

Introduction

*The heart of this book will only be found when you discover what God wants to personally tell to you in each verse of his Word, the Bible! It is my goal to assist you in reaching the place where you can hear God's voice through His Word and then, by faith, obey and live it out with confidence. Understand that what this writer has to say about each verse are simply his own personal comments and insights and are offered to you merely as a guide to point you towards the Voice, the Holy Spirit, who is the revealer of God's Word. **Don't skip over the Word of God to only read my personal comments!** That would completely defeat the purpose of this book and leave you with little more than a head full of religious concepts which will be quite detrimental to the goal of developing and growing in personal communion with the Author of the Bible.*

The world is filled with people who call themselves Christians. The term 'Christian' means to be 'Christ-like'. Yet people claiming to be Christians fall far short of living a Christ-like life. There is little in their lifestyle and the things they talk about that makes them different from anyone else in the world. For many, the only difference is that they attend a religious service occasionally. That is not what Jesus was like! Instead, these so-called Christians are spiritually weak, like malnourished children, having no knowledge of what an exciting Christ-like life is all about. In fact, they think being a Christian is boring and meaningless. Their very lives express that. Yet, they fear going to hell so they call themselves Christians and put on a religious facade when necessary, in a hope that this will ultimately get them into heaven. Are you like this kind of "Christian"?

Jesus said that we are to 'seek first the Kingdom of God'. This is not some sort of mythical heavenly fantasy land, but it is the method or system by which we can find and become all that God ever intended for us to be and do. It is the place where we can find ultimate satisfaction and purpose for each of our individual lives.

In fact, Jesus commanded us to seek God's kingdom first and foremost. It is above all else the most important thing that we do in life! Like a starving person who craves food and water, that is how we should search for God's kingdom! Yet many professing Christians who are starving to death spiritually are burning up all their energy searching for spiritual food (real life) in the all wrong places. The end result is this; though they love Jesus, their lives are weak, powerless, without joy, vibrancy or fulfillment. They go on and on and on, like that starving person who knows that to survive they need to eat food, yet they continue day after day trying to stave off these spiritual hunger pangs by feeding on unspiritual 'junk' food.

Some people search for inner satisfaction (spiritual nourishment) by striving for power, position and notoriety in life. But has it ever really satisfied you? Some people search for inner satisfaction by striving for wealth and security. Do you ever have enough? Some people search for inner satisfaction by gaining knowledge and understanding of every situation and detail life throws at them so they can be in full control. Has this really given you peace? I think the answers are obvious. No. The end result for people who continue on these pursuits is that they are still empty. They are always reaching and searching for more or something else. Are you like this? Now be honest and don't just give a religious answer! Jesus said that we should "search first for the kingdom of God, and (then) all these things would be added to us". That is a promise! That is where he guarantees we will find what we are searching for!

So if we claim to believe in Jesus, then wouldn't it be correct to say that we should also agree with what he teaches and commands? And if we agree with what he's taught and commanded, then we must make those things a central part of our life.

The purpose of this book is to encourage and challenge you to a life of searching for God and his kingdom. It will help you on the journey of discovery and in doing so, will strengthen and nourish your spiritual life so that you can indeed become a person who walks worthy of the name we so proudly bear. The name of Jesus Christ. Christian – a person who is like Christ!

If you claim to be a 'follower of Jesus Christ' then the words he speaks are meant for you. They are meant for you in a personal way! The Bible is for you and addressed to you! It holds for you the keys to unlock the mystery of God's kingdom. It is your source of spiritual life and inner satisfaction. But like the ones who struggle after the ever elusive inner satisfaction through the methods that the world offers, I find I am never fully satisfied when feeding on God's Word. The big difference is

though, you will find God's Word so wonderfully rich and fulfilling that you will always want more and more. Not because you have been left empty, but because God's Word is just so delicious!

Now here is the real issue. You may say, yes I agree with you, but for me, when I read the Bible, why can't I seem to get anything out of it? That's the right question to ask! Some Christians are so spiritually weak that they can not even feed themselves. That is indeed a very sad condition, yet many are in that very situation. This is the reason that I've put this book together. It is to help you get to a place where you will be strong enough to feed yourself and in turn, feed others.

In some ways the book you are holding is unique. What I have done is shared with you a very personal commentary of the first book of the New Testament - the book of Matthew. I imagine that the next time that I read through Matthew my commentary will be somewhat different. Why is that? It is because the Holy Spirit, who is the revealer of God's Word, understands my unique and ever changing needs and situation in life. He knows me personally and through the revelation of God's Word, will provide the nourishment I need to meet those unique needs as I journey through this life.

And so it will be for you as well. Your situation and needs will be different from mine. Thus the Holy Spirit will feed and nourish you from God's word in the way that is best for you. He will speak things that will convict you, challenge you, give you direction for your life, and bring you ever closer to the heart of our loving Father in the way that will best benefit you, if you'll accept it.

When you read this book, understand that the heart of it is not what I have to say about each verse. **It is what God has to say to you in each verse!** Don't skip over the Word of God to only read my comments! That would completely defeat the purpose of this book and leave you with nothing more than a head full of religious concepts!

Jesus said, "My sheep will know my voice". That is what the goal is here! The goal is that you will come to a place where you can easily recognize the voice of Jesus as he speaks to you through each verse by the Holy Spirit. So in order for you to benefit from this book, you must actually read each Bible verse! Like I experienced in the beginning, I know that your mind may resist this, but if you listen to your heart you will recognize the need and be convicted towards the discipline required to a faithful regular diet of God's word.

To start off, have your own Bible handy and read through the entire book of Matthew to get a quick overview first. Then go back and read each verse slowly. Chew them well! Have a notebook handy and write down whatever the Holy Spirit reveals to you from each verse. **Only after you've done this do I welcome you to see what God has spoken to me personally.** I trust my few comments will help to affirm what God is already speaking to you and encourage you to continue on in this discipline of feeding on God's Word. As you discipline your mind and heart in the reading and meditating on God's word, you will find that you will become more and more familiar with the voice of the Holy Spirit. Finally, you will begin to recognize His voice speaking to you personally throughout the day and you will become caught up the excitement of a life lived in God's custom designed purpose for you.

I've chosen the book of Matthew because it speaks so often about the Kingdom of God. Many of the illustrations Jesus gave in this book are illustrations of what God's Kingdom is like. You'll find that I gone verse by verse through this book and after each verse I have written what God has personally shown me, or in a few cases, in a group of verses. Every verse is like a bite of food. It contains rich nourishment for our spirit. Just as when we eat natural food, we do not need to intellectually analyze and understand what nutrients are in each bite, we simply put it in our mouth, chew and swallow. So it is with God's word. We need to actually take it into our heart. We don't need to analyze it as it sits on our plate. We don't need to discuss it's nutritional content and understand all the intricacies of how it will benefit our body. We already know that God's word is good for us. So just eat it!

We will start at the beginning in this first book of the New Testament where Jesus speaks directly to his followers. It is good to start listening to what Jesus has to say at the beginning of a book! It seems to me that the Bible is one of the few books where people feel that it is alright to just grab a bit from here and there and say that they have read and understand it. That is not an intelligent or right way to read a book! A book as great and important as the Bible is, certainly was not given to us without a theme, flow, and purpose. The only way to intelligently read it is from the beginning and continue all the way to the end. You will discover that 'flow' building on one teaching after another as you go along. In reading the Bible in this way, we will get the full nutritional value of this heavenly

*We know we have come to know him if we obey his commands.
The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar,
and the truth is not in him.*

But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him.

This is how we know we are in him:

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

1 John 2:3-6

“A Journey with Jesus”

This study of the book of Matthew is by no means exhaustive. It is simply my personal record of what the Holy Spirit spoke to me during one of the times that I've studied through this book. There is an endless treasure of wisdom and truth yet to be revealed and discovered. Much of what God spoke is quite personal and I have refrained from recording those things on these pages. An area for your own personal notes has been provided so that you too can have a record of what the Holy Spirit will revealed to you.

It is my firm belief that the information in the Bible is an accurate historical record as well as the master guide for successful living on earth. But not only that! The Bible is the venue that God has provided for his people today to make direct contact with Him by the Holy Spirit as he speaks to us personally through His Words on each page. Thus, the Bible can be read and re-read, each time fresh and alive with God's presence. It is in the discipline of meeting with God in His Word that we grow spiritually and become more and more familiar with His voice and in the ever increasing knowledge of who He is. As we grow in this relationship with God, we are able to know and respond more and more quickly and confidently to His leading in our daily lives, lining up our will with his will in a fulfillment of our personal destiny in Him.

May this journey with Jesus through the book of Matthew be an inspiration and motivation to bring you into a deeper ongoing relationship with Jesus himself. May it inspire a life enriched by the wonder and joy of God's Kingdom principles and promises made reality by a growing faith firmly and confidently rooted in Him.

May the Lord bless you in His special way!

vs:1 ***A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:***

The records of the physical genealogy of Adam to Abram (Abraham) to Jesus Christ; *I Chronicles 1:1-27*.

There are two sets of genealogy for the ancestry of Abram (Abraham). *Matthew 1:1-17* records the Spiritual genealogy of Abraham to Jesus Christ. *Luke 3:23-38* records the physical genealogy of Abraham (Abram) to Jesus Christ.

This is the record of Jesus ancestry which dates back to Abraham; *see Luke 3:23*. It must be noted that the ancestry does not extend beyond Abraham to Adam as would be the case of all other genealogies as in the account in Luke. Rather than being a descendant of a human, Jesus is the descendant of a promise from God Himself to Abraham, who received the holy lineage by faith in that promise; *Genesis 17:5-8*. The 'seed of the promise' was carried by each consecutive generation until Jesus birth, rooting the ancestry of Jesus Christ firmly, by faith... to God!

Notice how long it took before the promise became a reality! The seed of faith was passed from generation to generation that received the promise in turn, as if it were reality.

What has God promised us? Can we trust that promise even if it does not materialize in our own lifetime?

To hold to God's promises by faith is just as important and honorable as receiving the reality of the promise. Why? Because it must become reality someday as long as our generation doesn't let go of the promise. What has God promised you?

Note: Jesus is the descendant of Abraham (The 'spiritual' man), not Abram (the 'carnal, physical' man). Abraham and Abram is the same person who encountered God. But God changed Abram's name to Abraham *Genesis 17:5* because of the promises he received from God and acted upon in faith. Jesus is the descendant of Abraham, the spiritual man of 'faith' (*Matthew 1:1*), not Abram, the carnal, physical man of 'human ability and limitations'.

vs:2 - 17 ***Abraham*** (*Genesis 17:1-8, Romans 4:1-25*) ***was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,***

3: Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar (*Genesis 38*), ***Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,***

4: Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,

5: Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab (*Joshua 2:1*), ***Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse,***

6: and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife (*II Samuel 11:27*),

7: Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa,

8: Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

9: Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah**10: Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah,**

11: and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

12: After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

13: Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor,

14: Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Eliud,

15: Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob,

16: and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17: Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.

These verses are a clear picture of the journey of a promise from God that was embraced in belief from generation to generation. The promise was 'believed', and that carried it through the tests of time, doubt, and evolution (the original promise remained the same as it was received from God. Unaltered, it was passed from generation to generation). At the right time, according to the Author of the promise, the promise was birthed to life - because of the faith. Jesus Christ - the 'evidence of what had been hoped for'; *Hebrews 1:1-2*.

"Faith is the seed of life" that births into reality God's promises.

Why does the Bible specifically mention three groups of 14 generations? Each generational group indicates a specific period of time that a 'seed of faith' must pass through. What are those three time periods?

Generation 1 - hope in the promise grows to its highest point and gives birth to David. But like Ishmael, who was the son of Abram (not Abraham) born out of human effort, David, too, portrays a picture to us of the outcome of mans own religious human efforts.

Generation 2 - hope in the promise is all but lost as David's descendants fall away from God and His promises, and turn to idols and worldliness. Like a seed, faith finally is buried into the ground. It must be. Dark, lonely, in a place of death, like a promise lost in the drudgery of history, left to die like a thing of the past. Yet like a seed in the ground, hope remains that one day it will sprout and grow.

Generation 3 - hope is all that remains and thus proves itself to be pure faith. All of mans efforts to give the appearance of obtaining God's promises have proven to be empty and lifeless; mere religious substitutes and emblems of the real thing. And yet, the hope of reality remains.

Fourteen generations X 3 = faith proven, tested and refined under the pressure of time.

vs:18

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

The birth of Jesus Christ had to come. The promise had been believed, tested, tempered, and refined in the fires of temptation, time, and silence from God. The 'faith' was proven true. Now the time for 'reality' had come. The heart of the nation was ripe to receive a reality even though it was not according to their preconceived ideas. Jesus, the promised Messiah, the hope of the nation, had come, born into living and breathing reality from a seed of faith. Not as expected, as a King born in a palace and robed in Godly glory, but as a peasant's baby born in a barn and robed in humility - a living parable of the pathetic spiritual condition of humanity in which the Holy Spirit dwells.

God uses 'normal' people, ignoring the proper traditional religious channels, throughout the process of bringing Jesus into the world. At the same time God devastated the customs and traditions by impregnating an unmarried virgin who was already engaged to be married to another man! In those days, more so than in our days, this was a great humiliation and 'loss of face' for both Mary and Joseph. Amazingly, God seems unconcerned for these two 'victims'. Yet in time, both Mary and Joseph become the worlds most respected and important parents. Though cast down in humiliation and hopelessness by God's divine plan, they were later raised up by God as a shining example for the world to gaze upon.

When God moves in our lives we must be prepared to lose everything! The reason that we can still joyfully accept this is because we have the blessing of being able to see our situation through God's eyes by faith. And by faith we can be assured of the good, victorious outcome.

"...she was *found* to be with child...". It just happened! There were no religious formulas or efforts to 'force' God's program into existence. This is so characteristic of God's nature when he does something. We usually don't realize it until after it has happened! We just 'find' ourselves in the promises.

"...by the Holy Spirit...". What incredible power! What wonderful forces are at work in our own lives when the Holy Spirit has come on us. What does the Holy Spirit want to give birth to, in you and through you – if you'll let him?

vs:19

Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

This is a tough situation for Joseph. He probably had a few sleepless nights trying to figure out what God was 'trying' to do. Joseph was known for being a righteous person, yet from all appearances, he was now among the most unrighteous of people. A quiet divorce would be necessary in order to save both Mary and Joseph from public disgrace. Who would ever believe that Mary and Joseph were innocent of fornication? In nine months the reality would demand judgment. There really was no way out!

Note: In the times of Mary and Joseph, an engagement commitment was looked upon to be as binding as an actual marriage. To break an engagement

was to place one's self among the ranks of the 'unfaithful', to be recognized as one who had no integrity.

vs:20 ***But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.***

No way out for Joseph - until ...God speaks! When God speaks, then whatever people say about us or to us just doesn't matter. How often our minds churn and trouble because we are more concerned about what people will say or think about something, rather than what God has to say.

When God spoke to Joseph the curse that had fallen upon him reversed to become his great blessing! What he had been willing to give up, his future wife, for righteousness sake, was now restored to him. He is suddenly aware that he has been caught up in God's most glorious miracle and that God is free to move far and above man's limited interpretation of 'righteousness'.

As in Mary, the Holy Spirit desires to bring things to life within us. But sometimes what he births in us is not what we desired or expected. We want the Holy Spirit, that's for sure, but can we receive him on his terms instead of our own terms? The Holy Spirit is fresh and creative, not bound by our religious limitations; *See Acts 2!*

vs:21 ***She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."***

God reveals the future to Joseph. God reveals it only at the necessary time and only gives the necessary details. God is not in the business of just telling us everything whenever we want to know it. If God doesn't speak concerning a seemingly important issue in our life, don't worry. When the time is right, if we're seeking him with all our hearts, he'll speak what we need to hear - and just at the right time.

God's comment to Joseph about Jesus' purpose on earth is that Jesus would save 'His people' from their sins. Obviously then, 'His people' are not perfect! Otherwise, 'His people' wouldn't need salvation from their sins. We desire to be 'His people' but then become so disappointed when we discover that 'His people' (including ourselves) are not what we anticipated. Indeed, 'His people' need to be rescued, from themselves and each other. This can happen when 'His people' look to Jesus and put their hope in him alone rather than put all their expectations on each other, their church, or within themselves.

vs:22 ***All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:***

The function of a prophet in God's Kingdom is very important. We must have prophets! Without fresh words from God, God has nothing to bring to life through our faith in His spoken word to us. God has full control of the timing for 'fulfilling' His words that we've received in our lives.

Note: Just because a person is a recognized spiritual leader doesn't mean the 'prophecy' he has spoken is from God. We must test the spirit of the message and the messenger. How do we know if a message is from God or if it's just someone's imagination, which sounds like it's from God? *Matthew 7:15-23, I John 4:1-6, Acts 20:25-31, Matthew 24:23-25.*

We must have prophets! But their words must be identified when spoken under the Lord's direction, which is an important job of church leadership, but the responsibility of every believer.

vs:23 ***"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel" -which means, "God with us."***

The prophesy of "God with us" came through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14), about 800 years before it was finally fulfilled! "God with us" is what every human heart longs for! It was a restoration of God's relationship with man, the presence of our 'rescuer'.

What does it mean to you - "God with you"? What did it mean to the nation of Israel? Is he with you now? Where? How does His presence affect your life?

Man broke relationship with God because of sin in his life; *Genesis 3:8*. Thus God allowed humanity to go its own way; *Genesis 3:24*. Since man chose 'separation from God' in favor of a life given over to sin, 'separation from God' is what the seed of that choice for sin has birthed.

It is easy for man to separate himself from God, but so difficult to find restoration of that relationship. Not that God makes it difficult, but because it is so hard for man to break free of the bondage of his love affair with his sins. In fact, the restored relationship to God can only come as a miraculous gift and in that sense, is the easiest thing to attain.

"God with us" - the most important thing for a human being to attain in this life!

If Joseph had divorced Mary, which would have been the easiest thing to do, he would have been viewed with suspicion the rest of his life. Also, it would have been very difficult for Mary to re-marry, which would thus always be a haunting confirmation of his guilt. Yet divorce seemed to be the only 'righteous' option.

vs:24 ***When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.***

What the Lord had commanded Joseph to do was not an easy thing. Nobody would have understood. The swelling of Mary's stomach was all the proof they needed! Quite simply, Joseph and Mary were 'bad' people. Joseph could have said 'it was only a dream' and done the easy and religious thing that would have salvaged his integrity. But Joseph knew God's voice and he did what was right, but most difficult - he obeyed!

vs:25 ***But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.***

How difficult it must have been for Mary and Joseph to go through what should have been the happiest days of their lives. God seems so inconsiderate and unfair and instead of joy these days are filled with disgrace and the destruction of personal plans. Yet, the awareness, that wonderful secret between Mary and Joseph of God's new plan for them, would certainly have caused such a joy that gave them the strength to endure the public humiliation.

When you are caught up in God's purposes people may not understand or be sympathetic to your vision. But it just doesn't matter! God's Kingdom,

birthed within us, is the source of our strength and joy that keeps us firm in our calling and unconcerned about 'religious opinion' of those around us.

"...When Joseph woke up...". Like Joseph, many of God's people, churches, or Christianity as a whole, have been caught in, what they interpret to be, a crisis. Thoughts swirl through a mist of confusion. Band-aide solutions are proposed, evaluated and tested with the hopes of stirring up a miraculous solution. But as with Joseph, the answers and miracles are elusive and life goes on and on as if in a tormenting dream that has engulfed us on a bed of isolation, confusion, and hopelessness.

But the answer is right there in front of our spiritual eyes. All we have to do is to wake up! We must realize that the problem is not a problem at all, but rather it is the hand of God spurring us towards obedience!

"...he did what the Lord commanded him...". Let's face the facts. The modern day church across much of the developed world is a far cry from the shining example we are given of the 'pattern church' in the book of Acts. The modern day church is in crisis and many that are aware of the problems are, like Joseph, searching for the right solution. They may try to 'quietly divorce' themselves from the church they are presently attending. Or in confusion, they go from one person to another to identify and criticize the perceived errors and sources of the crisis. Yet seldom do they have any solutions to offer at all.

But the answers are already given to us, right in our hand! We have already received the Word of the Lord. Even in our confused slumber, God's Word is with us. It has always been with us. **Emmanuel, God with us!**

The church has come to a time that it must wake up and make its choice. Though God's Word in the church is often only seen as a misty dream, the dream is real! We must wake up and receive God's Word to 'do it', no matter how unreligious or humiliating it may be (as Joseph experienced). We must ask, "What has the Lord commanded us to do that we have failed to obey"? It may seem like the exact opposite of what our standard of righteousness requires. Like Joseph, who was notably righteous in the eyes of his community, it certainly was an unthinkable thing to marry a pregnant woman! It would be for him a tremendous loss of face, yet it is exactly what the Lord required.

The modern day church has been preoccupied with 'saving face'! In fact, for many, the primary objective for saving souls has been to 'gain face'. That hypocrisy has caused the church to often miss the target of God's objectives. The end result has been emptiness in the hearts of God's people, isolated people - individually in a struggle to fill the empty void of a life of religious pretense. The religious solution to the problem is to incorporate more programs, projects, and entertainment that, though nice and religious in appearance, are nonetheless not God's desire.

The church needs salvation! It needs to wake up and simply obey the commands of the Lord. The church must be taught to hear God's voice and obey. It must! The church must have a heart to abandon its passion to 'have it all'; to have the nicest building facilities and programs, to have the best music and preaching. To have the vision of presenting to the community a glorious church that is designed to draw and appeal to the worldly desires of those outside its doors. It must resign from its quest to bring God's promises to reality through the efforts of mans' design, and instead the church must come to a place of true obedience and genuine faith. That is, faith not

manipulated to control people and events. Faith to do exactly what God has said without consideration of our human, financial, and spiritual limitations. Faith to let God glorify Himself in His own way, without interference of our expensive, religious, and selfish concepts of how God's glory should be expressed.

We must wake up and do what God has commanded. "Hear and obey"! Go! Preach! Love! Serve! Give! Not as over organized church programs, but as individuals who are obeying out of our individual love and friendships with God.

The church must be filled with individuals who are waking up and personally obeying the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church has got to make this choice... to obey exactly what Jesus has said. Each of us, individually, must decide because the church is made of 'individuals'. It's time to wake up the church!

Some patterns or parallels:

Mary = 'our spirit' as well as the 'churches spirit'. That place where God reveals and creates new things.

Joseph = 'our legalistic, religious nature' as well as the 'churches legalistic, religious nature'. That self-centered place where we desire to be in control.

Matthew 2

vs:1 ***After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem***

The Jewish wise men of the day were not chosen to receive the revelation of the arrival of the One they had been longing for! Like Joseph, their religious traditionalism limited them in what they could receive from God. So God uses non-Jewish wise men to announce the arrival of His Son. These wise men didn't just talk and analyze the revelation, they had action. They came, seeking - not just answers, but a person! They are people of action.

A 'wise person' is one who seeks after Jesus and His Kingdom.

vs:2-3 ***and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."***

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him.

Even though they didn't have all of the answers about where to find Jesus, they started moving.

As believers we have been told to "GO" into the entire world and preach the gospel. Yet so often Christians are reluctant or hesitate to GO because they don't have the whole program perfectly mapped out and financed. Without the maps and finances, they would need to go 'by faith', take risks! Can we not trust God to take care of us when we are 'going' in obedience just as much as we trust him to care for us when we choose to disobey by not 'going', by staying where it is 'safe'? I rather think that we can expect far better care if we are actively obeying - by faith!

As the wise men are going along, they ask questions. What questions do you have as you are seeking Jesus and the truth of His Kingdom?

- Wise people ask questions. They know what their purpose is and aren't content to simply grope along through life.
- Wise people know what is motivating them. These wise men came to worship. They had perspective, recognizing who they were in the world and accepted their position. And they used their understanding to do the wisest thing! They invest in an effort to find and worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- Wise people accept their 'rank' in life. Finally, the bottom line is that the wise men were searching for God.
- Wise people spare no cost or effort in searching for God.

vs:4 ***When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.***

When you make 'seeking God' your highest priority, you can be sure that some people will be offended. This is one leading reason many, if not most, people settle for a 'religious experience' rather than seeking a personal encounter with the living God.... They don't want to disturb 'their' system.

vs:5-6 ***"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:***

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel." "

The religious people are so eager to show off their Bible knowledge. Yet for all of their knowledge they have failed in learning to recognize the 'voice of their Lord! These religious leaders never should have given these scriptures to King Herod. In their eagerness to satisfy the cravings of spiritual pride, they had "cast their pearls before swine".

vs:7-8 ***Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.***

He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

The 'wise' religious leaders must have felt so proud that the king seemed near to conversion! It appears that King Herod is seeking after God! He 'said' that he wanted to 'worship him'! This would be a great moment in Jewish history if the King Herod would acknowledge and submit to the Jewish God.

The king is a politician. Politicians will use whatever means possible to secure their position of power and wealth. It is difficult to determine the motives for their 'sympathies'. Don't be easily deceived by the religious leanings of some politicians.

Why do you seek after God and His Kingdom? Is your motive to 'get' something or to 'give' something?

Why did God reveal Jesus' birth to foreigners? Answer: Because they were seeking the truth - maybe the only ones really seeking the truth. They wanted the truth so that they could worship the true God.

vs:9 ***After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.***

The threat of a king doesn't hinder God's purposes. God intends to reveal Jesus. The king and his evil intentions can wait.

God is in full control of nature. He controls the movement of the heavens as well as the actions of men. God could have used any method to reveal Jesus to the wise men, but He chose to use what the wise men were familiar with... the stars.

The Holy Spirit in our lives is like the star. He is ever leading us towards the presence and activity of God.

Why does the Holy Spirit lead us? Answer: To bring us to a place where we will truly love and worship God. Not as a momentary religious activity, but so that our whole lives can be an offering of worship to Him.

Like the wise men that had become so familiar with the stars through their disciplined and analytical studies, we also must follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in a disciplined way. We must be so familiar with God and His word that we can identify His voice out of the 'host' of other voices that contend for attention in our lives.

vs:10 ***When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.***

How true it is that as those times come when we can clearly see God's presence in our lives - we are filled with joy. Don't you desire His presence, God with us?

Like the wise men on a journey, we also are on a journey towards heaven. What joy comes when God affirms us of His pleasure in our progress being made in that direction - towards Him.

vs:11 ***On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.***

No mention is made about Joseph. It should be noted that he is only a temporary caretaker-father to Jesus. God Himself, is in fact, Jesus' true physical Father.

As soon as the wise men find Jesus, they worship Him. That was their goal, and it should also be our goal. Secondly, they gave Him their treasures.

What do you treasures? Are you wise enough to 'give' it to the King, even if the King doesn't fit your expectations?

Gold = Kingship, power, purity, eternity

Frankincense = priesthood

Myrrh = anointing (used to make anointing oil), priesthood

vs:12 ***And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.***

Civil disobedience! This is a special case where God specifically commands disobedience against the command of the government.

Why did God instruct the wise men in this way when he knew that King Herod, in retaliation to the disobedience of the wise men, would murder so many children?

After the wise men found Jesus, they returned to their own country. Why did the wise men come? Why did they make such a journey to find Jesus at such a personal cost of time, effort, money, and personal risk?

The characteristics of the 'wise men':

- They searched
- They persisted
- They found
- They gave
- They worshipped
- They heard from God
- They obeyed God's Word
- They moved on

vs:13

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

Escape to Egypt! That is the last place on earth a Jew would want to go to. The very heartbeat of the Jewish nation beats with pride of their miraculous deliverance God gave them from 400 years of bondage to Egypt! Now God is taking Jesus back to that place where once was fought the greatest spiritual battle of the ages between Moses and Pharaoh.

Being used by God can mean that our lives may be placed in jeopardy from time to time. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus are on the run! What God brought to life is now under threat.

What has God brought to life in you? Vision? Ministry? New believers? Are you willing to take our God-given treasure to such a place of risk as Joseph did with Jesus, God's Son?

We must anticipate attack on what God has birthed within us. This can be an attack on our:

- Salvation
- Ministry
- The fruit of our ministry
- Our faith, hope, and love
- Ourselves, our family, church

- King Herod is a type or pattern of: Satan
- Jesus is a type or pattern of: blessings on our lives, church or whatever God has given or done for us.
- We must be protective and anticipate attack against what God has given us.

Instead of confronting Herod, the source of our opposition, God directs Joseph to escape. Victory can come as a result of avoiding conflict rather than confronting it.

No doubt the last thing that Joseph wanted to do was to go to Egypt. That meant leaving home and work, friends and commitments. Plus this would only reinforce the opinions of the community that Joseph was indeed guilty of violating Mary. Now in obedience to God, they must both run, giving the appearance of not being able to face up to public opinion. What should the religious people say? What a lesson we must learn from this! We must not be hasty in judging people based on what 'appearances' seem to portray.

Only time would justify Joseph's behavior. Certainly Joseph could have used a sympathetic friend at this time.

God doesn't tell Joseph how long he must stay in Egypt! And as the time passed, Joseph must have thought frequently about another young man of the same name who was also 'taken' to Egypt under seemingly similar unfair circumstances; *Genesis 37 - 41*.

vs:14 ***So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,***

Joseph's obedience is very quick. That in itself appears very suspicious in the light and circumstances of his pregnant wife.

vs:15 ***where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."***

God's Word had to be fulfilled. Jesus had to have spent time in Egypt. What an incredible series of events God has allowed to transpire in order to fulfill his prophesied word through Hosea.

As unreal as it seems, God's Word can, must, and will be fulfilled. At what personal cost are we willing to give in order to see God's Word fulfilled? For Joseph the cost was very high and for the rest of the Jewish community the cost was even higher; vs:16.

vs:16 ***When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.***

World politics and God's Kingdom are closely entwined. Just as Israel is in a struggle for land claims in Arab possessed territory, so God's Kingdom is in a struggle to establish its 'soul' claims in Satan possessed territory. The conflict is very real and often spills over from the spiritual realm into the physical realm.

vs:17-18 ***Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:***

"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

Why didn't God stop King Herod from killing the babies? Answer: Because His word must be fulfilled no matter how painful that might be to both us and to God. God's Word is of greater value than life itself!

vs:19 ***After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt***

Again, politics and God's Kingdom are inter-linked. When King Herod dies, God moves Joseph into action.

- God can speak to you no matter where you are - even in the place of 'defeat' (Egypt is a type or pattern of spiritual bondage, enslavement, helplessness, etc.).

vs:20 ***and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."***

Joseph had essentially 'dropped out'. To a 'religious' person, Joseph's leaving Israel to go to Egypt would appear to be a total turning against God and His

purposes - not proper behavior for one considered to be a 'righteous' man. Now Joseph must go back to face his home community.

Could Joseph really trust his dream? Was Herod really dead?

In order to move forward in taking possession of God's promises for us, we need to release everything, lose it all, for a season. We can be confident when releasing all - as long as we don't lose touch with God's Word!

vs:21 ***So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.***

Joseph simply obeys God's Word.

Note the terminology: "the" child, not "Joseph's" child. Jesus was not Joseph's child - he was only the child's caretaker. This is the same situation and attitude that we should have towards anything God gives us. Even with our own families, possessions, ministries, converts, miracles, etc.

vs:22 ***But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee,***

Again fear is a controlling force in Joseph's life. But the end result is another 'word from the Lord'. This word, as with all the 'words' of God, is used to bring fulfillment to former 'words of prophecy'.

vs:23 ***and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."***

Joseph, a normal person, is caught up in fulfilling numerous prophecies and is a central figure in God's greatest plan for mankind. Yet Joseph seems quite oblivious to much of what God has him caught up in.

Matthew 3

vs:1 ***In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea***

John the 'Baptist'. If he were a normal person, he would have been identified as 'John, the son of Zebedee'. But in John's case, his work given to him by God was far more significant than who his father was.

"...preaching in the desert..."! This is just the opposite of normal preachers who work and struggle so hard to draw people into their beautiful buildings so that they can be identified as 'successful' preachers.

By preaching in the desert, John could not be accused of bringing the gospel to any select group of people. By taking his message away from the people, he was clearly declaring that the message was for whomever was willing to come to get it.

vs:2 ***and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."***

"...saying Repent..." This is the first step necessary for entering into God's Kingdom. Repentance means CHANGE! Why? Because God's Kingdom is near. If you can't see God's Kingdom in the direction that you are presently going with your life, then God's Kingdom must be somewhere else. Maybe it's behind you! So turn around! Go the other direction. Turn away from sin, religious tradition, the trends of the world and its standards, self-centeredness, and whatever else God will direct you to change.

John's audience was no doubt made up mostly of what seemed to be very Godly Jews. What were their sins? Sins carefully concealed from the accusing eyes of the hypocrisy and meaningless religious tradition that bound and ruled the nation. They had faces towards God, but hearts towards the world. Are Christians any different from this in our generation?

What is the 'Kingdom of heaven'? The people of Israel were so eager for the 'Kingdom of heaven' and frustrated in their search for it that they would make a journey out into the desert, away from the normal destinations of their lives, to hear this message about the 'Kingdom' proclaimed by a very unlikely person.

How eager are you to gain understanding and live in the reality of the Kingdom of God?

vs:3 ***This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, `Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"***

John was a fulfillment of God's Word.

"...desert..." A type or pattern of the heart condition of Israel after 400 years of 'no word from God'. They were spiritually dry. While John was a voice calling out to the masses from a literal desert, Jesus is a voice calling out to the masses in spiritual dry places of their hearts.

"...prepare the way..." YOU repent! YOU change! ACTION!

"...for the Lord..." Lord! That means submission. It means obedience, surrender, work, giving, abandoning your own plans!

"...make straight paths..." Do what is right and do it with a right attitude of heart.

vs:4 ***John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.***

John was completely different in every way from the normal social patterns and trends of his time. In the way he dressed, the way he ate (and what he ate), where he lived, and in what he talked about. Every aspect of his life was a living example that it really is possible to be a changed person, a person that can live separated from the trends and standards of this world.

vs:5 ***People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.***

The people come to him - even though he was a complete social misfit! Why did they come? What attracted them?

John lived what he preached! He was for real! But far more than that and most important - John was anointed by God for the heaven sent commission on his life. God's Word in God's power was being released through John.

When we serve God and when we do it with His anointing, we will be successful regardless of our location, techniques or styles, resources, etc. John's life certainly was not an easy life, yet it was a fulfilled one. He was successful in what God had given him to do.

vs:6 ***Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.***

These are religious, 'church going' people! People whose existence was based on their understanding of God! Here they are in public, in front of

friends, relatives, pastors and family, and they are confessing their sins!
Openly admitting and exposing the truth within their hearts.

This is a time of confrontation for the nation of Israel. One person at a time, a nation was being turned back towards true righteousness.

The people came to John in the wilderness. There was nothing there to attract them! No professional 'praise and worship' teams. No conveniences or comforts. Nothing to distract them from really hearing the Word of God. They had come to a point in their journey on earth where the emptiness of hypocrisy had brought them to their knees. A place of full surrender to truth and to the lordship of God.

They had to take days off from work to come to face the truth. Money was no longer more important than truth. The spiritual thirst they felt in the wilderness of their hearts demanded attention. John came offering them living hope for their spiritual thirst, like water in a wilderness.

John literally immersed the people in a river of water that flowed in the wilderness. Even as the Jordan River flowed in this wilderness, so also is a river that flows throughout the wilderness of the humans' soul. And by stepping into the waters of the Jordan, each individual was making a public sign before the crowds of observers, made in great humility, of their open admission to their sins. They were declaring their determination to live in obedience to God's Word. To live it in honesty and in truth with pure hearts before God, not merely as a show before 'the church'.

Baptism is a symbolic washing of the sinful, worldly, self-centeredness from a person's life. It is a symbolic death and burial of the selfish nature that rules a person's life. It is also a symbolic rebirth into the determination to seek God's Kingdom and live by its principals. Baptism is a submission to the only hope for humanity, like submitting to the only waters in the wilderness in that the 'truth of God's Kingdom' is the 'only water' that can satisfy the thirst in the wilderness of the human heart.

Repentance... The key to revival! It is being taught that prayer brings revival. Yet the greatest revival, the true revival which swept across Israel, came by total, humble, open, admission of sin and hypocrisy by very 'Godly' people.

Preceding John's ministry, Israel had received no new words from God by prophets or otherwise for 400 years. Why? The people had a form of godliness - but it was empty, like any other religion. It was full of deceit, worldliness, pride, and hypocrisy. This resulted in 400 years of 'bondage' to only the formalities of the Law of God. But where was the promised 'life'? This was in some ways similar to another 400 years of bondage that Israel had endured in Egypt. As it was when the Word of God came to the Israelite slaves in Egypt ("Let my people go") and initiated their deliverance, so also the Word of God coming to Israel through John the Baptist initiated a spiritual deliverance. It was a deliverance from the bondage of religious legalism to the law that was enslaving and suffocating them in a system of hypocrisy and pride.

vs:7

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

The things that were happening in the wilderness with John the Baptist were becoming a threat to the authorities of the Jewish religious system. John

knew everything about them. His father had been one of the priests; *Luke 1:5*. They nonetheless perceived John's mission as an indirect attack on these religious leaders, as a direct assault. To them, John was a serious threat. He threatened to usurp their control of the masses. He threatened the very foundation of their power base.

Yet John never avoided confrontation with these powerful men when the time for confrontation came. In fact, he obviously made no effort towards peace and unity with them whatsoever. John's mission to guide the nation to freedom from the bondage and control by fear of religious legalism was to be just as confrontational as Moses' mission was against the Pharaoh of Egypt in delivering the nation from slavery. John seems fearless! And with the weapons of 'truth', John delivers his assault, knocking at the very foundation of the source of ungodly religious power - the guilt and fear of God's judgment.

John's attack is directed at the hollowness of the religious leaders' authority, a pretense of God's authority - shown only in outward symbolism. The Jewish leaders claimed to have the anointing of God, and it is on this claim that they exercised their authority. John, who really did have the anointing of God (though without any of the outward traditional symbols of power), had real power and authority to confront the deceitfulness of the religious leaders' hearts.

"...brood of vipers..." This could only refer to something evil. Perhaps it is a subtle reference to the form of a snake that Satan took on in his great deception of Adam and Eve and the human race. Also, this could refresh the memories of the historical event when swarms of snakes inundated the Israeli camp as the heart of the nation became stubborn and rebellious towards God while they journeyed towards the land He had promised them.

"Who warned you to flee the wrath to come?" The reason that the masses of people were coming to John was because within their hearts a guilty conscience had convicted them of their sins against God. In fear of the coming day of God's judgment they were fleeing from their sins, to John and his message of hope.

'Hardness of heart' prevents a person from receiving the warning. This is a very dangerous situation to be in.

John's question immediately exposed the hypocrisies of the religious leaders. They were publicly humiliated. This is not what they had come for! In fact, they were being motivated to come by a very different set of convictions than those of the masses. They had no intention of repenting or of humbling themselves in honest confession of sin. They could not be seen being baptized! Their intention was to stop John's unveiling of their hearts and maintain their pretense of being the anointed leaders of Israel.

vs:8

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

"...Produce fruit in keeping with repentance..." What does your life produce? What is the 'fruit' of repentance? What is the 'fruit' of legalistic religion? What is the 'fruit' of unrepentance?

Repentance = It opens your heart to a new source of spiritual life-giving waters which spring forth in the dry, lonely desert of spiritual isolation from God's intended purposes for your life. Water means life. Without water there can be no life. Without life, there can be no life-giving fruit.

Fruit = A heart that is in the right condition to receive the 'seeds' of the truth of God's Kingdom that Jesus would soon plant. The fruit of the Kingdom of God is its principals operating in reality which are contrary to man's natural heart and mind.

Unrepentant, legalistic, religious approach to God = Emptiness and bondage. It creates a spiritually unfulfilled wilderness of the soul. It can only prosper with hypocrisy or absolute, flawless obedience to the law. But no man has ever accomplished absolute obedience to God's law. For those whose only hope is based on absolute obedience to the letter of the law, the fruit of God's Kingdom cannot possibly grow in the wilderness of hypocrisy that this futile effort will create.

vs:9 ***And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.***

You cannot put the hope of your salvation or the foundation of righteousness on some other person or experience. If that were the case, then anyone could claim rights to God's blessings based on any whim. Anyway, we are not the ones to determine on whom God's blessing will rest. Rather, God reserves that right, and if he so chooses, he could cause the rocks to be the worthy ones of His blessing.

Our roots, our denomination, our spiritual educational background, it means 'nothing' to God! He can create anything he wants out of 'nothing' if that is what he desires to do.

vs:10 ***The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.***

God wants to see fruit in our lives. Fruit that proves repentance and change! If we only look like we have repented, if we only know how to talk and act religiously, but have no real change in our hearts, God's judgment remains upon us and we are destined for elimination from God's blessing and presence. Our downfall will be complete like 'wood on the fire'.

"...the ax..." It is like the Word of God. When it comes, it either cleans us up (like pruning a tree) and makes us more productive, or it tears into the soul, dividing and exposing our heart. If we resist, it will only cut deeper and deeper until we fall. When the 'root' is cut, there is no hope of survival.

vs:11 ***'I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.***

'Baptism in water' - It is an outward expression of an inward change. It is not meant to be a sign that you are knowledgeable in your church doctrines or becoming a member of a church denomination.

'Water' - From the dryness of the desert to the wetness of water. That is change! Change as complete as the change of 'repentance' must be.

"...in water". Complete immersion. Complete change. Not a 'sprinkling' of change. Also, it is representative of death, burial and resurrection to new life.

The change of repentance is sudden and complete, as from dry to wet. As sudden and complete as the split second that separates a person from life and death. Repentance is a miracle triggered by obedience to God's Word.

John did not seek more than what the Lord required of him. He knew his status in God's Kingdom and was eager to point others away from himself and towards Jesus.

John's job was to prepare the way for Jesus. Our job is to do the same. Yet so often Christians use Jesus to 'prepare a way' for themselves. They use Jesus to bring attention to themselves. They use Jesus to be their source of livelihood. They use Jesus to build for themselves their own kingdom.

Why does John demand repentance? Because (pay attention to this) this prepares the way for Jesus to fulfill His greatest purpose of baptizing people in the Holy Spirit!

"...He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit..." Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit? The early church was very concerned that every person was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Note these following related scriptures:

Acts 1:4-5; Jesus commanded his disciples to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit!

Acts 2:38-39; Peter declared that 'receiving the gift', the baptism of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:4*), was an essential part of the 'salvation package'!

Acts 8:14-17; The Apostles were not satisfied that a whole city had accepted the Word of God and had been baptized in water for repentance of sin until they physically went to that city themselves to ensure that all of the people had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit!

Acts 19:1-7; The Apostle Paul specifically asks disciples of Jesus Christ if they have been baptized in the Holy Spirit after they became believers! When they give a negative reply, Paul makes certain that they do not continue on as 'disciples' without having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Notice that this experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is clearly evidenced with some obvious manifestations in each of the examples given above. In fact, every time the people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the book of Acts, there is some sort of manifestation of the event in their lives.

John doesn't specify Jesus' other ministries at this time such as, 'he will save you, he will heal you, or, he will be you king'. The reason John feels so unworthy to be compared with Jesus is because he understood the magnitude of Jesus' purpose to Baptize in the Holy Spirit. ...God Himself, residing in a human body; *I Corinthians 6:19*; *II Chronicles 7:1-3*!

Now I must ask you - when did Jesus ever baptize the people with the Holy Spirit? It happened only after He had proven unequivocally that He was indeed God's Son. Proving that He unfailingly loved all humanity, and had finally made a way 'in reality' for the human heart to be redeemed. Once the human heart is restored and acceptable to God through the blood of Jesus - then the Holy Spirit of God can find a worthy dwelling place in the cleansed 'temple' of the human heart.

So we find that Jesus never actually fulfilled His long-range purpose while living on earth. It was only after He returned to heaven that He could begin baptizing people with the Holy Spirit - after He had 'finished' preparing a way for cleansing the temple in the hearts of sinful humanity by His blood sacrifice.

- 1) John came to prepare the way for Jesus.
- 2) Jesus came to prepare the way for the Holy Spirit.
- 3) The Holy Spirit is here now to prepare the way to the Father.

"...and with fire..."

Fire represents a few of the following:

Warmth = fellowship

Light = truth

It tempers metal = strength

It melts metal = ability to cause change

It is destructive = overcomes evil; cleansing; warfare

Used in sacrifice = unselfishness

Hell = punishment; redemption and salvation

Provides protection = safety

Symbolic of God's presence = God's presence

vs:12

His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

"...winnowing fork..." The power of truth is like a winnowing fork which is used in our lives to [spiritually] 'toss' us into the wind of the Holy Spirit. As we submit to the upheaval caused by the presence of Jesus in our lives, community, or church, the wind of the Holy Spirit can separate out of us what is useless, sinful, and meaningless (chaff), and draw out the things that are holy, useful, and alive (grain).

"...threshing floor..." This is our hearts. When we give our heart to Jesus, we give Him a place in which He can work His own purposes in our lives. We may feel strange with His presence as He works within us to bring true holiness and cleansing.

"...gathering up His wheat..." Whatever is in our lives, it belongs to Jesus - once we give our heart to Him. He wants to keep what is good within us, stored up in His barn for whatever purpose He intends, whenever He wants to use it.

"...burning the chaff..." Jesus wants to destroy some elements of our lives. It may be a painful experience. What do we try to hang on to that Jesus is trying to destroy? Until we let go, releasing 'our self-determined rights', the tossing within our lives, that spiritual restlessness, will go on and on. Actually, the threshing, the separating of what is holy from the unholy, the separating of our self-centered motives and ambitions from what are God-directed motives and ambitions, is a life-long, on-going process.

"...with unquenchable fire..." Once Jesus has gained control over a 'chaff' [sinful, selfish] area of our lives, there is no turning back. He will destroy that area, eternally and completely. Don't ever think of going to look for it again. (If you do, Satan will be eagerly waiting to offer you a fresh substitute!)

vs:13

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

Jesus is determined to be identified with the 'common' people in every way. The people who came to John were confessed sinners. Jesus identifies Himself with them as one who is sincerely searching for God's Kingdom.

vs:14 ***But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"***

In the presence of Jesus, John sees his own unrighteousness. He feels so unclean and unworthy. Thus it is hard for John to accept the concept that Jesus needs his service. His own feelings of unworthiness almost prevent him from doing the job Jesus requires of him!

How often well intended Christians feel incapable, not qualified, or not spiritual enough to serve the Lord. Yet when we refuse, when we submit to our feelings and the deceptions of our self-judgment, we can miss and even hinder the work of the Lord.

vs:15 ***Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.***

Jesus wants obedience. He doesn't want us to pass religious judgment on ourselves. Jesus is Lord. Let Him do the job of judging. Our job is to obey! If Jesus finds us worthy and comes to us - we must obey. The fact is, we'll never feel worthy or capable of serving the Lord in even the smallest capacity! If John didn't feel worthy - we certainly never will!

It wasn't John's 'feelings' of righteousness that Jesus was concerned about. What Jesus was concerned about was the righteousness of the time and process of events in God's divine program.

vs:16 ***As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.***

When Jesus obeys in water baptism, then a miraculous event transpires. He gains an open door to the Spirit world and sees into the 'truth' of God's Kingdom. Heaven is opened to Him!

"...heaven was opened..." Humanity was aware about heaven and its wonders, yet it was like a fully stocked store that hadn't been opened for business. They didn't know what was inside! Now suddenly, with the obedience of Jesus to water baptism, heaven is opened. Jesus is the first of many who will stream inside to partake of the divine truths and provisions of God's Kingdom.

"...He saw the Spirit of God..." Obedience [by faith] to the principles and truths of God brings us into alignment with the realities of God's Kingdom. Jesus doesn't only get a welcome into the mysteries of God's Kingdom, but He sees God's Spirit come upon Himself. The opening of heaven doesn't only give us an entrance to God, but it is also an opening for God to come to us. This experience happens to Jesus. But later, after Jesus ascension to heaven, the Spirit comes upon all obedient people.

"...like a dove..." Pure. Gentle. A symbol of peace and harmony. Easily frightened away.

The Holy Spirit is 'like' a dove. Don't misinterpret that the Holy Spirit 'is' some sort of a bird! There is no mention of the Holy Spirit's presence leaving Jesus. What can cause the Holy Spirit to leave a person's life?

vs:17

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

"...a voice from heaven said..." Not only does Jesus see new things, He also hears new things. It's not the voice of a man, nor the all-too-familiar accusing voice of Satan's whisperings. Nor is Jesus a psychotic who hears strange voices. This is the voice of God Himself. God speaking to man! And in these first recorded words, words of utmost importance, God says to Jesus...

"...this is My Son..." Who was God speaking to? Of course for Jesus this was tremendous assurance of God's commitment to their relationship. It is a door of unlimited authority and provision. To be a Son of God is to be in the most privileged position possible in this world!

The message to Jesus is the same message God gives to each of us who follow Jesus - in obedience. It is the message that we must hold on to when we live in this world of doubts, accusations, and negative attitudes.

God says to you; "You, (your name) are my son [child]; *Romans 8:13-18; I John 3:1-3!*

"...whom I love..." There is no bond as powerful as the bond of love. True love cannot be broken. God confirmed His love to Jesus, His Son. What comfort! What assurance! And the same God has poured out this same love to every one of His children; to you and to me!

What is love? What is 'tough' love? How does God's expression of love compare to the way the world expresses love? How do we respond to this kind of love from God?

"...with him I am well pleased..." Again, powerful words of encouragement. And Jesus hadn't even started His ministry yet! God's love and pleasure had nothing to do with Jesus' accomplishments!

What encouragement just to know that you have pleased the One who has poured out so much love and blessing on your life. Satan's message to us is the exact opposite. He says, "You have disappointed God. You must work harder. God won't bless you because you're not good enough." Sad to say, many times it is our own Christian brothers and sisters who carry Satan's curse to another person. Our words to one another should reflect God's Words (yet without condoning or ignoring unrepented sins).

We need to hear and establish God's message and attitude of love towards us down into our own spirit. We must uproot the negative impressions we have of ourselves and encourage one another in God's love and His pleasure in us.

Matthew 4

vs:1

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

Jesus had just been baptized in water by John, had received the Holy Spirit, and had a personal message spoken to Him by God Himself out of a now opened heaven. You'd think that with all this confirmation, Jesus would be all set to begin the ministry God had for Him. But God has other things in mind! Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit away from the people and future

ministry, led away from the comforts of home and family, away from the security of Godly fellowship - into the desert to be tempted by Satan! This is the last place you'd expect to end up after receiving God's Holy Spirit and affirmations of love! Who would want this?

It is important for us to understand what the Holy Spirit is doing. The reasons we receive the Holy Spirit are not for the blessings and benefits, and not for the security of our own ministry, but we receive the Holy Spirit so that we can be led into God's perfect program day by day. And in order to travel on a spiritually led journey through this life, we must not limit God with our religious expectations. Jesus is led to a test of 'Lordship'. And this testing, which is necessary to produce quality of character and strength, may from time to time require a journey into desert-like situations.

As if the desert isn't a bad enough place, the Holy Spirit led Jesus there to be tempted by Satan himself. The desert Jesus was in was a real desert. But there can also be spiritual deserts in our lives. Lifeless. Lonely. Dry. A place of great weakness and hopelessness and just as real as the physical desert Jesus was in. It is this place that Satan often comes to tempt us and try to destroy the work of God in our lives.

Just as the Holy Spirit may lead us into the spiritual desert in order to refine and strengthen a person, so also Satan will try to lead us into a spiritual desert in order to corrupt and destroy us. Just as God led the Jewish nation through the wilderness to the Promise Land, so too, our spiritual journey will require periods in the wilderness. But God's purpose in it is to qualify us to receive His future blessings.

So don't fight the wilderness! Embrace it when it is God who is leading you there! And learn from it. But if your time in the wilderness is a result of sin as were the extra 40 years of Israel's wanderings in Sinai for their rebellion and unbelief - - repent now! Leave your present situation and return to obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

vs:2

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Jesus' confrontation with Satan didn't come immediately. It came after He had gone without food for 40 days. He was very weak indeed. This was most likely an 'involuntary' fast.

Christians sometimes think that it doesn't matter if they abstain from spiritual food for periods of time. But Satan is just waiting for people who have allowed themselves to become spiritually weak. They are easy prey for him. In order then to remain strong spiritually, we must be just as disciplined in nourishing our spiritual lives as we are with feeding our physical bodies.

Kingdom Lesson: The first concern of the Holy Spirit is to establish the Lordship of God in the life of a new 'Follower'. This is developed by a leading us to a place where we must overcome the passions and demands of 'self'. This is essential for a victorious Spirit led and Spirit filled life. Selflessness is the foundation on which God can begin to build and create a new, victorious man.

vs:3

The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

"...the tempter came to him..." Satan's name describes himself. He is a tempter. What does the word 'temptation' mean? If Jesus, God's own son

experienced confrontation with temptation, then we, too, must beware that we will encounter temptation.

"...and said, If you are the Son of God..." Satan's first word to Jesus is to inspire doubt in Jesus of who He really is! "If"! God Himself had just told Jesus that Jesus was His Son and that He loved Him. Now Satan's first attack is to destroy this relationship. Satan hates it that God would choose to love sinful man and to bless him. Satan is very jealous of this and so one of his prime areas of attack is to cast doubt in our minds of our relationship with God and who we are in Him.

Who does God say we are? What is our position and the privileges in that relationship? Who does Satan want us to believe we are?

"...tell these stones to become bread." Satan knows what our weakness' are. In reality we all have weakness. Jesus' weakness at this time was His great physical hunger. So Satan tempts Him in this area. It is important for us as Christians to identify and protect our areas of weakness and vulnerability. What are the specific weak and vulnerable areas in your own life?

This first temptation from Satan is also a temptation to seek a repeat miracle. God had provided bread supernaturally for the entire Jewish nation of over a million people for dozens of years as they journeyed through the Sinai wilderness. Now Satan tempts Jesus to seek a repeat performance. But God is not bound by patterns and we should not seek after something that God did in the past. Just because He did something in a certain way before, doesn't mean He is limited to always do things in that way. We should expect and believe for a far greater creativity from God.

vs:4

The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus' response to Satan's challenge is very simple, yet most powerful. Jesus says, "It is written". Satan cannot stand against God's established Word. Though God is not limited in any way, His Word is established and nothing can alter it. Not even Satan. So Jesus stands firmly on the rock of God's Word and despite His intense hunger, He overcomes the temptation.

We, too, are given God's Word as a weapon for overcoming Satan. The problem is that too many of God's people are unfamiliar with His Word. If Satan can convince a believer that it doesn't matter about his personal knowledge of the Word, Satan has effectively unarmed that person and has great liberty to manipulate and control him. A believer is a threat to Satan and a target of his attack against God's Kingdom. A believer must never be allowed to be complacent in their disciplined familiarization to God's Word. Jesus emphasizes this point in His next words...

"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"; *Deuteronomy 8:3*. Quite simply, apart from the disciplined nourishment of God's Word, a person will never come to know real life. Just as physical life is dependent of the discipline of regular meals, so, too, the spiritual life of a person is dependent on feeding regularly on God's Word.

We have God's Word so that we can have life. God's Word was Jesus' food in the wilderness and the same is true for us. If you feel confused, lost, lonely, or are being tempted, have a banquet in God's Word!

vs:5 ***Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.***

"...the Devil took him..." Forty days earlier Jesus had been 'led' by the Holy Spirit, now He is being 'taken' by the Devil. Surprisingly, the Devil doesn't take Jesus to some very evil, dark, and sinful place. But instead, they go to church! And not just any church! This temple is the center of all mans' efforts to reach to God. It is the center of religion, the pride of the Jewish nation. Satan 'takes' Jesus right inside, unhindered, up to the highest point. It's amazing that Satan could just freely walk the sacred halls of the temple without any opposition. How free is Satan to come strolling through your church? Your life?

I Corinthians 6:19; "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God..."

Jesus is taken to the highest point of the religious system. It is the place where many 'religious' leaders struggle and strive to attain status and position. It is the place of highest human power and authority. It is also the place of highest hypocrisy and deception where men, under the guise of Godliness attempt to control the destiny of churches and nations. The place where God's Word is manipulated to attain the desires of man.

vs:6 ***"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."***

To hold a position at the highest point of religion and then be also confirmed by miraculous signs - would put a person in a very powerful position indeed. Satan seems to know that if Jesus obeyed the challenge Jesus would indeed be spared any physical harm. Why? Because who in the entire world would have more faith in God's Word than Jesus!

Satan can quote the Bible, too! He is not ignorant of God's Word and uses it to tempt Jesus. How much more must we be 'finely tuned' in the use of God's Word.

We can see that God's Word, when misused, can be powerful to lead people away from the truth. It's not enough to be able to quote verses. We must know how to properly apply God's Word, using it in its proper context.

Note: It is important for Bible teachers to let God's Word speak for itself. Don't use the Word to manipulate and control, to make it say whatever you 'feel' it ought to say. What we feel it says and what it really says can sometimes be two very different things. And, it is just as important for those receiving the Bible teaching to consider carefully what is being taught. How does the message balance with other scriptures?

vs:7 ***Jesus answered him, "It is also written: `Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"***

We must never 'test' the Lord by trying to force Him to fulfill something He has spoken. Some people will teach that if you have faith in such-and-such a verse, then God must do it for you. Or, if God doesn't fulfill that promise, it's because you lack the faith!

God is faithful to His Word. But it is His Word and He can fulfill His promises when, where, and to whomever He chooses. He is Lord of His Word - not us!

vs:8 ***Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.***

When you think you've gained the victory over Stan, don't let you guard down! Satan doesn't acknowledge defeat readily. Again Jesus is 'taken' by Satan, this time, to a very high place or position in the world. From a high, distant position - everything looks better than it really is!

vs:9 ***"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."***

The world and all it offers can certainly be attractive. Satan offers it all to Jesus. Power! Authority! Wealth! Pleasure! Fame! The amazing thing is that the world didn't even belong to Satan! *Psalms 24:1* says, "The earth is the Lords and everything in it, the world and all who live in it". Yet Satan, the liar of all times, tries to offer it to the Son of God, the very One who created the world; *John 1:1-3 & 10*! Satan appears to be desperate in his struggle to overthrow the authority of Jesus. In his desperation he reveals his overall intention - that he desires to gain the position and authority of God Himself!

The ultimate goal of Satan is the same towards each believer as it was for Jesus. That is - to usurp our position and authority in Christ! If he can convince a believer that it doesn't matter if our priority in this life is focused on:

- 1) Acquiring our basic daily needs,
- 2) Establishing an appearance of religious piety or,
- 3) A total 'sell out' in exchange for all that the world offers, then he has won the battle. He has one less opponent between himself and the throne of God.

vs:10 ***Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: `Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"***

Satan wants to receive worship. What is worship? Is it a ritualistic activity performed for half an hour once a week? Or is it where our priorities lie in life; an attitude of the heart; what demands our energies and attention; what we chose to give ourselves to?

We wouldn't actually bow down before the feet of Satan! But would we bow down before the trends and standards of this world's system which he has established; *Romans 12:1-2*? Who or what do we really worship? To whom or what are the hours of our lives dedicated to?

Jesus' defense is the same in overcoming each of the three temptations. His defense is God's Word, which is also His offense. The reason Jesus could command Satan to leave Him was: "...for it is written." But in order to use the Word of God like this we must also be living in obedience to it and the under the lordship of God. It is not enough to be able to chant verses to Satan and expect the kind of result Jesus received, while meantime, giving your life to serving under the passions of the love of money, a career, education, or anything that enhances your 'self'.

If the Word of God is powerful enough to cause Satan to obey it, shouldn't we as Christians obey it as well?

vs:11 ***Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.***

Satan leaves Jesus because Jesus uses His authority through God's Word to command Satan. Jesus' authority in God's Word comes because He Himself

is also submitted willfully to the authority of God's Word. Satan must obey God's Word because Jesus obeys God's Word.

If we want spiritual victory in our lives we must:

- 1) Know God's Word
- 2) Obey God's Word
- 3) Recognize who we are because of what God's Word says about us;
Matthew 3:17.
- 4) Not run in fear from Satan, but allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to the places of confrontation.
- 5) Resist Satan, no matter how weak we feel we are. No matter how excusable it may seem for us to surrender to his enticements.
- 6) We must be living lives of worship, service, and surrender to the lordship of God.

Note: It may appear to a non-discerning Christian that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into temptation in the wilderness. We must be careful not to rebuke the Holy Spirit when he is only leading us to a place of testing. Tests are good! They make us learn and make us stronger. Don't rebuke the Holy Spirit or the test.

After the test, after Jesus overcomes Satan, then God sends angels, supernatural servants from heaven, to take care of all of Jesus' needs. They come after the temptations and 40 days of fasting. Why didn't God send the angels sooner? Jesus' need, from a human perspective, was for angelic help long before Satan ever arrived and the time of temptation.

Obviously God intended for Jesus to withstand Satan in the strength that He already had: the strength of the Word of God. So, when Satan comes to us, we shouldn't go crying to God for angelic deliverance or falling into the trap of introspection as we try to rationalize God's purposes. No! This is the time of testing. The time of seeing yourself for who you actually are in God. This is the time to use the weapon of God's Word - and fight to win.

Kingdom Lesson: Before God permitted Jesus to begin His ministry, Jesus had to get acquainted with the real powers and authorities that He would have to deal with. First, He met the Holy Spirit who lead Him into the wilderness where Jesus met with Satan. Finally, Jesus met the angels from heaven who strengthened Him. Much of Jesus' ministry dealt with the unseen, supernatural powers that controlled the lives of humanity. It is essential, absolutely necessary that we also have an understanding of the 'unseen beings' that rule and reign in the lives of people in the 'seen' world before we attempt to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ and represent Him accurately in this harassed and confused world.

vs:12 ***When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.***

Jesus does not force His way into His 'calling'. He waits for God's timing before making His move. God allowed John to be put into prison, which then opened the door for Jesus to freely step out into His own ministry. It also created a great void in the lives of John the Baptist's followers that only Jesus could fill.

vs:13 ***Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali--***

Nazareth was Jesus' home. In order to fulfill God's purposes, He had to leave behind His home and family. The commission of God to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel..." is twofold. In order to 'go into', you must also 'leave behind'.

vs:14 ***to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:***

God's Word is powerful, not only in our warfare against temptation, but also as a guide for our lives.

vs:15-16 ***"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles--***

the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

God's Word gives Jesus direction and vision. Jesus made the choice of personally obeying the prophesied Word.

vs:17 ***From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."***

Jesus begins His ministry with the same message that John had preached; *Matthew 3:2*. We don't have to try to be original or unique in our ministry in order to get people to follow. Just give the people the simple truth of God's Word. That will do the job.

vs:18 ***As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.***

Jesus' ministry didn't leave Him sitting in a fancy office. Jesus was always on the move, always among the people. Jesus also was not isolated among like-minded people. His circle of ministry reached all people

vs:19 ***"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."***

Jesus speaks to the people He had been observing. His words are so simple and direct, "Come follow Me". This is what Jesus wants from us! When He passes by our lives His message is the same. "Come". That also means, "leave"!

Peter and Andrew were professional fisherman. They were set in their careers. Why should they leave their lifestyle to follow Jesus? Why should you leave your lifestyle to follow Jesus? Jesus didn't ask them politely to follow Him, He commanded them to leave! They had to leave:

- financial security
- friends and family
- lifestyle and culture
- respectability and status

Why should Peter and Andrew leave this behind? Because these things did not fill an emptiness. These things weren't enough and Jesus offered them something more. They followed Him because Jesus didn't only command them to follow Him, Jesus offered them the hope of a life with a deeper purpose. "...and I will make you fishers of men". People certainly must be of greater value than fish! The challenge is great and exciting.

Jesus' calling to us is the same today as it was on the shores of Galilee. "Come, follow me, and I will make you..." I "will", (choose) to make you! I

will "make" you (create something out of you). I will make "you" - God working with you, not someone else!

In this life we have so much pressure to 'make ourselves' into someone important and useful. But Jesus' message is so refreshing and simple - "follow him". "Follow him". Follow him", and let Him do the rest.

In our generation, how can we 'follow Jesus'? Just before Jesus ascended into heaven he repeated this same command to Peter, "Follow Me"; *John 21:22*. How can we follow Jesus who is now in heaven? One important example of this is provided throughout the book of 'Acts', which is our pattern for the church.

How will Jesus 'make' us? How did He 'make' Peter and Andrew? We can follow this process as we observe Peter's relationship with Jesus throughout the four gospels and 'Acts'. And our lives will be developed in similar manner as we day-by-day follow Jesus and make that the full focus of our lives! What Jesus makes us into is up to Him. Our job is to 'follow him'. Of course, that means entering into all kinds of situations, both good and bad (according to our feelings).

Imagine the first impression in the minds of Peter and Andrew when Jesus said "I will make you fishers of men". No doubt they saw themselves casting a large net over a crowd of people! And yet this is a very accurate picture of Jesus' intentions. Only the 'net' used would be different. It would be a 'net' of love and compassion, forgiveness and deliverance, healing and provision, truth and hope - neatly woven together into a net that would be later called the 'church'. And, what is the purpose of this net? To merely draw people into our 'church' and leave them there? No! To draw them to Jesus!

vs:20 ***At once they left their nets and followed him.***

"At once..." Peter and Andrew respond immediately! No long discussions. No long prayer meetings. No 'fleeces'. They simply leave 'everything' immediately. Why? Because Jesus is on the move. In only moments He would have been gone. This was a chance for 'change' which might never come again. They had to respond immediately.

As in all cases in our day-by-day travels with Jesus, we must be quick in our responses to Jesus. Obedience is not obedience if obedience comes at the wrong time. In fact, responding at the wrong time can be total disobedience as in the case of the Israelites late change of heart to enter into the 'promise land'; *Numbers 13:16 - 14:45*.

vs:21-22 ***Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.***

Jesus calls three people, James, John, and their father Zebedee. It's the young sons again who can receive Jesus' call. More was required of Peter and Andrew. The latter had to leave, not only their boat and career, but they also left their father. What Jesus requires in both cases is that 'all' of them follow Him.

When Jesus calls a person to follow Him, obedience to that call requires a cost. The cost will vary from person to person depending on how attached they are to the things they must leave.

- Peter and Andrew had to break away from material possessions.
- Andrew and James had to break from family ties.
- Zebedee also had to break from family ties in order to hold his possessions and set lifestyle.

What is it about Jesus that causes people to 'drop everything' to follow him? He offered very little and required much. Why would anybody accept His offer? Is it because the men who followed Jesus were so simple-minded and easily persuaded? Or was there something else about Jesus that drew people to sacrifice all for the privilege of walking with Him? Miracles? No. He hadn't performed any yet. Was it the 'anointing'? If so, what is the 'anointing' and who can receive it?

vs:23

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

"Jesus went..." He always is in motion. His church (group of followers) is a mobile church. They go to the people and as they step forward to meet the masses of people, those people are also drawn to Him.

"...teaching in their synagogues..." Jesus ministers to both religious and non-religious people. In the synagogue, He teaches. On the street, He preaches.

"...preaching the good news of the Kingdom..." The message of God's Kingdom should be 'good news'. Too often the message has been presented as a threat, 'repent or burn'. This is true, but not the whole message. On the other hand, some preach only an 'easy street' gospel. The gospel, to truly be good news, must be complete and balanced in truth. The following chapters of Matthew's book present a balanced gospel message. It gives an accurate picture from God's perspective of sin and its consequences and God's 'good news' plan of redemption.

The 'good news' is truly good when viewed alongside the realities of a life and its consequences apart from the good news of God's Kingdom.

"...and healing every disease and sickness among the people". The 'good news' is not just in talking, it is demonstrated in real life and power. The healings give authority to the words Jesus taught and preached.

- Jesus healed all sickness and diseases.
- His power and authority is complete.
- He extends hope to all people no matter how hopeless their condition.

Jesus' 'net' used to catch men is:

- 1) Calling people by their name (loving people)
- 2) Giving people a vision / mission (to follow Jesus)
- 3) Teaching the truth
- 4) Preaching hope in God's Kingdom
- 5) Healing the sick and casting out demons, thus demonstrating God's power and authority to make real changes in peoples' lives

Kingdom Lesson: This is what the church must be like! They must be like a net, inter-linked by relationships which enhance and complete each person's spiritual gifts and abilities until they become an accurate representation of Jesus Christ. Then as they are 'cast' out into the world by

the Holy Spirit, they can be used to draw men and women into God's Kingdom through the same active love and compassion that drew so many thousands of people when Jesus physically walked on this earth.

Sad to say, many church congregations know little or nothing about God's intended purposes for them. They are like a loosely woven net, full of holes and broken relationships caused by self-centeredness and pride, lacking the vision of God's intended purposes for their existence, and focused on the development of personal skills rather than the procurement and exercising of spiritual gifts. Useless, they are left to lie on the deck of an abandoned ship, their Captain, the Holy Spirit, having moved on to places and people who are intent on being obedient to His lordship and command.

Jesus promised to make His followers into 'fishers of men', too. Could they expect to do the same things Jesus was doing? What practical qualification would a fisherman need to have, to receive this kind of ability to do what Jesus did? The qualification: they really 'followed'! That is what is required of us as well! To 'follow Jesus' day by day and do what He tells us to do as we travel along on this journey through life.

vs:24

News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

"News about him spread..." This should be the fruit of any person or churches' ministry. When all is said and done, the name of Jesus must be what is seen. Not our name! Not the name of our church! Not the name of 'our' ministry! But our job is to ensure that all attention is drawn to Jesus.

As word about Jesus spread, the masses of people responded. No promotional or advertising campaign was needed. The presence of Jesus is all that is needed. When He is in the center of your life and ministry, the people will come! And those who come are just the kind of people that the rest of the world has little need for. Sick, in pain, demon-possessed, having seizures, and paralyzed. People bound by discouragement and hopelessness. The negative thinkers. The social dropouts. Yet when the name of Jesus reaches their ears, they receive hope. Why? Because when they heard about Jesus they immediately recognize His name in association with the miracles they had heard testimony of. The name of Jesus means - there is hope at last to change an impossible, unwanted situation into something good.

A church ministry or individual that preaches about Jesus, but cannot lead the people to Jesus' life-changing power, is a great discouragement and greatly discredits the name of Jesus. This is why many people are often reluctant to hear about Jesus. All talk - no power.

We should never call people to come to 'our' church. We must rather, call them to come to Jesus! He should be found in the church among other places.

What should we do when we are met with sickness and disease? Jesus can do something! It is because of sickness, disease, and pain, that Jesus, through His power, can bring glory to God.

Satan knows that if he can prevent people from receiving their healing from Jesus, he has succeeded in discrediting Jesus' name. Thus a 'successful' church or ministry is one that glorifies God because the power of Jesus is being manifested in that place.

What prevents Jesus' power from being manifested in a church? In your life?

vs:25 ***Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.***

"...large crowds, ...followed him". This is the goal! Men, women, and children from around the world - following Jesus! Not a church denomination. Not a new theological slant or doctrine. Not a man or a movement. But people following Jesus, day-by-day, eyes on him!

Matthew 5

vs:1-2 ***Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:***

Though Jesus is aware of the crowds, He did not always allow Himself to be accessible to them. But to those who are His committed disciples, He gives them a special place for a special teaching.

You can be a follower, a curious on-looker, a person who follows Jesus in order to 'get' something. Or you can be a real 'disciple' who follows Jesus for what He can 'give'. And it is to those who are committed to 'give' who receive the most.

"...up on a mountainside..." This is a place of perspective. A place where you can see where you've been and where you are going. The other 'followers' remain in the valley where they have only very limited comprehension of where they are.

Mountains can both enclose you and confine you or, with committed effort, be a place of beauty and perspective.

"The beatitudes" (be-attitudes) were taught (and promised) to the disciples, not the 'Jesus-followers' in general!

"...and he began to teach them..." Jesus is teaching His disciples, not the casual follower.

"blessings" = 'good luck' based on God's controlled events and situations whereby we benefit. Blessings are for God's glory, not ours, and for the advancement of His kingdom. Blessings are not 'good luck' based on fate, stars, or man's manipulative abilities in the traditional sense of the meaning.

vs:3 ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

"Blessed..." To have God's favor, His zeal to help you; God's 'good luck' directed towards you. To be blessed is to be 'deemed as holy'.

God loves us. That's one thing. But to be in a relationship and have the conditions to 'receive' the effects of that love is another matter! That is being 'blessed'.

What is the condition in our relationship with God that opens the way for a person to receive the practical effects of God's love?

"...poor in spirit..." To be poor in spirit is to be 'spiritually bankrupt'; being fully aware of sinfulness and need of God's mercy and forgiveness.

The Spirit = life.

To be poor in spirit or poor in 'life' = the need for and desire for the 'life of God'.

If you are aware of your spiritual poverty, God offers the kingdom of heaven to you! It's yours! A new way of living under a new and righteous governmental system which, very different from the world system, has - new realities with new laws (principles) and standards, new expectations, new objectives, new authorities, new communication system, new culture, new friends, new enemies, new judicial system, new benefits, etc.

What is a kingdom? What is the kingdom of heaven? What changes can a person expect in their life when they enter or submit to the governing principles of heaven?

vs:4 ***Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.***

God pays special attention towards people who are in sorrow and He will be sure that they have a source of comfort.

God understands about sorrow. No one experienced greater sorrow than God did when He allowed His only Son to be sacrificed because of our sins. God understands sorrow!

Note: Our definition of 'comfort' may be very different from God's definition of 'comfort'. But we can trust Him to provide what is best for our situation. Why? Because God sees the full picture of the event and the distant outcome.

What causes people of the world to be sorrowful? What should Christians be sorrowful for?

II Corinthians 7:9-11; We should be sorrowful because of our sins. 'Godly sorrow' for sins will result in 'repentance', which leads to 'freedom of guilt' and from that comes 'Godly comfort'.

vs:5 ***Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.***

God gives special attention towards people who are of a character of gentleness, patient, submissive, and humble (Webster's definition of 'meek'). Spiritually speaking, a 'meek' person is someone who is relaxed in, at peace with, whatever God's program is for his life and situation. God says that He will cause people like this to inherit, take possession, of the earth!

Why? Because people of this character will use the possession of the earth to expand the work of God and bring glory to His name.

What kind of character does the world require in order to 'take possession'? Aggressive, shrewd, proud, stubborn, confident in your own strength.

vs:6 ***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.***

God gives special attention to people who pursue righteousness as enthusiastically as if they were seeking food and drink. Food and drink are basic for survival, So too, 'righteousness' is essential for spiritual survival.

What is God's righteousness? Doing what is right according to God's right principles and standards. This often conflicts with our human, natural feelings and the world's standards.

What is the world's (legal, cultural, social) standard of righteousness? What is God's standard of righteousness?

"...they will be filled..." A person has an emptiness, like an empty stomach, that only righteousness can satisfy. Nothing else will fill that need though people try so many different things that this world offers. Only doing (not just knowing) what is right according to God's principles can totally, completely satisfy!

What are some things that people try to 'fill' their spiritual stomachs with?

vs:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

God gives special attention to people who choose to be kind and forgiving, especially to people who don't deserve it. And in turn, mercy will be given back.

Why? This is God's principle... 'What you sow - that is what you will reap'. If you sow mercy and forgiveness - you'll reap the same.

It is easy to show mercy when a person views his own life and its many shortcomings through God's eyes. How can we be hard on others when they fail us or when they sin, when we ourselves are failures and sinners before God. Yet, if we expect God to forgive and have mercy on us, so how much more must we show forgiveness and mercy.

How grateful we are for God's mercy. How grateful we are when others extend their mercy towards us in our shortcomings and failures.

Can we show mercy even when it is abused and we are taken advantage of because of the mercy we've offered? Has God ever shown you that kind of mercy, which we then take as license to continue in our sin. That is real mercy!

vs:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

God gives special attention to people who have pure hearts. A pure heart is a heart that has been cleansed by Jesus. Forgiven and guilt free. It has highest motives to do what is right in God's eyes. It is obedient to God's lordship. It is worthy of God's presence - to be His temple. It is a heart that is worthy of expressing God's nature, His love, and His compassion.

Where can God be seen? Not only will the 'pure in heart' see God, but others will also see God in that person.

Impurity of heart results in 'not seeing God'. A person whose heart is impure, yet who claims to see and understand God, is a liar and cannot lead towards the truth. What makes a heart impure? What is the doorway to the heart?

How can person sit in Bible school and learn about God, become a leader, and graduate with certifications, yet never deal with the secrets of his heart? Can a church built on this kind of a person's leadership ever be successful? And then we must ask, what is God's definition of a successful church compared to modern Christianity's standard of a successful church?

vs:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

God gives special attention to people who are pursuing the way of peace, who lead others to harmony with God and with those around them. Peacemakers must be aggressive. Peace is not natural to man's sinful character and must be aggressively promoted. A peacemaker is one who lives a life of risk and, without God's power, is destined to failure.

If we are sons of God, we must be peacemakers; Not argumentative, except for the cause of righteousness; Not self-centered; Not demanding of 'our rights'. Yet demanding of God's rights in love and by the power of His Spirit in us. This is how God's children should behave!

vs:10 ***Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

God gives special attention to people whose heart is set on doing what is right, yet who are being abused by others because of it. God promises that people like this will possess the kingdom of heaven and that the principles of God's system will be working in their lives.

People are persecuted around the world for many reasons. God's promised kingdom only applies for those who are persecuted for doing what is right according to God's standards. Doing what God says is right and doing what is religious or is man's definition of what is right, are two different things.

The key to entering into the blessings of God's Kingdom is not based on how much you suffer, but rather on how dedicated you are to doing what God declares is 'right'.

Some Christians prefer to embrace the sympathies and special attention that they get because of their persecution (or perceived persecution) and thus miss the great blessings of God's Kingdom principles working in their lives. Which would you rather have - the kingdom of God or peoples' sympathy?

Persecution can come in many forms: anti-God governments, 'Christians' who are offended when righteousness exposes hypocrisy, family members who require honoring family traditions over righteousness, and from the spiritual forces of Satan and his kingdom who are not only opposed to, but are severely threatened by righteousness and truth.

vs:11 ***"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.***

God will give special attention to people who stand up for Jesus despite criticism, 'loss of face', false accusations, and persecution. When we stand up for Jesus and God's Word, God will stand up for us!

vs:12 ***Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

In fact, when we stand up for Jesus in the face of opposition, we have great cause to rejoice and celebrate. God takes notice of what we endure for Him and he will not let us go un-rewarded. We need to remember that God has great reward for those who suffer for Him! And besides, we are not alone in our suffering. It is the heritage of those who live in obedience to God.

vs:13 ***"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.***

Unworthy as we may think we are, without us the people of the world will not survive. Salt is a preservative and without people in this corrupt world to permeate the world with the preservative of truth and righteousness, ungodly men will ultimately bring destruction on themselves.

"You are the salt..." Aggressively living our life as a believer is very important. We must take our responsibilities as Christ's representatives in this world very seriously. We are the means by which the Holy Spirit

manifests His presence and carries out His work in the earth. If we fail to do our job as Christians, the effects of our laxness are irreplaceable. You cannot make salt become saltier without adding more salt.

Salt is a preservative. Salt enhances and flavors. It melts ice, purifies, whitens, and corrodes metals. Salt softens hard water. Salt dissolves and permeates everything! *II Kings 2:19-22; Leviticus 2:13*

"You are the salt of the earth." So often we expect the other people around us to 'flavor' us, but our 'flavoring' must not be dependent on other people. Rather we get our 'saltiness' only from the Lord.

How often church members are critical of the lack of 'flavoring' in a church. They have many opinions about who has 'lost their saltiness'. But Jesus says, "You" are the salt. You'll never stir up somebody else to be an effective Christian (to become salty), but you can stir up yourself. Try talking less and 'becoming' more!

Christians who have lost their effectiveness (no longer enthusiastic about God's Kingdom), have lost their value in God's eyes. They are good for little more than to be used for stepping on by men who are in pursuit of self-gain. They'll feel used and neglected, which is exactly what God intended for them. There are many people like this in the modern churches who demand ministry and counseling. Their main problem though, is that they have simply lost their saltiness!

vs:14

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

"You are the light of the world." Light always overcomes darkness. You cannot turn on the 'dark'. You can only dim or turn off the light. Light means activity. Light reveals reality. Light draws attention. A small light in darkness will become the center of attention. The one with the light will be the leader. *Leviticus 24:1-4; John 11:9-10*

"A city on a hill cannot be hidden." God depends on His disciples to be the 'light' in this dark world. He expects us to stand out, just like a city stands out on top of a hill. We must not hide the fact of who we are in God. Do you know who you are?

A city means safety. A place of defense. It's a place for resources and commerce. It's a place of meeting and uniting of people and ideas. It's a place of government and authority. This is what a church should be, spiritually. *Deuteronomy 4:41-43*

vs:15

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

If you are a light it is unthinkable that you would try to hide that light. Yet, that is exactly what Satan has succeeded in causing many Christians to do. Because of fear of persecution or intimidation they try to hide what they are in Christ. Are these really Christians?

A real Christian boldly declares who he is and what Jesus has done for the world. This gives hope to all mankind who is lost in the confusion and disappointments of this world.

We cannot be a 'light' in our own strength. The only way this is possible is that the truth, the 'light' of the gospel, shines out through us because of the power of the Holy Spirit bringing into reality the kingdom of God into our lives. If the principles of God's Kingdom are not obviously operating in our

lives, we are like a lamp without a flame. *Matthew 25:1-13; John 1:6-9; John 12:35-36*

vs:16 ***In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.***

In the same way that you normally use a lamp on a dark night, we as disciples of Jesus Christ must let the light of the truth of the gospel be openly lived and demonstrated before all people. God wants them to see that through the gospel good deeds are produced in our lives and that our relationship with Him is one that fills us with thankful praise.

vs:17 ***"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.***

Don't presume anything regarding the kingdom of God. Jesus has not come to do away with the laws already established in the Old Testament. The God of the Old Testament is unchangeable, as are the commandments He gave. And don't think that the message of Jesus annuls the prophecies of the Old Testament. No. Every one of those prophecies that are yet unfulfilled must still come to pass. God's Word is eternal. Nothing can abolish it!

vs:18 ***I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.***

Here is an important truth established in God's Kingdom: One day heaven and earth will disappear. But before that happens every prophesy ever spoken or written down and every principle of God's Kingdom will and must be fulfilled - right down to the smallest detail. God's Word is supreme! Nothing can happen that will ever abolish one smallest item God has spoken. His words will and must be fulfilled! *Acts 15:1-35*

vs:19 ***Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.***

People dare not approach God's Word with a casual attitude. We are offered no option regarding it. Every detail and command by God must be obeyed. And if you think there is some unimportant detail of God's Word that can be disobeyed for any reason, and if you teach others that it is alright to compromise something in God's Word, then you are to be regarded as the 'least' in God's Kingdom (no matter how great of a person you may seem to be in the eyes of men).

But if you commit yourself to practice obedience to God's Word in every detail and you teach this to others, you will be regarded as "great" in God's Kingdom (no matter how humble and unsuccessful you may appear in the eyes of men).

vs:20 ***For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.***

Here are the facts. Unless we live lives of Godly obedience to the Word that surpassed the 'illusion of Godliness' that was presented by the religious leaders and teachers of God's Word, you definitely will not get into God's Kingdom! You can talk and pretend 'righteousness' all you want. But unless you live it from the heart, instead of a show to men, the truth is not in you

and neither will be the realities of God's Kingdom promises and principles.
Matthew 23

vs:21-22 ***"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'***

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Jesus had just said in verses 17-19 that every letter of the law must be obeyed. Now He goes on to clarify God's meaning of what He has said. Obviously the people had lost track of what God meant in the words He had spoken and were instead obedient only to what was convenient for them in their own twisted interpretation of God's law.

Can we be sure that we have received God's Word according to God's intended purpose or have we in some ways made His word adaptable to our sinful nature and culture?

Jesus, in these verses, now begins to correctly reveal the 'spirit' of the law - what God really said. He wanted them to 'repent' of misusing God's Word. And this is the 'letter of the law' that Jesus says must be obeyed, not the religious, outward appearance of obedience. He wants the 'law' to be our real character, not merely a cover of our sinfulness.

So in order to live a life of fulfilling the law of God, we must first accurately understand what God expects from us in response to that law.

Jesus is pointing out in these verses that God's law goes much deeper than what was originally thought. His law is to become our spirit, not just an outward ritual. And so Jesus begins His re-application of God's law by picking what was probably the easiest law for the Jewish nation to outwardly obey. Yet Jesus makes it clear that in God's eyes murder is something that is carried out, first in the heart which ultimately leads to outward manifestation. Therefore, Jesus teaches that if you think murderous thoughts or hold murderous attitudes secretly in your heart or mind, God considers you guilty for disobedience to His law.

Jesus also makes it very clear that there is a progression within the heart that leads from one degree of anger to various degrees of expression which will ultimately result in the act of murder.

An attitude of anger leads to a somewhat casual verbal expression of that anger. Having gone that far, it can lead to a deliberate and carefully spoken verbal attack...and so on. The punishment or degree of God's reaction to the level of progression towards the act of murder - from anger, to words, to action - is outlined. The degree of disobedience receives an equal degree of punishment, or rather, an equal degree of God's mercy.

Jesus doesn't even talk about the act of murder. The worst punishment is already administered, the fire of hell, when murderous words are spoken! Words that destroy or that are the opposite of the kind of words God wants us to receive from Him. God's Words to us, spoken in love, build up a person's character. Words spoken by a 'brother' in anger can destroy a person's spirit.

We must take careful note now of the powerful effects of 'words'. Words can kill! Or words can give life! So, if our heart is angry, our words will

communicate that anger. But if our heart is forgiving and filled with love, our words will express that and bring life and health.

A religious legalist will now probably ask, "...So, who is my brother?" They will try to re-focus the attention Jesus is directing towards them, and focus it on those around them. But a righteous person will simply 'repent' and speak 'life' to all that he meets.

vs:23-24

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

God is not interested in your gifts if they are offered when you are aware of a broken relationship. Even if it isn't your own fault! If you know that someone is angry with you, get it fixed! God is much more concerned about that person who is harboring 'murder' in their heart. God wants that person restored and healed.

This is the kind of gift God is really interested in. This is what God is really concerned about. Unity within the church. Love between members. Get on the phone or go see the one who is angry with you - immediately! Anything else that you do for God is meaningless to Him until you restore unity! Anything you do for God or give into His kingdom is pure religious activity and hypocrisy until you have made a serious effort to restore the relationship.

vs:25-26

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Don't avoid confrontation! When truth is in dispute - face the unpleasant realities and pursue it. If you don't, the matter won't go away. Instead you will be lead on a journey that will ultimately bring you before a judge and perhaps a fine or imprisonment.

If you don't confront an issue when it is small - it will grow silently and subtly until it causes one party or the other to react in a criminal way.

If you don't confront an issue when it's small - others around who know about it will begin their own trial against you! You will face the judgment of a public court. They will pass judgment and place sentence on you. It will ultimately lead to a criminal court hearing. In fact, from the moment of the conflict the case has been on trial in the criminal courts of heaven. A worldly court will only get involved when there has been a law broken or a crime committed, but we must remember that in God's eyes a crime is committed when the seed of the sin was planted within the heart as just a thought. Such as the seed of murder is planted when there is anger against a brother. Thus it is most urgent to deal with conflicts as soon as it is possible.

If you allow the seed of a sin to grow in your heart and it ultimately leads you to a trial and sentencing (whether in the official courts or unofficial court of public opinion) you will be responsible to bear the burden of the outcome. Don't come begging God to get you out of your situation. He has already told you that the way to deal with the problem is to confront it at its inception.

Is there anyone you can think of who has offended you? What is it that prevents you from going to that person in sincerity and love to find restoration and healing of your relationship?

vs:27-28 ***"You have heard that it was said, `Do not commit adultery.'***

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus again emphasizes that sin begins in the heart, not just when there is an outward expression of it. He uses an example that strikes much closer to home now. His first example was about murder. Now He speaks of adultery which God considers a sin when it is even only committed in the secret bedchamber of the imagination.

Though a person might not actually commit an adulterous act physically, they think it is harmless to carry out the act within their mind and not cause any offense. But God says that it is in the imagination that sin is committed.

vs:29 ***If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.***

When sin is committed, there can only be punishment, which may be tempered with mercy and grace. What God shows us here is that even though the sin of lust is an inward, secret sin of the heart, the punishment is still going to be physical. And apart from finding forgiveness and the mercy of God, it would be far better to destroy the physical part of the body that is the doorway for temptation. If what your eyes look at causes you to be filled with lust, then eliminate your ability to look at what causes temptation.

It must be emphasized here that Jesus isn't actually teaching people to inflict such physical punishments on ourselves every time we sin in the heart. But rather, He is emphasizing the seriousness of such sin and the seriousness of the punishment for even the most secret sins.

We must never forget that apart from the saving grace of God through Jesus, we would indeed be destined for the full measure of punishment for our sins. The punishment of being physically thrown into hells fires!

vs:30 ***And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.***

Again Jesus repeats this example. If your physical hand causes you to sin - even secretly in your heart - the punishment from God is sure and severe. It is far better for you to deal with the sin, no matter how great the pain and personal loss, than to have God deal with it for you.

vs:31-32 ***"It has been said, `Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'***

But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

According to God's law, if a man is going to divorce his wife it must be established with legal documentation. But again Jesus confronts the people's interpretation of God's Word by pointing out that they have missed the meaning by not obeying the 'spirit of the law'. They have only followed

in obedience to the 'letter of the law' which can be manipulated in interpretation to permit sin while pacifying the guilty conscience.

Jesus makes God's heart very clear in this matter of divorce. It must not be allowed, except in the case where one or the other married couple have been unfaithful. In this case, the sin of adultery has already been committed and the foundation of the marriage has already been destroyed.

The end result of divorce is the propagation of the sin of adultery. And in God's Kingdom adultery must be punished. Even if you find forgiveness from God, the damage of the sin is profound. Adultery holds a curse that is far reaching. *Malachi 2:13-16; I Corinthians 7:10-16, 39 & 40*

"...anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

vs:33-37

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.'

But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.

And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.

Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Each of the examples that Jesus is giving gets closer and closer to the heart of the Jewish system. "Murder" doesn't relate to many people. 'Adultery' is more common. 'Divorce' is tolerated, but making 'oaths' is an everyday occurrence.

By now the point of Jesus' message must be hitting home. That is, 'God does not judge by the outward appearance, but rather, He looks at the heart'; *I Samuel 16:7*. Yet most religious people could still declare innocence up to this point. But now Jesus hits at the very foundations of 'religion'. That being the human resolve to be or do something in their own strength in an effort to bring God glory.

Our intentions often are so good, but our efforts can never bring us to the place where God wants us to be. We make resolutions and promises to God only to be disappointed at our human failures. Yet stubbornly we continue on, and in order to establish an appearance of Godly resolution we say things that we are unable to carry out.

God is warning us in the verses that what you speak, the 'words' that come out of our mouth, are binding. And if we say one thing in God's name, but do another thing because of our own weak nature, the very Word of God is undermined. We establish a concept that 'words' are not binding and that they are unreliable.

Therefore Jesus says, watch out for what you are saying. Don't go making arrogant, religious statements. This is only religious pride and hypocrisy. Though it may be so simple, be humble in what you say and honor your words with all you have. Otherwise your words will become sin in your mouth.

Jesus is emphasizing that our words are much more powerful than we realize. What we say expresses what is in our heart and what is in our heart

is what God is observing. We must be careful about what we say. Even in casual conversations things are said that can carry a great impact on the life of another person or in our relationship with the Lord.

vs:38-39 ***"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'***

But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Now Jesus begins to bring the message of God's governing standards to a very personal level. Everyone could relate to the concept to equal justice. This is basic to human nature. If you commit an offense to me, then I, by rights, may retaliate with an equal offense (of course it would be done under the guise of righteous judgment and justice).

But Jesus again emphasizes that God never intended for His Word to be used in this way. And now that the kingdom of God was upon the nation of Israel, God was demanding change. Change of the greatest extremes! Change that went against the very core of humanities' sinful nature. Change that could only be accomplished with radical alteration in every person's very nature.

God wants us to emphasis mercy, not justice! Offense and vengeance is an endless cycle that only results in broad-scale suffering and intellectual bondage. The cycle must be broken in order for God's Kingdom to have entrance into a person's life. We must be so bold as to offer ourselves as a brake in the cycle of vengeance.

Let it stop! Don't use your rights for vengeance, but rather give yourself as an offering of peace. Submit to the persecutions of your offenders. Just receive it and go on with life. If you don't retaliate, the matter will fade away and the offender will finally feel sorry for his attitude.

Of course it will cost you. But what does it matter when you know that you are doing what the Father has already done for you.

vs:40-42 ***And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.***

If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Our natural instinct is to receive as much as is possible for ourselves. The world system is based on 'getting' for yourself as much as is possible.

But Jesus is telling us that we should have the opposite attitude. We should concentrate on 'giving'. Give to whoever has need without judging the legitimacy of that need. Give, to whomever!

We may reason that if we loan to others, we will deprive ourselves. But how can God bless us if we are already overwhelmed with our selfishly stored up 'things'? And if we remain in a situation in which God has no need to bless and provide for us, how then can He bring glory to His name? *Proverbs 14:31; Proverbs 19:17*

vs:43-45 ***"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'***

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

You have been taught something else that isn't right. Now it's time to see the truth and 'unlearn' what was taught. You were taught that it is right to follow your natural instincts in love and hate. But the blessings and principles of God's Kingdom will be realized when you overcome your instinctive reactions and relations, and choose to treat others in the same way that God has treated you - with total, selfless, undeserved love!

Jesus demands that in God's Kingdom, if you want to inherit the blessings and benefits of being completely integrated in God's Kingdom family, you must rise up against your own naturally sinful tendencies. You must deny the rights afforded you by the world's systems and standards. You must do the unthinkable. You must love your enemy!

How is it possible to love an enemy? Only by choice! Everything within you will resist this command. Yet because of our love for our Father in heaven, we choose to love. Love, not of our own strength, but through God's strength. Love, because we understand that in our ignorance and religious pride, we were once enemies of God, too. Yet He chose to love us and bless us. Thus, we must and can to the same.

Love and pray for your enemies and those who cause you to suffer. If you don't, how can you be a true and worthy son of our Father God?

Just as God extends sunshine and rain to both the righteous and the unrighteous people equally, so also He wants us to extend His love to both friend and foe.

vs:46 ***If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?***

God cannot bless you when you only will treat others according to the world's standards. God's love and greatness cannot be seen in that. You will only gain a worldly benefit that has no eternal value. In fact, this behavior is no better than the way your enemy behaves.

vs:47 ***And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?***

And if you think my instructions only apply to those within your little religious circle, you're wrong. I want you to express God's love and acceptance to both believer and non-believer alike. In fact, the non-believers are more generous in expressing love and tolerance than you who are believers! How can God bless you or bring glory to His name?

vs:48 ***Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***

The bottom line is this. I want you to get an accurate understanding of who God is. Observe how He relates to you and how He has blessed you. I want you, as God's children, to become just like God, who is your Father. You must be perfect! That is to be your goal! Just like God Himself is perfect. Then when others see you, they will not just see another miserable human being, but they will see in you the hope of the 'good news' of God's Kingdom. And the name of God will be glorified to them through you!

Matthew 6

vs:1 ***"Be careful not to do your `acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.***

In *Matthew 5:16* Jesus urged His disciples to 'let their light shine publicly' so that people could see their good deeds - so that - they would give praise and glory to God, the source for their light and goodness. But then in *Matthew 6:1* Jesus seems to warn the disciples in just the opposite way! Why is that?

In both cases the 'deeds' and the 'acts of righteousness' may well be identical activities. But the difference is found in the motive. Our 'good deeds' should be born out of a heart of love and passion to bring glory to the name of our Father. In doing this, we will be found worthy of the benefits of God's Kingdom.

But some 'acts of righteousness' are born out of selfishness and pride. A desire to make ourselves **appear** to be receiving the benefits of God's Kingdom, but without having a changed heart. It is an effort to gain religious authority, hide an unchanged heart, and even trick ourselves to believe we are receiving God's favor and blessing.

Jesus warns us against this attitude and condition. And he explains that the way to get your heart in the right standing with God is to hide all religious activity from other people. This in itself will force into submission our selfish nature and bring forward the heart that can be filled with God's light.

vs:2 ***"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.***

When you give to people who are in need, just do it without expecting anything in return. Don't do it in order to exercise your power of wealth or to gain recognition. If you do this 'good deed' for what you can get from it, then the only reward you will receive is whatever can be gained in your own strength from this worldly, selfish effort.

vs:3 ***But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,***

The right way to give to people who have a need (and you should do this), is to keep the matter as secret as possible. Don't hint or suggest about your good deeds. Don't boast about your accomplishments in order to validate the credibility of your ministry. Don't promote your 'good deeds' to raise funds! Just do it out of love and praise to God.

vs:4 ***so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.***

The best way is to just keep quiet! Remember that you are doing your good deeds because of your love for God, who, in His love for you, is watching carefully over the motives and attitudes of your heart to see if it is worthy of receiving the rewards of His kingdom's blessings.

We must treat God as though we really believe He is watching our heart. Too often we doubt that He sees, and resort to human efforts and manipulation to 'take' on an illusion of God's blessing working in our lives.

vs:5 ***"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.***

This is Jesus first use of the word 'hypocrite'. Yet He was referring to people of this description all through the preceding verses and chapter, warning His disciples that in order to receive the benefits of God's Kingdom, they must be different. They must not pretend love and loyalty for God. They must not act religious, but rather, they must break free of the hypocritical religious system and 'be real'.

Hypocrite = one who pretends to love God; a 'pretender'.

"When you pray..." We must assume that prayer is an integral practice of anyone who claims to be Jesus' disciple. Jesus followers were expected to have a much different prayer discipline than that of the religious 'pretenders'.

When 'pretenders' pray, their motive is to be seen by other people - to deceive them into believing that they are communicating to God by His Spirit. But in reality, all they are doing is speaking to the wind and to the people who happen to be within hearing distance. Thus, often the prayer of a 'pretender' contain limits and suggestions of how he wants to be treated by those around him. In other words, under the guise of praying to God, the 'pretender' is in reality, praying to the people around him!

vs:6 ***But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.***

Jesus wants us to forget about the people around us when we pray. Don't think about what their impressions will be of your words to God. They don't matter unless what you are praying directly relates to one of those people. What does matter is that you really communicate with God, heart to heart, spirit to Spirit, in faith, believing. And when God sees your sincerity and the truth of your words, He will respond! He will answer! He will reward - you!

vs:7 ***And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.***

Don't think that repeating your prayer or saying it in various ways will impress God! It's not your communication skills that will move His hand, but rather a few words spoken in truth and without pretense, that reaches and moves God's heart and hand. Anything else such as pious and wordy prayers, are going to drive God away from you! You are acting no different than the non-believers who are masters at manipulating people and situations with 'words'.

vs:8 ***Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.***

Don't be like the people of the world who rely on their 'slippery' tongues in order to reach their selfish goals. You can't fool God. He already knows what your real needs are before you even realize them and verbalize them yourselves.

If you are a true disciple and a true son of the Father, then you don't need to be a 'master' of the art of prayer. Our Father already knows everything about us, our situations from day to day, and our physical, spiritual, emotional, and material needs. He wants us to just communicate with Him as a son

would communicate to his own father. Just talk to him! No performance! No change of articulation or expression from your normal way of speaking. Just be His friend and treat Him that way!

vs:9 - 15 ***"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,***

your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Prayer is COMMUNICATION with God (not hinting to those around you or showing off). It is speaking to and hearing from our Creator. Prayer is a tool to line up our lives with God's plan for us and is useful and necessary in every kind of situation.

Matthew 21:13; the 'temple is a house of prayer'.

I Corinthians 6:19-20; now we are the 'temple' of the Holy Spirit. God's intention is for us to be a house (temple) of prayer.

Luke 11:1; "Lord, teach us to pray". We must learn to pray.

Jeremiah 33:2-3; When (if) we call on the Lord, God hears AND God answers.

I Thessalonians 5:17; pray (communicate) openly and continuously.

Romans 8:26-27: the Holy Spirit helps us to pray. How does he do that?

James 5:16: "the prayers of 'righteous' people accomplish much". What is 'righteousness' (see *Romans 1:17* and *4:3*)?

'right relationships' with:

- God through Jesus
- Other Christians
- Your family
- Non-believers

'Right perspective' of yourself, your calling, your church etc. (seeing things the way God sees them).

'Right responses' to situations, the way God would respond to them with compassion, love, hope, thankfulness etc.

'Right way of doing things' (in God's way, not according to standard of our culture, society, traditions, religion etc.).

Matthew 21:22; prayer must be made in 'faith' believing. How do we get faith? *Romans 10:17*

John 16:24; ask in 'Jesus name' (*Mark 16:17*; "in my name drive out demons", *Acts 2:21*; "anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved", *Acts 3:6*; "in the name of Jesus Christ, walk").

John 16:24; you won't receive until you ask! 'Asking' forces us to make contact with God. It builds our relationship with him. It brings us into the 'light'. This is what God is longing for. He loves us. He wants to have communication and relationship with us. **Prayer brings God and man together.**

Matthew 14:35; "not my will but thy will be done". Prayer must be in line with God's will (his plan). How can we know God's will? *Romans 12:1-2*.

Different prayer situations:

Acts 4:24; united prayer, spoken out loud at the same time

Acts 20:36; in public, on their knees

Mark 1:35; in solitude (Jesus often prayed like this)

Acts 6:2-4; a leaders duty

'Our' - Jesus is our brother. Who are His brothers and sisters? *Matthew 12:50*

'Father...' - Who is "Father"? Jesus is our example of who our Father God is. *John 14:9*; "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father".

- God cannot be compared with an earthly father who has great limitations and faults.

- Jesus had already learned to recognize His Father by the time He was 12 years old; *Luke 2:49*

'...in heaven...'

- It's a real place, not an ideal, fantasy, or feeling in your heart (Hell too, is just as real!)

- Jesus ascended to heaven

- We will go there too, someday

- Heaven was 'opened' to Jesus when He received the baptism of the Holy Spirit; *Matthew 3:16*

'...hallowed be Your name...'

- "Honor your father and your mother"; *Exodus 20:12*

- 'The name' (Jesus) is a great source of power; *Mark 16:17, Acts 3:6*

'Your kingdom come...'

- Getting caught up in God's vision; *Matthew 6:33*

Kingdom = government; *I Corinthians 4:19* (it is powerful),

I Corinthians 15:50 (it is spiritual), *Romans 14:17*

'...your will be done...'

- How can we know God's will? *John 6:38, Romans 12:1-2*

'...on earth as it is in heaven...'

- God has a plan for you! *Matthew 18:18, Ephesians 2:10*

'Give us this day our daily bread...'

- When we are centered in God's will, we can expect God's provision for our daily needs. The 'Lord' provides for His 'servants'. The 'Father' provides for His 'children'.
- Don't worry! Day by day we are secure in God's love; *Matthew 6:2*
- "Ask! And it will be given to you"; *Matthew 7:7-8*

'Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors'

- we may owe debts of finances, emotions, time, government, energy, etc. Parents owe children. Children owe parents. We all 'owed' God.
- Unlimited forgiveness! 70 x 7; *Matthew 18:21-22*
- 'Forgive them' for their ignorance of what has happened and their lack of seeing the situation the way you do.

'And lead us not into temptation' - *Matthew 4:1*; Jesus was lead by the Holy Spirit to a place of temptation which comes from Satan. *Luke 4:14*; Jesus returned from the place of temptation victorious and 'in the power of the Holy Spirit'!

- God permits temptation and provides a way out of it.
- *I Corinthians 10:12-13*; Jesus overcame temptation by the power and authority of God's Word.

'...but deliver us from the evil one' - We have a real enemy! How does Satan attack us? Through people, sickness, accidents, thoughts, (assumptions). How can we overcome Satan? *Galatians 6:10-17*

'...for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever' (Note: This last sentence is added in some of the late manuscripts)

...*the kingdom* - It's God's government. If you don't like something about it, tell Him!

...*the power* - It's a government with real power, not manipulative men creating an illusion of power.

...*the glory* - God must get the glory. He created everything. If we are expecting the church, or our spiritual gifting, our self-righteousness, etc., to make us 'somebody' important, then we're in the wrong kingdom! Every heartbeat belongs to God! Every truth you understand is a revelation, a gift to you from God!

...*forever* - God, His kingdom, His truth, His plan for us, His love, and on and on, ...is forever, and ever, and ever!

When we pray, pray with this kind of perspective. Ask according to God's will, believe with faith that is built on confidence through the Word.

vs:16 - 18 ***"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.***

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,

so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

"When you fast..." Just as Jesus had said in verse 2, "When you give to the needy" and in verse 5, "When you pray"; we can see that it is a basic

assumption that the true disciples of Jesus have these characteristics of giving, praying, and fasting. Every Christian should be regularly practicing these disciplines.

Just as in 'giving and praying', fasting should be done in secret out of your trust and love for God. If your fasting is not something based on your personal relationship with God, then you have nothing to gain through fasting. The same is true in your giving and praying. But if your fasting, your sacrifice and suppression of your natural desires, is born out of a sincerity and passion to express your heart's prayer to the Lord, God promises to see our heart and answer. He promises that the principles of God's Kingdom will be effective and real to us. *Zechariah 7*

This is what Christians are to hunger for. They don't want to hear more preaching about 'God's Kingdom'. They want to experience it! And it cannot be experienced with only an outward show of charismatic enthusiasm, long prayers, tears, or speaking in tongues. Though all of these can and should be part of a Christian's experience, they must not be used as a tool to 'reach God's throne'. What God wants and demands is clearly written. He wants people to be 'real' with God. No pretending - - anything! Why? Because His Kingdom is real and in order to be a part of it, we must be real too.

Jesus wants us to enter God's Kingdom. He wants us to receive the blessings of God. He has clearly shown us the door, the way to enter. Now we must leave one part of our life to pass through to another - His Kingdom.

- "Let your light shine" *Matthew 5:16*, Relax, and let what is really in you be seen. Don't pretend to be religious. Live your life to bring glory to God, not to bring glory to your religious pretense.
- Guard your heart. Be aware of God's judgment and that He watches you continually. Thinking murderous and adulterous thoughts are the same to God as committing the act.
- Change your thinking and wrong concepts of what you think God's Word says. You will find that in reality God doesn't approve of divorce, equal rights, and vengeance. Rather, he wants us to treat others the way we want God to treat us, that is, with mercy and forgiveness.
- No pretending! When you give, really give, with no strings attached! When you pray, really talk to God - as if He really is listening, like He really loves you, like He really can do something!
- Don't let your 'human nature' control your spirit. Bring your selfish passions into submission to the will of God and your redeemed spirit. The bottom line is this - God sees the truth of what is in our hearts. God wants us to see ourselves in this way too, and to have no concern for outward appearances and efforts to 'gain religious approval'. God wants us to see His heart, too. Not the outward impressions that we get about Him, but He wants us to really have heart to heart companionship with Him, like a son to his father.

How does a righteous father desire his son to relate to him?

- To receive his advice and love
- To be obedient
- To honor the family name
- To be a friend
- To communicate about everything

- To receive the father's blessings
- To express love to the father

vs:19 ***"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.***

Just as eating food is a natural compulsion of our natural character that can be brought under our control by fasting, so also is our compulsion to acquire wealth and 'things'.

Jesus wants us to stop all activity that focuses on 'ourselves'. We must realize that everything on this earth is cursed with the curse of death, sin, and decay. Therefore, when we focus on our earthly existence, all our efforts and investments are destined for loss. Working and investing in this world is a bad investment. You will lose! If the thieves don't get your possessions, then rust and natural decay will.

vs:20 ***But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.***

But Jesus isn't just commanding us to stop or suppress our natural compulsion to invest our time and life towards reaching a goal. This isn't something wrong. Rather, it is a God-given part of our character. What God wants though, is to change our vision and goals. He wants to change us from having a self-centered vision to having a heavenly, God-centered vision. He wants us to invest our time, energy, and life into God's Kingdom. By doing this, we will be storing up treasures in heaven. And in heaven, we can be assured that there is no stealing or decay. This shows us that we can have some effect from here on earth on our situation when we arrive in heaven.

vs:21 ***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***

This is how we can determine the truth about where a person's heart motives are focused. When we know where someone invests their time, energy, and money, we know the truth about their heart. But we must be careful not to base judgment on what only our eyes see. As we will see in the coming verses, God also invests His time, money, and energy where His heart is. And, His heart is focused on those people who sincerely love Him and are dedicated to the application of the principles of God's Kingdom.

Where is your treasure invested? What is your treasure?

- Time?
- Energy?
- Friends / relationships?
- Resources?
- Talents?
- Vision / goals?

vs:22 ***"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.***

"Eyes" = your focus of attention.

What you focus your attention on in life, where you invest your treasure, will be reflected in your physical environment. The same will be true of a church. If you focus on the right things (God's Word, evangelism, obedience, giving, etc.) the church will be an attractive 'light', a shining light in the darkness of self-centeredness and sin. If your attention is focused on

what is right the goodness and light of your heart will permeate throughout your whole being, even effecting your physical environment and your body.

vs:23 ***But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!***

But if your attention is on the wrong things, then you cannot claim to be in the truth or to see the right way. You may know how to act as if you know your way and to see clearly, but in reality, you are in darkness and cannot be walking in the light of God. This also will have its effects on your physical environment and your body.

So if you are in the dark and you think you are in the light, the reality is, you are really lost in the darkest darkness there is. You can't even know how dark your situation is! Things can't get much worse for you!

vs:24 ***"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.***

It is not possible to be loyal to two different systems. The end result if you attempt this is that your attraction to one or the other will steadily grow until you are torn into a state of confusion and mixed passions. You can only love one thing at a time with true love and dedication. Just as a man cannot have two wives simultaneously and express equal love and devotion between the two. In the same way, it is impossible to serve God and money with equal devotion. You cannot be in God's Kingdom and reap its blessing while maintaining loyalties to the world's system.

This gets us to the root causes of hypocrisy and religious pretending. When people secretly love and devote themselves to money, and the comforts and things it can buy, while at the same time trying to reap the blessings of God's Kingdom, they ultimately must yield their loyalties to one or the other. Yet because of fear of God's judgment and the opinion of people, they continue in a charade of pretended loyalty to God while their heart is busy pursuing a worldly vision.

Some modern day churches have bowed down to this confused system, turning a blind eye to the hypocrisy and deceptions in order to reap the finance that these poor, guilt-ridden souls offer in appeasement. In order to be rated as a successful modern day church, you are required to have a large financial base. Without this financial base most of these kinds of 'churches' would fail. How can we even call these institutions (businesses) churches? A church with or without money should have for its base/foundation a deep love and passion for obedience to God's precepts and to each other. That is what makes a real church.

Do you know what God's precepts are?

Is your church established on these foundational principles of God's Kingdom? Or is your church established on money hungry projects and programs?

At the beginning of Jesus' 'Kingdom Lessons', he said, "You are the light of the world". In these last few verses Jesus now clarifies what it is that makes us light and what can cause the light to be extinguished. All the teachings leading up to these last few verses are isolated examples of how people who are bearing the name of God are either in the light or in darkness.

Jesus continues on with his 'Kingdom Lessons' explaining how we receive the blessings of God's Kingdom and what must be done to enter in.

vs:25

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"

Worry limits vision and obedience to God's Word.

"Therefore..." This word expresses that the following verses are conditional and are based on preceding information or conditions. So, if you are not established in what Jesus has already taught, what He is about to express cannot apply to you.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life..." Most people are motivated by worry and fear. Our minds are filled with concerns of failing health, loss of social status, inferiority, and the inability to reach the normal lifestyle standards of our peers. We worry about not having even the basics of survival - food and clothing. Why do we worry? Jesus said that we should re-evaluate our focus on life. Instead of focusing on the temporal and outward aspects of our existence, we should be concerned about the most basic element, that is, 'life' itself.

What is 'life'? Is it simply the ability to breathe one breath to the next? Or is it more? Is life actually the condition of our existence where we are fully satisfied in the purposes God has planned and prepared for our existence? And isn't a healthy physical body far more important than the outward appearance of a healthy body?

How much time and energy and money is expended in an effort to cover up our inward misery and out-of-control physical appetites? Jesus wants His children to get the priorities right. And when you do, if you are meeting the conditions of 'therefore', the benefits of God's Kingdom that Jesus is about to describe, are available to you. The benefit of a 'worry free' life!

What causes you to worry? What is the overall motivating force in your life? Fear and worry or love and truth?

vs:26

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Learn a lesson from the nature around you. The birds aren't worrying about what they are going to eat and the outcome of their futures. Yet God who made the birds, your heavenly Father who also made you, feeds them day by day. Don't you think that you are much more valuable to your Father than the birds are? Do you think it is normal for little children to worry about

where their next meal is coming from? No. It isn't that way at all. Children who are confident of their parents' love rest in assurance that their parents will always provide. They trust in their love and goodness.

Yet so often Christians treat God their Father as though He doesn't love them at all and has no concern for their needs. They make Him look to be an uncaring and self-centered person. They worry about everything as though God, their loving Father, hasn't the slightest care for them.

Why do Christians worry? Because they don't really know their Father's love and because of their stubbornness and rebellion to walk in obedience by faith in His plan for their life. So why are they stubborn and rebellious? Because they don't know God and don't trust Him to care for them. They think that they can't obey because they must take care of themselves and their needs first.

vs:27 ***Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?***

So what does worrying accomplish anyway? Can anyone prove that their worrying extended or added to their lives? They can never know for sure!

vs:28-29 ***"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.***

Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

Why do people, including many Christians, worry so much about their clothes? Being in style. Their outward appearance? Again, take a look at nature. Look at the flowers that grow wild in the fields. How hard must they work in order to create such beauty? Not at all! It just happens! Yet even the wealthiest and most prominent people can't compare to the beauty of the flowers.

vs:30 ***If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?***

Now let's look at this rationally. If God really loves you as much as He claims He does; and if God can create such beauty as is found among the flowers of the field (which one day you see and the next day are gone); don't you think He will make sure that you will reflect His love and goodness by the way you look, in what you wear?

Why can't we trust him? God wants you to look good and reflect His goodness just as much as a parent wants children to look good in representing themselves. The reason you worry about clothes is because you just don't trust your Father.

vs:31 ***So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'***

"...so do not worry..." This is a command, not a suggestion! To worry or not to worry is a choice. We either choose to put our trust in ourselves or in our Father God. Jesus wants us to choose to trust God. And when we do, God provides faithfully for all our needs. Our lives will be a reflection of His love and glory to those around. When we no longer focus on the worries of maintaining the necessities for life, we will then find ourselves liberated completely to serve God whenever, wherever, or however He directs. This is joy and fulfillment of life! This is the secret of success!

vs:32 ***For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.***

As Christians we are to be very different from the non-believers. Our standards cannot be compared to theirs. If you set your standards according to the world's standards how frustrating your life will be. Don't you think God knows about the pressures we face to be 'acceptable' in this dark world that He has placed us in? Of course! He also provides clothing that is in style and food that you enjoy - if that is what is required for you to properly reflect His glory and meet your own needs.

Don't go comparing yourselves among one another. Trust your Father. He knows what is best for you. He knows your needs. He is a good Father. He will provide - if you will stop being so stubbornly independent and trust him.

vs:33 ***But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.***

Now it's not enough to just hide away in your house or church and wait for God to throw food and clothing at you! These benefits and promises of God's care are conditional! What God wants from you is to stop wasting your time and energy pursuing and worrying about the 'things' of this world. God wants His children to pursue His kingdom and His standards of righteousness. If you must worry, then worry about this! Worry about not ever entering into the benefits and blessings of God's Kingdom. And this is what Jesus has been trying to teach us in the previous two chapters; where and how to find and enter God's Kingdom. This is where our focus as Christians MUST be and nowhere else!

Matthew 6:10 This is Jesus vision and prayer; "Thy kingdom come...".

Are you living in and experiencing the joy and peace of serving in God's Kingdom?

Whose kingdom are you seeking? God's Kingdom or your own? Whose standard of righteousness do you follow?

vs:34 ***Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.***

"Therefore..." Jesus says, "DO NOT WORRY"! Let tomorrow alone. It will take care of itself. Just think about the issues at hand today. That is enough.

What do the non-believers worry about? Is there any chance that you worry about the same things?

Imagine a family. The children in the family often speak about the love of their father. They speak about their fathers' wealth and unlimited resources. They speak about serving their father. Yet, if you can see into this home, you would be surprised to see that in spite of all the wonderful things that the children say about their father, day after day the children fret and worry about whether or not they will be provided with food and clothing. When they speak of serving their father, it's only talk because all of their time and energy is mostly focused on seeking provisions for each day.

This is not a healthy family. It is a dysfunctional family. And all the while the father keeps reassuring the children that they can trust him. It's very sad because the children feel so guilty about not really serving him or fitting into his plan for the family. And because of the guilt, the children feel

unworthy to receive the father's provision. What a strange family! How can they expect onlookers to really believe that they have a loving and healthy family?

This is a picture of how many Christians fit into God's Kingdom. This is very unfair to God! How can we expect him to receive our gratitude? How can we expect others to join us in this family? No wonder those outside God's Kingdom think Christians are crazy!

Matthew 7

vs:1 ***"Do not judge, or you too will be judged."***

This is a simple and very straightforward statement. It is one statement or regulation of God's Kingdom principles out of a series that express the established principle that for 'for every action, there is a reaction'.

Matthew 7:1

- Judge - and you will be judged
- Show mercy - and you will be shown mercy
- Give - and it will be given to you

Matthew 7:7

- Ask - and it will be given
- Seek - and you will find
- Knock - and the door will be opened

Matthew 6:15

- Forgive - and you will be forgiven

Judge = to decide for yourself if something is good or bad. This judgment can only be based on whatever limited amount of information you've acquired, lacking in God's overall perspective on each situation and motivation of the heart.

It is beyond us as humans with our limited understanding and lack of perspective to determine what is good or bad. And if we do begin passing judgments then we must also pass judgment on ourselves as well as receive judgment from others.

vs:2 ***"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."***

If you are sympathetic and compassionate, if you are humble enough to recognize your own inability to pass fair judgment - then you will be treated the same way. But if you are highly opinionated, quick to accuse others and have no mercy - you will receive the same treatment in return.

Who judges us? Both men and God. With what standard do you want God to pass judgment on you? With mercy and compassion or with harshness and stubbornness? How men and God judge us is reflected by the way and with what measure we use to judge others with. Thus Jesus commands us, "Do not judge at all"! Who do you think you are to exalt yourself to a position of perspective and authority to be a righteous judge? Only God can judge righteously!

vs:3 ***"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"***

Jesus wants His disciples to have an accurate understanding about themselves. He wants us to judge ourselves instead of others. If we could clearly see ourselves the way God sees us, we would be too humiliated to go around passing judgment on others.

The reality is this; we can always clearly see the inconsistencies, problems, and sins in other people's lives, yet we can just as easily justify and excuse our sins. But sin is sin, no matter how we justify it. Sin in our lives perverts righteousness and truth. How then can you dare to point the obvious sins in the other peoples lives and at the same time turn a blind eye to your own sin? Don't you think you have enough to do in life to simply take care of your own inconsistencies and sins?

vs:4 ***How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?***

Why do you always focus on people rather than God who is righteous, truth, and light? Why do you think you have any right to take your eyes off God and focus on your own brothers? You have such sincere excuses, you are so disgustingly self- righteous! You pretend concern and get yourself involved in such trivial concerns. Your pretended concern about your brother or sisters problems or sin is only a cover-up of the major problems in your own life! Wake up!

vs:5 ***You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.***

Don't you realize how obvious your sins are to those around you and to God? You hypocrite! If you think you're so skilled at problem solving, go take care of the disaster in your own life first. Then maybe you'll have some qualification to help somebody else. For certain though, you can't help anybody else when you still haven't dealt with the sins of your own life.

vs:6 ***"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.***

Who is an unworthy person? Obviously from Jesus' teaching it would be religious hypocrites! People who regularly attend church! People who are masters at acting like they love God and serve him. Yet Jesus calls them "dogs"! He warns us not to try to apply the truth of God's Kingdom or give any of the blessings to these kinds of people. For certain, though they may act so religious, God will not give them the kingdom privileges. Not until they become righteous from the heart first.

The treasures God has given you, the pearls of truth and the kingdom privileges - hold on to them! Don't casually give away what came to you through so much fire. If you do, if you are careless - you're going to lose it all! And then the very ones you were hoping would understand and enter into the wonderful things you've experienced - they will in turn, destroy you. Hypocrites are unworthy. In fact, they cannot receive the treasures of heaven because worthiness is based entirely upon a condition of the heart. A heart yielded, changed, and obedient fully to the will of God.

Why are so many pastors suffering at the hands of their congregations?

Why have so many proclaimed 'Christians' missed out on the simple truths of God's Kingdom? They read about others who are experiencing life in God's Kingdom, yet they always seem to be on the outside.

vs:7 - 8 ***"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.***

For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

These are basic principles that are applicable **only for those who meet the qualifications of partaking in God's Kingdom**. How do you know if you are qualified? First of all, if you are truly a 'citizen' in God's Kingdom you will have only 'kingdom interests' in your mind and plans. Therefore, if the Kingdom of God is our priority, God assures us that what we ask for will be given. Why? Because what we ask for, what our heart longs for, will be in line with God's plan and kingdom purposes. So too, what we are searching for we will find. And what 'door' we desire to go through, if we just knock on it, it will be opened; *Revelations 3:19-20*.

Of course everyone who asks is going to receive some kind of an answer. But this is the question: is the thing they receive as an answer really the 'truth' or merely just what they want/choose to hear or receive? Everyone who seeks will find something. But is the thing they find going to be good for them? Or, will it turn against them to bring about their own destruction?

Everyone wants to see their visions, their plans, fulfilled. Like passing through a doorway, they persist till the door opens. Without concern about what is waiting for them on the other side, they just want to get the door to budge.

vs:9-10 ***"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?***

Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

But in God's Kingdom you don't need to worry! When you ask God your loving Father for something, in God's Kingdom you will only receive the best. If God loves you, will He trick you by allowing you to receive something contrary to His good plan for you? Of course not, not if you're truly a part of His kingdom family.

vs:11 ***If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!***

Now assuming that you know how to give good gifts to your children (actually, in Gods eyes, you are evil people), you can be assured that God your Father (who is truly good and truly loves you) will give good gifts to those who ask Him.

Conditions: You must be a true child of Father God and a kingdom citizen. Then--you must ask! Communicate! Have relationship!

vs:12 ***So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.***

Here is the bottom line concerning how our attitudes should be towards others: In the way that you want others to treat you, treat everyone else that way first (including God). By obeying this principle you will have accomplished what all the law and its prophets have been trying to teach.

In order to attain this standard it is necessary to always and in every situation, consider the other person's perspective (including Gods). In this way you can truly determine what is the right position you should seek in every situation you encounter.

vs:13 ***"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.***

The way to enter God's Kingdom is not so obvious. If you follow the way of the majority, following their standards and value systems, follow their attitudes and priorities, and look to their standard for success; to make this the pattern for your life is to merely take the easiest way in life. But the end result will guarantee your destruction.

vs:14 ***But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.***

There is a way that leads to true life and success. It leads to the place that every human heart is longing to reach. But it's not an easy road to follow on. The majority does not travel it. If everyone knew where this little road would ultimately lead them to and went searching for it, only a small handful would ever actually find it.

How can we find the gate that opens this small road for us? First, ask the One who made the road and gate - God. Second, search for it. Focus your energy on locating the gate. Make this your life's priority. That means breaking ranks with the majority. Third, when you find the gate, simply knock. The Holy Spirit, who is the keeper of the gate, will open it for you; *John 10:1-5*.

Where can we find this gate? Jesus is the gate; *John 10:7-10*.

Where is this narrow path? It can only be traveled on by keeping your eyes on Jesus; *John 10:27-28, John 14:6!*

What is the ultimate destination that the human heart longs to reach; *John 14:6*? Why do we need to find restored relationship with Father God? Because, "In his presence is fullness of joy". Restoration to man's pre-sin relationship to God; *Genesis 3:8*.

vs:15 ***"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.***

Beware and stay away from people who claim to speak God's Word in order to point you to an easy, appealing way to enter God's Kingdom, yet who are not meeting the standards God has set for their personal life. They know how to act like they have a great relationship with God and are living in His kingdom blessings. They will for certain come to you looking like a true child of God from all the outward appearances. But hidden from view is a heart that is self-centered and fulfills its cravings by feeding on the innocence and trust of God's true children.

They will speak the truth of God's Word in order to manipulate people to respond according to their own desires.

The prophecy may well be true but the prophet is 'false'. Satan is a master of disguise! And one of his most deceptive disguises is of a person who is a master in the art of looking like they love God and have close relationship with him. Yet all the time they have the motive of 'taking' instead of 'giving'.

vs:16 ***By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?***

You can recognize these kinds of people for what they really are. You need to watch their lives over a period of time. In the same way that many fruit trees look similar, you don't know for certain what kind of tree it is until it

bears fruit. The fruit reveals the truth of what is in the heart; *Galatians 5:13-26*.

So if you don't know what is really in the heart of a person, take care! Just because their message is appealing, don't just accept it without knowing what is in the heart of the speaker. Know their motives. Know about their real relationship with God. Don't behave like a fool by seeking truth from a deceiver. And don't be deceived by falling out of touch with the author of truth, your Father God

vs:17-18 ***Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.***

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Just as you can't get food fruit from a tree just because the tree looks beautiful, in the same way a good fruit-bearing tree may not look so appealing. Simply said, a good fruit tree must bear good fruit, but a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. And a good tree cannot have bad fruit while a bad tree cannot have good fruit.

vs:19 ***Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.***

We must remember that 'Somebody' is watching and keeping track of what is going on in our lives to see if we are a good tree that produces good fruit or not. We need to realize that if we are only playing a Christian game and have not produced the kind of spiritual results of God's Kingdom principles in our lives, we will be 'cut down' and thrown in the fire. You are of NO value in God's Kingdom. This is not a game!

vs:20 ***Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.***

So, the way to know what is in the heart of a person is to look at the fruit, the results, of their life. Can you see Jesus reflected in their life? Does their message line up with God's Word and well balanced with related scriptures? Are they motivated by selfless love for God and man?

To see the fruit requires time and relationship. Don't accept a 'messenger of God' just because someone else says they are good. Why? Because false prophets will come to you (vs:15) and you must be the one who protects yourself from deception.

Can you confidently discern the heart of a person, ministry, or church? Why, or why not?

How can you identify good fruit? By being completely familiar with the One who produces good fruit in our lives.

What is the difference between 'good fruit' and 'good works'?

vs:21 ***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.***

It's certainly not enough to just be able to say the right religious things. You may be able to trick people into thinking that you are submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ, but you'll never be able to trick God! You can worship Him and call Him your Lord all you want, but you are working against yourself and the plan of God unless you are fully surrendered in obedience to doing the will of Father God. This is what God is looking for; real change that permeates every aspect of our being; total surrender and obedience to the lordship of Jesus Christ and to the plans and desires of His Father in heaven. This is the key to entering the 'kingdom of heaven'!

Obedience - to what?

- Obedience to the teachings and commands that Jesus has given us through His word and actions.
- Obedience to the ongoing personal directives given to us individually by the Holy Spirit. (See examples of the early church in the book of 'Acts')

vs:22 ***Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'***

"Many will say to me on 'that day'..." There is coming a day which Jesus refers to as 'that day'. What is the meaning of 'that day'? It will be the day that you stand before God and Jesus Christ in all their power and glory. It will be the day when all secrets and the motives of your heart will be exposed for righteous judgment. *Revelations 20:11-15*

Many people will have only their words as a line of defense for their actions in this life. Many people will try to talk their way out of the terrible truth revealed on 'that day'.

They will beg the Lord to consider what they did to prove their worthiness. But even though they performed miracles, prophesied, and cast out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus, this will not prove their innocence. Why? Because their heart was not right. It was not in submissive obedience Jesus.

So, something interesting becomes clear here. You can have the power of God through the 'name of Jesus' and still be in rebellion to Jesus. You can have authority yet use it for the wrong purposes! A police who uses his authority for corrupt purposes is a great danger to society in the long run. He must be stopped. In the same way, 'Christians' who have gained authority through the name of Jesus Christ and who use their authority for corrupt, manipulative, or self-centered purposes, must be stopped. They cannot expect to succeed in building their own kingdom on earth using their authority through the name of Jesus, and still get the full benefits of the kingdom of God and eternal life. When the Day of Judgment comes and the secrets of the heart are laid bare, God will deal with these kinds of people.

vs:23 ***Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'***

Though they carried the name of 'Christian', held leadership positions, operated in the gifts of the Spirit, had 'successful looking' ministries, Jesus will give them a very simple response for their complicated defensive arguments. He'll simply tell them, "I never knew you! Get away from me! Whatever you did in your life - it was evil!"

A description of a false prophet:

They may give true prophecies, but their heart and their loyalties are false. And if Jesus doesn't know them, then we shouldn't be impressed by them or try to 'know them' either. *Matthew 12:49-50; John 1:47-50*

To 'not know' Jesus and to hide yourself from him is to 'do evil'; *Genesis 3:8-10* (fear of exposing the truth).

vs:24-27 ***"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.***

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Jesus has just concluded an extensive teaching of what God's Kingdom is and how a person can enter into it. Now He gives a final summation emphasizing how important it really is that we take note of all the things He has said.

It's not nearly enough to 'hear' the teachings of Jesus and agree with His kingdom principles. The words we had heard must be 'activated' in order to be effective in a positive way. Each person who 'hears' the word is responsible for making the truth a living and active part and practice of their life.

It is not enough to be a part of a group who holds to these standards. It must be personal! Does Jesus really know you?

Jesus compares the man who establishes life upon the kingdom of God to the man who establishes his life on the world's standards, religious systems, or any other form of government or standard. Though both may appear to have a successful life, what is important is what is unseen. How does the person's life stand in the 'test of time'?

In this world, systems and standards are based on economics, politics, attitudes, and trends. These things are always changing because of the unforeseeable events that evolve in a nation and its people. So what is right and correct one season may be wrong or outdated in the next. A nation, family, church, or individual that tries to accommodate and build on this system is destined for a disaster. Why? Because as unforeseen forces oppose the system, the system will not have solutions to prevent failure.

But the kingdom of God, His systems, standards, and regulations are eternal. God is eternal. He has proven the reliability and permanence of His word. It is like a rock! Unchangeable. Solid. It can support what ever is built upon it. It has stood the test of time and overcomes every opposing force. God's Kingdom will never leave you defeated as long as your life is firmly anchored to the truths of God's Word, not an acknowledgment of agreement, but in total active adherence and obedience

So, do what is wise, not what is popular. Build your life on God's Word. Become one with it. And let the trends of the world carry the foolish masses on their proud parade to destruction. It will happen!

What happens when troubles or opposition arise in your life? Are you shaken? Or do you stand confidently and in the joy of your strength in the Lord? The truth will be known one day!

vs:28 - 29 ***When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching,***

because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

It seems that Jesus began this series of teachings especially for His disciples. But by the time He was ending the lesson, crowds of people had joined in the session. We should remember though that these teachings on God's

Kingdom are intended especially for the disciples who were Jesus' original audience; *Matthew 5:1*.

Matthew 5:1 So we can understand that these kingdom principles must begin with:

1. Being a disciple - a disciplined follower of Jesus.
2. Coming to Jesus - separating yourselves from the crowds; making an effort to reach the place where Jesus is; not always easily accessible.
3. Being teachable - having an open and hungry heart and mind.

The reaction of the crowd is worthy of noting, or rather the lack of reaction should be noted. First, they were amazed because of the power and authority of Jesus' teaching. Yet they only talked! No practical response. No change! Just like 'normal' people!

Should Christians have 'no response, no change, after Jesus speaks to them? No comment is made concerning the disciples response. The job of the disciple is simply to obey, to become whatever the master requires of them to be.

What makes the difference between Jesus' authority and the other leaders? Jesus practiced what He preached! Whereas the religious leaders spoke of ideals and standards that they themselves were unable to attain in reality. They could only pretend to attain, an art at which they had become masters. Thus, every time they spoke, they could not speak from a clear conscience, but rather, only out of deception and guilt.

Jesus' teaching touched the center of the human heart. He spoke of real restoration with God. Real freedom. Real hope. Religion speaks of mans unworthiness and need of restoration with God, legalism and works, a focus on an endless cycle of guilt and failures. Because religion cannot take you into God's Kingdom, religion cannot go beyond 'endlessly reaching but never arriving'. It's no wonder that when Jesus spoke, the people were amazed. Jesus brought them to a place of arrival. He opened the door to God's Kingdom.

Matthew 8

vs:1 ***When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.***

Why didn't Jesus make His 'kingdom teaching' available to the crowds? He went to an isolated area on a mountain to teach His most important lessons to His disciples. Interesting, isn't it, that only the disciples were the ones with enough discipline and commitment to Jesus to receive the 'revelation' of God's Kingdom. The masses that simply follow Jesus get only 'crumbs', parables and demonstrations about God's Kingdom. It seems to me that being a disciple is fundamental in receiving 'kingdom revelation'.

So what makes the difference between being 'one person among a crowd who follows Jesus' and a disciple who 'follows Jesus'?

Jesus comes down from the mountainside and makes Himself accessible to the crowds. It is among the crowds that Jesus lives out in reality the principles of the kingdom He taught about.

- It is essential that a disciple can receive God's Word and then live it out 'among the crowds'.

vs:2

A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

We see that at least some people from among the crowds had great needs in their lives. This man with leprosy certainly had suffered greatly in his life and even to come forward publicly in his condition would have been very offensive to those nearby. This man is motivated to come to Jesus because of his immediate need.

"...and knelt before Jesus..." Because of his need, 'he came'. Because of the hopelessness of his need, 'he knelt'. Would he have still 'come and knelt' before Jesus if he hadn't been in such need?

Despite his great need, he believed! He had faith! 'Need' is good when it causes you to come into right relationship with Jesus.

This man had probably read 'through the grape vine' the things Jesus had taught on the mountain. Some thing happened in this mans heart and he had a revelation, a comprehension of the truth of Jesus' words. More than that - he responded. Too often people allow their needs and disabilities to hold them back from responding to the truth. But in this case it is the hopelessness of this man's need that causes him to cross the point of fear and 'loss of face' and boldly, actively respond to Jesus.

He comes to Jesus. He has everything to lose or everything to gain. He takes the risk. A public risk of faith!

He talks to Jesus face to face. He openly exposes his humility, his need, and his faith. Yet he doesn't make any demand based on what he knows as fact. He knows for certain that Jesus can heal him. Yet he is in full submission to Jesus lordship; "...if you are willing...".

Are you willing to surrender to Jesus lordship? Or do you feel that in order to be a successful Christian you must not be left in your needful situation? This leper shows all the characteristics of a true believer, a true Christian - before he gets healed! Would he be anything less of a believer in God's eyes if Jesus had chosen not to heal him? What about yourself? Can you kneel before Jesus in full faith and submission despite your hopeless situation? Or are you holding out on Jesus, waiting until He proves Himself, until He meets your set of requirements before you will come to Him in full surrender?

vs:3

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

The kind of attitude the leper expressed towards Jesus touched His heart. Of course, Jesus loves all people everywhere. But that doesn't mean He will respond immediately to your needs automatically. First, we must come to Him. Second, we must surrender to His will concerning our lives and situation.

Now Jesus moves into action. He reaches out from where He is and touches the man. Jesus stops whatever He is doing at the moment to pay attention to the needs of this one man. Then Jesus speaks such wonderful, simple words, "...I am willing...".

How Jesus must long for people who claim to believe and trust Him to respond to His word and calling on their lives in the same way!

- Jesus' body, His church in the earth, is not functioning as it ought to. It is like a leprous man. The sight of it repulses the world. Why? Because within the body, the church, are 'believers' who are not doing what is required and expected of them. Thus the whole 'body' or church is in a condition of hopelessness, unable to function properly.

How Jesus must long for those who are a part of 'his body in the earth', the church, to stop whatever they are doing to reach out and touch Jesus and His word and to say, "Yes, I am willing, too". I will be obedient to Your word. I will do my part and bring health to this church, this body of Jesus Christ.

And Jesus says to each of us, "If you are willing, you can bring health to the church. You can - if - you are willing".

What love Jesus has for us, even though so often we are unwilling to put down our own program and give our priorities to Him. It seems unfair to Him, yet His love is blind to this unfairness! He is willing!

"Be clean..." What simple, powerful words! Immediately the leper is healed! God's Word can bring immediate results in a person's situation. Certainly many words had been said regarding this man's leprous condition. Yet, none of the consultations and opinions had brought change. But when Jesus speaks - His words bring change!

How important it is to have God's Word applied to our lives! Not as a ritualistic formula, but His word received in a condition of surrender to His will in humility. The crowds around also heard the same words, "Be clean...". Certainly many among them had needs, but just because they heard doesn't mean that they automatically get the same results as the leper did. Something more must be involved. It is the 'heart'! It is the coming to Jesus and His word in full surrender.

"Immediately he was cured..." We must never doubt the power of God to change the most impossible situations. There is always reason to hope! Never forget that! And never simply accept your hopeless situation by surrendering to its strangling power.

The leper could have said to his disease, "I surrender to your authority and power over my life. Since you (the disease) are willing to impose your power on my body, I give you my 'will' and mind as well"! But instead the leper chose to surrender to the power and authority of Jesus with 'no strings attached'.

Who or what holds power over your life? It's your choice!

This story is about choices and authorities. Yet we hold the power to determine the course of our destiny; a destiny under the powers of darkness and destruction, or a destiny under the power of life, truth, and love. So, choose wisely!

vs:4

Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

The leper had demonstrated such desire to surrender to the authority and power of Jesus. Coming, kneeling, yielding. Now after the miracle comes the test. Will the man remain surrendered to the 'will' of Jesus? Or will he

renege on his surrendered will and escape into the authority and power that he has had reinstated upon him along with his healing? Jesus never forces a person to submit to His kingdom principles. He entices us and proves Himself true. But never does He impose His authority upon us. We are free to surrender and free to escape

It certainly must have been a difficult thing for this man to keep this most incredible miracle a secret and a great struggle to control his emotions. The joy of his deliverance! The whole world ought to know of Jesus healing power! Yet the 'will' of Jesus, that same power to heal, the will of Jesus was that the man must go to the very ones who were the very source of his former rejection, loneliness, and hopelessness. The priests! They should have been the very ones to lead him to God and hope, but, not so. For the priest themselves had lost touch with God and hope.

'Religion' only adds greater burden to the oppressed.

Now the healed leper had to 'be willing' to touch the very ones who had scorned him. The priests in God's eyes were just as unclean as a leper was in the eyes of the religious community. Jesus longed to bring healing to the priests and was using the healed leper to entice them to come and kneel in surrender in the same way as the leper had.

Mark 1:45 gives us a more complete picture about this man. Instead of obeying Jesus, he lets his emotions run out of control and the results are very detrimental for Jesus. Maybe if you were Jesus, you might consider a bit of revenge and cause the leprosy to come back on the man! But that is not Jesus' character. It is not God's love. Jesus loves us and continues to care for us even when we disobey and make mistakes. That is real love.

In Jesus great 'kingdom' message he had said, "I have not come to abolish them (the law and prophets) but to fulfill them". It was not the legal structure that Jesus opposed in the Jewish system. It was the hypocrisy that was born out of legalism. Jesus sets a clear example with the leper by requiring him to fulfill his legal requirements.

We need not fear or avoid legalism. Not after we've surrendered to the will of the Lord Jesus. Legalism is nothing until it interferes with our obedience to Jesus Christ.

There are laws (requirements) from God. There are also laws from men. What are the differences between the two? And what are our obligations to the law?

Matthew 19:16-22; Matthew 22:36-40; Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 5:17, 27

Kingdom Lesson: When all else fails, there is still reason to hope in Jesus. Don't be limited by the opinions and attitudes of the 'crowds'.

Kingdom Lesson: We should 'be willing' to follow Jesus' example of 'being willing'. This is God's love in action.

Kingdom Lesson: God's Word changes everything! Both spiritual and physical. When you have 'nothing' you can still give God's Word in love.

Kingdom Lesson: Though the leper came to Jesus in submission to His lordship, he did it for what he could get. Once he received, he became disobedient. In God's Kingdom, let your attitudes be born out of actions, not just words. Submission demands obedience!

Kingdom Lesson: The leper had nothing except faith. He activated his faith by making a statement to Jesus. Without his statement, his faith would have lain dormant. For faith to be effective, it must be accompanied by action.

vs:5 ***When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.***

Like the leper, the centurion was a social outcast among the religious Jews. Yet the centurion did not let this stand in his way of coming to Jesus for help.

What stands in your way of bringing your needs to Jesus?

vs:6 ***"Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering."***

The centurion was not concerned for his own need, but the need of another person who was unable to get to Jesus. He came in love and concern for his servant. Jesus saw the concern of the centurion and made it his own concern.

vs:7 ***Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him."***

"...I will..." Jesus' choice, just as the centurion had 'willed' to go to Jesus and 'ask'. If we are only willing, so many problems and impossibilities can be resolved in Christ. ...if we are 'willing'.

vs:8-9 ***The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.***

For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

The centurion understands one of the secrets of God's Kingdom. He understands 'authority' and the power of the 'word'. He knows that when the 'word' is spoken from authority, it is as good as done. He understood that there were spiritual powers that made realities out of Jesus' commands. The greater the authority, the greater the results.

So though the centurion himself had much authority, he lays it all aside and gives full place and recognition of Jesus' authority. He knew that there was none higher! He knew that Jesus' ability to heal the servant had nothing to do with anything he did other than to come in faith and ask. The rest was in Jesus' hands and, even more so, in Jesus' word.

Do you understand what incredible authority Jesus has (*Matthew 28:18*)? If Jesus' words (*John 1:1-4, 14-15*) have great power, what about our own words? What kind of words do you speak to those under your authority? Are they words of love and encouragement? Or are they words of apathy, distrust, having no compassion? Do you try to ever over extend your authority? Where does your authority come from?

vs:10 - 11 ***When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.***

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

There are different levels of faith and depending on the amount of faith we express depends on the results we receive.

vs:12 ***But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

Religion or acting religious in not faith! You can keep all the religious rules that you want, but without faith - you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

vs:13 ***Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.***

"It will be done as you believed it would." This is what faith is all about.

1. Come to Jesus (not a man or religion) vs:5
2. Ask for help vs:5
3. Surrender to Jesus' lordship over your life and situation. vs:6

This is the same requirement that applied to the leper as well. But there is some difference. The leper was in submission to the lordship of Jesus as far as the outcome of his sickness was concerned. But in actual obedience to direct command of Jesus after the healing, he was disobedient.

On the other hand, the centurion knew how important authority and obedience was. He knew that a 'word' had to be obeyed and he had a heart that was in true submission to Jesus.

The words of Jesus in this verse were spoken directly to the centurion, not the crowds in general. But these words could be applied to anyone who comes to Jesus, asking with real faith and in surrender to the lordship of Jesus.

Kingdom Lesson: You can go to church and obey all the rules. But without faith, obedience to God's Word, and coming to Jesus, you will be a person 'on the outside'. You can act religious all you want. You can 'name it and claim it', too. But apart from surrender to the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ, the 'doors' to the Kingdom of God are closed.

vs:14 ***When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever.***

Peter had given up a lot in order to follow Jesus. A career (*Matthew 4:20*), his home, his family. Jesus doesn't make any reference to 'how much' Peter had given up. He doesn't have any comment about Peter's house or even his wife (who possibly had died because on the lack of any information about her). What Jesus saw at Peters house was the 'need'.

Jesus is very intimate. He will come right into your house, regardless of the needs to problems. Regardless of whether the others believe in Him or not. He can handle that. No problem!

- Have you 'invited' Jesus to your house?
- What will He find when he comes in?

vs:15 ***He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.***

Jesus just takes it on Himself to heal Peter's mother-in-law. What if Peter hadn't brought Jesus into the house? What if his feelings of 'unworthiness' hampered him from extending an invitation?

Jesus simply touches the woman's hand and she is healed. This is wonderful, but even more beautiful is how she now uses her health and strength, not to draw attention to 'her miracle', but to simply serve Jesus.

vs:16

When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.

Obviously word got around that there had been a miracle in Peter's house. When people in need learn of solutions, they will be motivated into action. It wasn't Peter's house that the people were coming for. It was because Jesus was at the house. It was because Jesus had the power to heal and deliver people from evil spirits.

Kingdom Lesson: No matter how beautiful the church building, no matter how well organized a church is, no matter how good the preacher preaches, no matter how beautiful the 'worship' (performance) is... if Jesus isn't there in the church in reality, not just in 'religious expression', your church doesn't have what the people need! People have problems, thus people need Jesus! Not a performance, building, or another function.

Jesus cares about individuals and He also cares about the masses of individuals. He healed them all! No sickness - NO SICKNESS - is too hard for Jesus to heal! No authority or power, no demon, is too hard for Jesus to command into obedience.

He delivered and healed with the spoken word. Not many words or long prayers. Not long discussions or disease analysis. Jesus spoke 'a' word and the power of that 'word' changed everything!

Oh, just to get to Jesus! Where is He? He can be found where there is need! He can be found where there are disciples! On the mountain. In the streets. In someone's house! Among the religious (in the church)! Often when Jesus was in the 'church' it was for the purpose of scolding and rebuking. Healings in the 'church' were often done for the purpose of exposing the hard hearts of the leadership. In fact, most of Jesus' ministry was not in the 'church'! (by the term 'church' I am referring to the group of people who hold to religious systems and methods in hopes of entertaining God).

vs:17

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

Just as Jesus speaking the word can powerfully change lives in a miraculous way, so also can a 'normal' person speak God's Word with powerful effects. Isaiah, speaking under the anointing and in the authority of God, announced and described Jesus and His ministry.

Jesus' ministry is to 'take up' from people their infirmities, problems, and suffering, and place them on Himself. This is also true of physical diseases.

'Diseases and infirmities' - all kinds, without limit. What are you carrying in your soul or body that Jesus wants to carry for you?

Jesus loves you so much! He is so concerned about you! He really wants to help you. Are you willing to release your sickness of heart or body and let Him lovingly carry it for you?

vs:18 ***When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake.***

Who did Jesus give the order to cross the lake to? To His disciples.

If you are just a follower of Jesus because of the crowds, if you follow Him because He is popular - you're going to find yourself being abandoned. But if you are a disciple, one who is committed to obey, serve, follow, and become like Jesus, you will not be abandoned.

Jesus gives orders!

vs:19 ***Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."***

When Jesus moves, you must move, too! He will not be held up by our good intentions. It requires sacrificial commitment. How many people have said the same words as this religious teacher, "I will follow Jesus wherever He goes". Yet what is the reality? There is a big difference between being a disciple and a religious 'know-it-all'. Some people call Jesus 'Teacher'. Some people call him 'Lord'.

vs:20 ***Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."***

You will never 'feel' settled or established in the 'normal' sense of the word, if you follow Jesus. His values are a far cry from the values of 'normal' people. He doesn't really belong anywhere except in heaven. If we are to truly follow Jesus we must be completely unattached to the things of this world, its comforts, securities, and value systems.

vs:21 ***Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."***

In fact, the most important thing in this life is 'following Jesus'. It doesn't matter if even your father dies and is left unburied. Follow Jesus! Now!

How can a disciple order his master to wait for him? "I have some traditions and obligations to attend to. Please wait". This is not the action of a true disciple. This is a person whose heart has divided interests between culture, traditions, world values, and 'following Jesus'.

What could be more important than the death and funeral of your own father? Yes, even 'following Jesus' is more important than this!

vs:22 ***But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."***

The whole world is in a process of death. Don't take the things of this world too seriously. What is more important is 'life'. And Jesus is the author of life!

'Follow Jesus'. Follow Jesus'. Follow Jesus! Learn how. Find him! Seek His kingdom. You'll find Him there. And then don't look back.

Don't focus on things that bring death. Death is the fruit and punishment for sin. Jesus came to break the power of sin and death. *Revelation 1:18; Genesis 2:17*

vs:23 ***Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.***

Jesus is on the move. He is never very long in one place. The disciples follow Jesus. A disciple of Jesus must be unattached to the desires of his own heart. They must be able to immediately stop whatever they are doing and move on.

Many Christians miss Jesus because they are bound by their attachments to the things, people, commitments, traditions, and loves of this world.

Christians should not make a big thing about others coming and going in their lives. They should encourage and aid another to 'follow Jesus'. It seems that it is the ones who 'go' who get all the attention - who are 'heroes'. But rather it should be that the ones who are not caught up in a journey with Jesus, they should be the ones getting the 'extra' attention. Attention focused on them to help them get their attention to the right place. On Jesus!

vs:24

Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.

The places Jesus may lead you! The disciples innocently follow Jesus into danger. Life threatening! They thought they were off on an adventure and escaping the hassling crowds.

Kingdom Lesson: Following Jesus involves risk! But not following Jesus also involves risk!

There are many kinds of storms in this world. Jesus can be found in storms though it may seem that He is uncaring and hidden away in our time of need. There are storms in family relationships. Storms at work, storms in churches. There are financial storms. Physical, emotional, and spiritual storms. Storms coming in all shapes and sizes. What kind of storm are you in now?

Can you relax in your storm? You can if you are a disciple of Jesus and have followed Him into the storm. He is with you! Be at peace!

Storms are a natural part of life. What is important is how you deal with them when they come.

Amazingly, Jesus sleeps - in the storm - as the boat seems about to sink. He is at peace while the world is in turmoil around Him. What an example for us. What an example for the church in these tumultuous days.

vs:25

The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

While the storm rages, the people caught up in it must choose between seeing what is natural and what is spiritual. Naturally, it seemed that unless something was done, they would die from the storm. Spiritually, Jesus knew all was in the hands of His loving Father and His Father who creates and controls storms, would not let something happen outside of His will and plan for Jesus. The reason Jesus could sleep is because He knew God loved Him.

"...Lord, save us! We are going to drown!" This is Jesus' business - saving people.

For those people who weren't disciples of Jesus, those other people who weren't in the same boat as the disciples and Jesus (*Mark 4:36*; 'other boats'), they were left in the storm - alone - to battle and struggle, in fear and despair. It's so much better to go into a storm as a close follower, a disciple of Jesus. Then you always have hope!

Kingdom Lesson: You may not 'feel' like Jesus is with you. You may not understand what is happening. But He is there and He is at peace.

He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

When the storms come in life, if we struggle in our own strength, overcome by fear, failure, hopelessness and confusion, we are obviously in a state of faithlessness. This is an accurate illustration of people who have 'little' faith. Just enough faith to cry out to Jesus when all else has failed.

Earlier we had an example of 'great' faith; *Matthew 8:10*. The centurion wasn't even a Jew, a chosen one of God. He was a despised Roman, an unclean Gentile, incapable of receiving anything holy from God. Yet he has the greatest faith. While on the other hand, Jesus own followers, those committed to God's Kingdom, committed to holding forth God's principles, fail in the most basic area of trusting in Jesus.

How should the disciples have demonstrated 'great' faith in this stormy situation?

- By following Jesus' example of being at rest in the storm.

"...Why were you afraid...?" Afraid of dying? Afraid Jesus was unaware of the seriousness of their dilemma? Afraid Jesus didn't care? Afraid Jesus lacked the power to save them? Afraid of revealing their fears and lack of faith to Jesus? Afraid - because that's how you normally should react in a storm?

Lack of faith = fear. If Jesus isn't in the boat and the storms along with you, then you have real cause for fear. The reason Jesus was in the boat was because the followers were 'disciples', not like the rest of the followers who were safe on the land.

The natural storm, the events that were swirling and threatening the disciples caused another storm within their hearts. But Jesus doesn't want this to happen. He wants us to rise above the power that these crisis have on our souls. Because Jesus has power over the storms of life, we can choose to put our trust in Him and remain confident and at peace though engulfed in crisis.

Then with a few words Jesus speaks to the storm and suddenly the storm is over. His word ends both the physical storm and the storm in the hearts of the disciples. Jesus authority is indeed over all!

We must not assume that it is Jesus' will to always end the storms of life. But we can be assured that it is Jesus' will for us to have peace in the midst of life's storms. Some other examples:

Acts 16:16-40

Acts 27:13-44

Acts 12:1-19

Kingdom Lesson: Following Jesus has a cost. It costs your life and it requires the sacrifice of 'having your own way'. But the returns on this investment are priceless. You gain entrance to the blessings of God's Kingdom. You discover the joy of attaining and living in God's perfect purposes for you. It is a life fulfilled!

Kingdom Lesson: Following Jesus has, what seems to be from time to time, life threatening risks. Yet the truth is that 'with Jesus' there is never any danger. But rather those apparent risks are object lessons for the purpose of developing our character into the likeness of our Master.

Kingdom Lesson: Storms come and storms go. Relax!

vs:27 ***The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"***

Just because there are storms in life, don't worry. As long as you stay with Jesus you will arrive to his destination.

vs:28 ***When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way.***

'Demon possession'... means just what it says. People whose bodies, minds, and souls have been 'possessed' by a spirit other than their own.

How does a person come to the place where a demon can claim and acquire rights over that person?

Why does a demon want or need a human body? What are its intentions after gaining possession?

These two men are infatuated with death. They live among the dead; *Mark 5:3*.

What is the difference between demon possession and Holy Spirit possession?

"...they were violent..." This is one of the outward manifestations of the presence of these demons. But violence is not always the manifestation.

The men controlled anyone trying to pass their way. They used violence to control people. The Spirit of God is just the opposite. He uses love to guide people.

vs:29 ***"What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"***

The demons knew who Jesus was. They are submissive to the power that is in Jesus. They fear that Jesus will be violent to them!

They also are fully aware of their future punishment. They know that one day the power of God will bring them to justice and their 'appointed time'. Demons know that at their 'appointed time' they will be tortured. What will the 'appointed time' hold for you?

vs:30-31 ***Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding.***

The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs."

The demons seem to greatly fear not having a body to reside in. Yet it also seems that they cannot just enter any body at will - not even an animal! Though they would be satisfied for even just a pig's body.

It seems apparent that demons must gain permission to enter and take possession of a body. They also know that Jesus has full power and authority to command them. And, they must obey! They are obviously very fearful of Jesus and willing to comply with whatever He commands.

vs:32 ***He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water.***

Jesus needs to say only one word and the demons rush to obey. "Go!" And they immediately leave the men and enter the pigs that respond without resistance to the nature of these demons by rushing to their death - violently.

The pigs had no ability to resist the urges brought on them by the demons. It seems the goal of these demons was to cause the men to die violently. But because people have a 'will', the men were able to resist the desire of the demons. As it was, they came as close to death as possible to appease the demons within.

Like the hopelessness of the disciples who were at the mercy of the storm's violence, these men had been hopelessly trapped in a spiritual storm.

The storm the disciples had experienced had been brief and not entirely hopeless. But the storm of the possessed men had been without any hope of ever ending.

Kingdom Lesson: Jesus allows us to experience things in order to identify with and have compassion on those whom He is about to bring us to minister to!

Kingdom Lesson: One word from Jesus! It is enough! What power!

Kingdom Lesson: Jesus does not put a dollar value on ministry. He certainly knew what would happen to the herd of pigs. It was an economic disaster for the local village. Yet Jesus was unconcerned about the dollar value that this deliverance would cost. The souls of these men were far more precious in His opinion.

He also knew that the village people would hate Him and send Him away. Yet that was unimportant to Jesus.

The 'religious' Jews cared more for their pigs than for the souls of the possessed men. How often we Christians put a dollar value on a person's life and then evaluate the 'investment' risks of ministering to those persons needs.

vs:33 ***Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men.***

This was a hot story in the region of the Gadarenes! Consider what the pig tenders were up against as they tried to explain what had happened to the thousands of pigs in their care. They would need the owners of the pigs to come and see Jesus and the healed men in order to have any chance of proving their own innocence.

What is good news in the lives of the two formerly possessed men is a financial and credibility disaster for the pig tenders and the towns economy.

Kingdom Lesson: Even in God's Kingdom you can't please all of the people all of the time!

vs:34 ***Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.***

In fact, in that village, Jesus was resented and feared. What power! What a cost to deliver two men. What if Jesus started casting demons out of all the possessed in that area! They would be in economic shambles. They might have said, "Let the demon possessed alone. We like it this way. Your fee for deliverance is too high."

Are you willing to pay the price for the presence of Jesus?

What benefit was there for the village to bring these two men into deliverance? For the men, their liberty certainly was priceless.

The former actions of the possessed men may have seemed, in the minds of the local villagers, reason enough for the men to have deserved to be demon possessed. Their life certainly would have been worth very little in their opinion.

Note: Jesus first missionary! *Mark 5:18-20*; This offers us more detail about this event which is noteworthy.

vs:18 The end of Jesus' ministry in this area. It is a very short visit and seemingly small ministry. He leaves at the request of the people. He looks like a failure as far as worldly standards are concerned.

If people don't want what Jesus has to offer, He won't force himself on you. Because the people didn't want to bear the cost of Jesus' ministry of deliverance, they sent Him away. In the same way, if you don't want the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life, He also will leave you alone - if that's what you want.

If you reject part of Jesus' ministry, you reject Him and the entire ministry!

vs:19 Jesus would not let this poor, ignorant, untrained outcast join Him! By all appearances it looked very hypocritical and prejudice. Instead, Jesus launches him into full-time ministry! This is Jesus first missionary! This man not only has no reputation of any account, but he has a history of insanity, violence, and uselessness. How can a man like this begin a ministry? Because he had something that no one else had. He had been delivered – supernaturally! Every time anyone saw this man, they had to remember Jesus! This man had nothing else in his life to talk about except Jesus!

Jesus commands him to begin his ministry in his home. And he is to focus on two things:
1. Tell them how much the Lord did for him.
2. Tell them about God's mercy.

vs:20 The man simply obeyed. He didn't argue about his lack of ability or talents. Jesus didn't request that the man first go to get training, a reputation, connections, authorization, or financial backing before he could begin his ministry. What Jesus required was simply - obedience!

Did the man feel rejected by Jesus? Maybe so. Did he disciples think Jesus was unfair. Maybe so. Did the town people who lost their investment hate the man? Maybe so. But he obeyed anyhow. And his testimony touched the lives of many throughout the region.

Matthew 9

vs:1 *Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town.*

Jesus' time and ministry in Gadarenes was very short, maybe only one day. Yet the effort and expense of traveling there with 12 disciples seems unreasonable for ministry to so few.

Kingdom Lesson: We must not have a concept that ministry is only important if it's 'long term' or to large numbers of people. Whether it is to many or few, Jesus places no limit on the value or effort he'll extend in order to express His love and healing.

We should never judge a person's ministry by numbers, distance, or length involved. Also, we must be just as obedient in leaving a ministry as in starting one.

vs:2 *Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."*

Obviously the paralytic was unable to come to Jesus under his own strength. He could have resigned himself to simply wait for Jesus to 'chance' coming to him - if it was God's will. Or he could take active steps in order to get to Jesus.

Now it seems that actually it was the other men who had the plan to bring the paralytic to Jesus, They were the ones noted for their faith. The paralytic most likely had resigned himself to acceptance of his fate and was too depressed to care or hope for change.

Kingdom Lesson: People are sometimes completely unable to come to Jesus under their own ability. They can be just as paralyzed by sin, emotions, guilt, fear, deception or Satan's bondage etc., as this paralytic. And their only hope is for someone else to 'make the way', to take them by the hand, either literally or through prayer and intercession, to the place where ministry can be received.

Note: *I Corinthians 12:27*; By the 'outpouring' of God's Spirit into those who believe, we are now the physical presence, the body, of Christ on the earth. Therefore, wherever we are there is saving power, healing, deliverance, and endless hope. So we can see that while it may be important to 'bring' people to Jesus, more important is for us to understand who we are in Christ and that wherever there is a need and we are present, Christ is there to work His will and purposes through us.

Our commission is not to simply bring people to church or the place where we 'feel' secure in the Lord. But rather we must represent Jesus through our daily lives - to minister as Jesus would have had He been here now and boldly be an extension of Jesus' hands, feet, mouth, and heart.

"When Jesus saw their faith..." We can have faith in proxy of the 'faithless'! Faith is the key to 'results'! It is as important or even more important than just getting to Jesus.

How many people surrounded Jesus who had needs, yet left unchanged because of their doubts and lack of faith. They were always analyzing without ever truly believing.

"Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven..." The heart cause of the paralysis apparently was the result of sin! Jesus deals with the real issue first - sin. Often we are motivated by what our eyes see. But Jesus sees deeper. He sees the heart and is moved by compassion on behalf of the man.

Jesus shown no criticism, anger, or rebuke towards the paralytic's sinful condition. Rather we see only truth and love; Encouragement and forgiveness; Authority with compassion.

Jesus is not shocked by sin! Sin does not make us unworthy of being in His presence. In fact, 'sin' is the main reason Jesus came to earth. To bring cleansing and forgiveness.

vs:3

At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"

Why did the 'teachers' think like this? Concerned that Jesus had stepped outside of the known 'religious' safety zone? That His actions would bring confusion to the interpretations of established doctrine? That Jesus would bring change?

Maybe they were offended that Jesus had power to deal with a problem that they had never been able to deal with. Was Jesus a threat? If Jesus could make problems disappear, rather than merely guiding people on how to live with and tolerate their problems, could it be that the religious teachers feared loss of face and loss of religious influence, power, and, yes, loss of a financial resource? Could it be that they were jealous of Jesus and his gang of 'simple' followers?

The hearts of these religious teachers are not moved by compassion. Rather their hearts are critical, judgmental, and hardened to the real needs of simple people. Yet their studying and lifestyle of concentrated focus on a legalistic, judgmental God, had made them this way.

In order to bring change to a nation, its leaders must first be changed. Thus Jesus strikes to the very core of the nation's heart by, in a roundabout way, declaring Himself to be the long awaited Messiah, an equal to the Messiah, or a total fraud, by declaring a man's sins forgiven.

Not only did Jesus' declaration of forgiveness change the heart of a poor broken man, but it was a death blow to the heart of a poor, broken nation. From here on, the nation's religious leaders would struggle in a conflict of interests, truths, and 'Gods'.

When Jesus comes... He brings healing and forgiveness. But He also brings change for everyone whether they accept Him or not.

What happens in your heart when Jesus comes? Can you receive all He gives or only 'some' of what He brings?

Kingdom Lesson: Jesus either makes people glad or mad. We cannot serve God effectively if we try to please all of the people all of the time. Jesus didn't - neither should we.

vs:4 ***Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?"***

There are no secrets in God's Kingdom. Even the deepest thoughts and imaginations are completely obvious to God.

'Evil thoughts' come into our lives like guests come to visit in our home. We can either 'entertain' them and make them feel welcomed or we can not welcome them. It's our house. We can do as we choose. The same is true with thoughts. We can 'entertain' them or sent them away - if we choose.

What kind of thoughts are you 'entertaining'? Why? What are your motives? Why would Jesus be concerned about what you think about? Where do 'thoughts or ideas' come from?

vs:5 ***Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?***

The 'religious teachers' were concerned about Jesus' authority. They feared that their own authority was threatened. They also could not accept that Jesus, as a normal person, could have authority over sin. This was their territory and they had been using the sins of the people to their advantage. Jesus threatened the very heart of their religious system. Their control over the nation would be broken if people actually found forgiveness of their sins!

vs:6 ***But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home."***

Jesus really wants us to know the full extent of His authority over us and our situations. This miracle of the paralytic had a greater purpose than just salvation and healing. It was a public lesson and demonstration of who Jesus really was. If these religious teachers had been wise, they would have seen that the paralyzed man was an example of the entire Jewish nation and religious system. As a nation they were like this helpless man; unable to

reach God, to hear from God, to know God's will, or to enter His kingdom. The whole nation was paralyzed by sin and the whole nation needed forgiveness and healing!

Jesus does the whole job - not half a job! He forgives and heals. How often we find it possible to receive forgiveness, but not the healing. Why is that?

Sin paralyzes a person, a family, or a church. The key to many, if not most of our problems is - not more counseling or programs. The key is repentance and forgiveness!

"Get up, take your mat and go home." Jesus heals the man with a command for action to DO the very thing that was so impossible only moments before.

People (Christians) who are spiritually paralyzed need forgiveness of sins and a vision of action. They need to put away whatever it is that allowed them to be comfortable in their trouble and remain inactive.

- * The modern church has become the 'mat' on which paralyzed Christians can take comfort!

vs:7 ***And the man got up and went home.***

It happened just as Jesus commanded! Jesus' authority in action. How we need this authority to work in our own lives, families, and churches. But too often our evil thoughts, religious thinking, pride, and love of our 'mat', prevents us from surrendering to His authority.

vs:8 ***When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.***

The world is so hungry to see this kind of authority in action. The church, the 'body' of Christ, should be manifesting this kind of love and authority. Why? Because '...God has given such authority to men'!

vs:9 ***As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.***

Jesus moves on. He doesn't stay at the place of 'great spiritual victory'.

Tax collectors were the despised of the despised. Matthew was a Jew who worked for the Roman government. To the Jewish zealot, he was a traitor to their nation and to their faith.

Jesus is no respecter of people. He will accept anyone to follow Him.

"Follow me". The challenge is the same and unconditional as it was for the religious disciples. The call is the same to us today. Follow Jesus! Not doctrines or religious rituals. Not loyalty to a church or denomination. But a call to follow a person - Jesus. Jesus, who is the same today as He was 'back then'. And Matthew's response is simple yet revolutionary. He abandons everything! His job, his past, his future, his identity, and simply 'goes'! With Jesus!

Following Jesus may lead you to very unexpected places. Matthew suddenly finds himself back at his own home. Face to face with the people and culture he was leaving behind. He had to make his position public. No games! No compromise! No secrets! Matthew had to become 'transparent' to everyone.

How did the religious disciples relate to Matthew? He was representative of much of what they hated and dreamed of destroying. Yet Jesus brings them all together to live and serve Him as one.

vs:10 ***While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples.***

Jesus can be found in the places that the most religious people would never go to. His disciples should never be ashamed of going to those places either; the places where 'sinners' hide out. Jesus not only went to these places, but He joined in, too. He identified Himself with these 'sinners'. He ate with them. And so did His disciples.

You can never be a disciple of Jesus if you are too proud or religious to be identified with the ungodly crowd.

This does not mean though, that at any time a disciple of Jesus can just go to 'hang out' with the 'world'. But it does mean that if Jesus leads you to a place of ungodliness by His Holy Spirit - you must go!

The place of ungodliness should be a place of revulsion and disgust to a disciple, a place where the disciple sees human tragedy through Jesus' eyes of compassion. It must not be a place of religious identity, enjoyment, or surrender to out carnality, and spiritual battle. It is a mission field where God brings repentance, healing and change.

vs:11 ***When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and `sinners'?"***

Jesus doesn't concern himself with the opinions of the 'nice' religious people. These people have also followed Jesus into the 'ungodly' place, but for the purpose of judging and destroying Jesus' work.

Instead of giving answers, religious people always have questions. But God is not confused! He doesn't have questions - only answers!

vs:12 ***On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.***

Jesus answers His accusers with a very simple comparison. "It's not the healthy, but the sick who need a doctor."

Certainly the religious accusers could accept this answer. Yet those words must certainly have raised more questions as they realized that most of Jesus' ministry was to their own people, the ones they had taught, the nation they had shaped.

vs:13 ***But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' [35] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."***

But Jesus doesn't stop with this explanation and gives them a bit of God's Word that would clarify their own 'sickness' if their hearts weren't so hard to reject the truth.

'...go and learn...' Yes, it is possible to get an entirely wrong meaning or no meaning at all out of even the most basic principles of God's Kingdom.

Holding on to religious tradition destroys understanding and obedience to God's work.

Jesus tells these religious leaders to 'go back to your classroom'. You didn't learn your lessons properly. Try again! How hard it is to find you misunderstood God!

Kingdom Lesson: Go and learn the lesson of verse 13. It's a command!

vs:14 ***Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"***

Who are you a disciple of? Another man? An organization? A set of doctrines of concepts? Jesus?

The issue here is more about 'what is truth' (fasting), but now you say and do the opposite (not fasting)?

vs:15 ***Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.***

When we follow Jesus, our journey will never be based on the 'cut and dried - proved and tried' methods of tradition. Rather, truth is based on the present circumstances. When circumstances change, such as the physical arrival of God, people need to change accordingly.

There will be times when the traditional methods are right, but only when the circumstances are right. 'Traditions' are not to be totally rejected, but rather applied to ones life as the need arises.

The presence of Jesus means change. And if we cannot accept change, then we cannot accept Jesus.

Every God ordained tradition is good until something or someone better comes along.

vs:16 ***"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.***

Why would someone continue to hold on to and apply traditional methods to change situations? It isn't logical. This would be as unreasonable as someone who insists on sewing an unshrunk patch (tradition) on to an old garment (situation that has changed over the process of time). Originally, when the garment was new, a new patch would have worked well. But now that the garment has changed, having become old, the new patch will only make the garments condition worse. The same is true of applying traditional values to a changing world.

vs:17 ***Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."***

This is another example regarding traditions and change. And this one points towards yet another change about to come, the 'New Wine', the 'Holy Spirit'.

Old wine skins = unchanged, unrepentant human heart

New wineskins = a human whose heart and life have been made new through Jesus saving grace and a yielded heart to 'change'.

New wine = the Holy Spirit.

Our 'preservation' comes when the New Wine has been poured into the new wineskins.

A new wineskin has little value unless it has been filled with the wine. Just as a new believer needs to be 'filled' with the new wine of the Holy Spirit.

vs:18 ***While he was saying this, a ruler came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live."***

Even the religious authorities can throw aside their pride, traditions, and envy of Jesus when they are immersed in real helplessness. Many people come to Jesus only after need and hopelessness has broken them.

This ruler comes humbly and in great faith. His faith is activated by the words he publicly speaks. Desperate and bold.

He doesn't ask for prayer! He makes a statement of what he believes and expects.

vs:19 ***Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.***

This statement and request moves Jesus and everything He is doing. It gets His attention!

As Jesus disciples we must be moved by what moves Jesus.

vs:20 ***Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak.***

Jesus isn't motivated by crisis, emergencies, or according to our standard of priorities.

The ruler had made a public proclamation of faith. This woman had quietly purposed in her heart to simply touch Jesus. This was as valid an expression of her faith as the ruler's public statements. Yet both are motivated out of desperation which gives birth to faith activated.

vs:21 ***She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."***

Getting to Jesus. This is our hope!

vs:22 ***Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.***

But more than just 'getting to Jesus' is the hope we have through faith in His power to change every kind of situation.

Though certainly there had been a continuous press of people against Jesus, this one woman gets His attention. A simple touch! But the contact is mingled with faith, and faith moves the hand of God.

Twelve years of sickness, hopelessness, and failure. But making contact with Jesus and faith in His changing power instantly changes it all.

Kingdom Lesson: Jesus will always have time for you! Others may seem to have greater and more pressing needs. But God's care and compassion omits no one who comes to Jesus in faith.

vs:23-24 ***When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd,***

he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him.

The facts had been established. The girl was dead. There was no doubt about it. Yet Jesus does not accept what is obvious to everyone else. Though the whole world may believe something that is proven without a doubt, Jesus has a higher standard of reality. There is a reality that supersedes man's known boundaries of reality.

Reality is based on patterns that have been known and repeated consistently. But there can always be change!

We may have a pattern of reality established in our own lives. We cannot see things any other way than what has always been obvious. Yet Jesus sees much more than we do. Therefore, no matter what the circumstances, no matter what has been proven, through Jesus there is always the possibility that there can be more - a new way to see the situation, a chance for change, ...hope!

If you choose to believe what Jesus really says, the world will not be able to accept it. You'll be laughed down as a fool. In Jesus' eyes; what is dead and useless, hopeless and unchangeable, He sees as an opportunity to glorify His Father and turn the eyes of people from death to life.

vs:25 ***After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up.***

If the people had any idea of what Jesus was about to do, they never would have left. Because of unbelief, Jesus must isolate Himself and hold many people at an arms-length, those who would otherwise pray for an opportunity to be a part of what Jesus is doing.

Even today many people feel cheated by God because they have not seen or received a demonstration of God's miraculous power in a dramatic way. They always feel 'put out', held at an arms-length, while others in far away places are caught up in dramatic participation with Jesus. Why?

The people who were mourning the death of the girl were most certainly very religious. They were friends and relatives of the religious leader. Yet their religion had not produced in them 'faith'. Instead, all they had was a common knowledge of God based only on history. So too, having refined religious concepts and understanding is no substitute for 'faith'. Knowledge about God and His Kingdom is a far cry from the daily disciplined life of 'following him'.

vs:26 ***News of this spread through all that region.***

This was indeed an incredibly miraculous event and news of the event spread. But what Jesus really desired was that the event would turn the heart of Israel back towards His Father. It was also a demonstration of Father God's love and compassion for the nation of Israel.

vs:27 ***As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"***

Jesus moves on. He doesn't let a special event become the focus of His life and ministry. God has much more!

As Jesus is going along two blind men follow Him!

- We have no excuse for not following Jesus. If you want something bad enough, you can get it.

- If you want to 'follow Jesus' bad enough, just start! And as you go along you'll begin to gain your sight, that is, spiritual sight.

The two blind men had great need. They call out for mercy.

What has blinded you to truth? Sin? Undisciplined? Busy-ness? Compromise?

Has your blindness left you discouraged and feeling hopeless? Inferior to other Christians? Jesus' mercy can change all of this!

vs:28 ***When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied.***

Jesus seems to ignore these men and their cries for mercy. He doesn't stop for them, but rather continues on until He reaches a stopping place. He doesn't make it easy for these two men to reach Him, unlike the case of the ruler's daughter and the woman with the 12 years sickness.

If two blind men can get through to Jesus, you can, too! What is it that hinders you? Spiritual blindness? A 'blindfold of traditions'? Do you believe that Jesus can even restore spiritual sight? Do you desire it?

vs:29 ***Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you";***

The healing comes, not with long pleading prayers, but rather activated faith. A touch from Jesus and a statement putting the entire healing and its source into perspective... "According to your faith..." Faith in the Son of God.

The result of their healing is not proportional according to the amount of faith they had. It is simply based on that they had some faith.

Can a person get a healing from the Lord without having faith? Can it be based on some other person's faith? Or based on a plan of God to bring glory to His name? What about simply because Jesus cares for a person and wants him healed. And finally, can a healing come because of how you have conducted your life and your standards of living in the past?

- Which of these are true and what scripture examples can you base each one on?

vs:30 ***and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this."***

Just because you have a special blessing from the Lord doesn't mean you are free of your duty to obedience. The healing of the two blind men comes with a responsibility. They are to inform no one about the miracle! How would this be possible? Anyone who would have known them from before would certainly observe the changes. Were they to go and pretend to still be blind? Apparently this is what Jesus was requesting.

Sometimes Jesus may request us to not share the gospel! This is why above all else, we must live at a level of spiritual maturity where we can 'hear and obey' the Lord. What the Lord requires from one person may well be the very opposite of what He requests of another.

vs:31 ***But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.***

Instead of obeying Jesus the two healed men did what came naturally - what their emotions lead them to do. They began talking! They were the center of attention! They used their 'experience' to begin a ministry! Indeed, they used their ministry and experience to direct people's attention towards Jesus, but they did so in disobedience!

vs:32 ***While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus.***

This demon possessed man is brought to Jesus. Other people were involved and certainly a necessary factor in this man's deliverance.

It seems apparent that the demon was responsible for the man's inability to speak.

vs:33 ***And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."***

This time Jesus doesn't heal the man. He delivers him! And the manifestation of the man's deliverance is the ability to speak once again.

The demon was 'driven out'. It had to be forced out. It did not want to lose what it hoped to possess. This was not a thing that had ever happened before. No one had the power and authority to 'drive' out demons before. The realities of Israel were being changed New hope had come.

Can we still expect to see 'new things'? Yes! The return of Jesus in the sky, for one example!

vs:34 ***But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."***

While the masses of people simply believed what their eyes saw, the religious people had great difficulties in accepting something new. Because it meant that the traditional standards and values that had governed their lives and nation were under threat. It meant that their very position as religious leaders was under threat. Their control of the people was being weakened.

Just as the man who was possessed by a demon had to be 'forcefully' delivered, so too, would the entire nation need a forceful deliverance from the controlling powers of religious traditions, fear, and the firm grip of the religious leadership.

In an effort to maintain their position of power, the religious leaders declare that Jesus Himself operates by the power of Satan. This is designed to put fear and confusion in the minds of the people and bring them running to the 'safety' of the religious traditions.

vs:35 ***Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.***

The simplicity of Jesus ministry:

1. Jesus 'went' (action)
 - a. to all towns
 - b. To all villages
2. Teaching (ministry to the mind)
 - a. in the 'churches'
3. Preaching (ministry to the heart)
 - a. good news about God's Kingdom
4. Healing (ministry to the body)
 - a. every disease
 - b. every sickness

vs:36 ***When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.***

Jesus' ministry is to the 'crowds', to all kinds of people, without respect of persons.

It's not enough to observe the people and their needs. It's not enough to go through the motions of ministry. What is important is the force motivating you to ministry! Jesus is moved, motivated, compelled, by 'compassion'.

Feeling what others are feeling. Putting Himself in their shoes.

Understanding the realities of individual situations. Jesus understood the frustrations of the people's souls and their helplessness in reaching solutions for the dilemma of the soul separated from God.

What motivates you in your ministry? Compassion alone? Guilt? Attention? Money? Identity? Religious works?

What is the condition of your soul? Harassed and helpless? Jesus not only understands your situation fully, but He has compassion for you. He understands and willingly will help you, if you let Him.

vs:37 ***Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."***

Jesus has a great burden for these masses of people and this burden is placed directly on the disciples. Not by force, but rather, if the disciples are true disciples, they also will pick up the burden because of also being moved by compassion. Jesus doesn't force or compel the disciples to share His burden, but He makes it available. A true disciple will be the one moved by compassion and a vision just as Jesus is.

Jesus equates the crowds (hopeless and helpless) to a rich harvest field, ripe and ready for harvesting. Yet He expresses a great need, a need for workers, other people who are willing to approach these helpless, hopeless people and 'harvest' them from their situation to be brought into the 'granaries' of God's Kingdom.

It seems it is the 'hopelessness and harassment' of life that make a person ripe and ready for harvest into God's Kingdom. And this is good news - that your distress has purpose! To 'ripen' you for kingdom purposes.

Yet, who will be the one to 'do the work' of harvesting?

vs:38 ***Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."***

If you care about the concerns of Jesus, then 'ask' Jesus who is the one responsible for this great harvest, to raise up, separate out people (disciples) to work in expressing Jesus' compassion and bring people out of their situations and into God's Kingdom.

Have you considered the need of Jesus? Have you been 'harvesting'? Touched by Jesus' compassion? Will you be the one who will be moved by a Christ-like compassion to leave your own work and to do the work of Jesus?

This is Jesus' heart and vision - 'the harvest field'. His call is for 'workers'. His call is for people, disciples, to at least share His vision and burden.

It seems that the Lord will not appoint workers unless there are those who 'ask'. God wants us to want what He wants. He will not send the workers unless we also share the concern of the ripe harvest field.

- the harvest field = human souls
- the act of harvesting = to cut people from the 'world' to be brought into the safety of the garner of God's Kingdom.

What will happen to the harvest (people) if no one harvest them?

What will happen if no one asks the Lord of the harvest to raise up workers?

What will happen if the Lord of the harvest calls workers, yet they don't surrender or obey His call?

Matthew 10

vs:1 ***He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.***

Just after Jesus expressed His concern about the 'harvest field', He prepares His disciples with the proper harvesting tools.

Regardless of spiritual understanding and maturity, Jesus gives each disciple the same tools for harvesting souls.

These tools are:

1. A background of discipleship (discipline)
2. A calling (a vision)
3. Authority (a gift) over evil spirits
4. Power (a gift) to heal every kind of disease and sickness

We cannot and dare not go out to the 'harvest field' without first having been 'called to Jesus'! So many people are called to a work or ministry. But Jesus requirements are to be a disciple, to be called to Him! Not a school, church, or organization, but to 'Him'. Discipled by Jesus. Caught up in His work and word. Not swayed by ideas or opinions of other people about His word. This is where we get the power and authority and the calling to go out to reap the harvest!

vs:2-4 ***These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;***

Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;

Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

This is a list of the first 12 disciples. Men who were called to Jesus as disciplined followers. Men who had left much in order to enter into the vision and work of Jesus. Men with greatly diverse backgrounds, problems, and shortcomings, and levels of faith and commitment. Regardless, Jesus calls each to Himself and shares His power and authority for the purpose of bringing souls into His Father's Kingdom.

Can we expect less in our own Christian life? Can less be given or required?

It's amazing that Jesus uses men such as Thomas 'the doubter', Peter 'the disowner', Judas 'the betrayer', and every one a 'deserter'. If Jesus will choose such as these to anoint with such authority and power, can we not expect the same for ourselves, that is, if we have answered the call to discipleship and surrendered our 'will' to His? If we claim this is true, then why do so many 'believers' fail to enter the harvest field with proper tools?

I see in western Christianity a full and ripe harvest field with many workers standing among the bowed heads of ripened grain. In their hands they hold tools. But not the tools Jesus requires. Instead of the tools of authority over evil spirits and power to heal all kinds of diseases and sickness', they hold books of knowledge, oratory skills, business methods, and skills of acting and dramatics. They are weighted down with self-made tools and methods, able to only cut an occasional stalk of grain, which is soon crushed under the feet of the worker who is overly concerned about keeping his tools nice and shiny.

Yet only a few are actually harvesting. Swinging freely, they are laying down large areas of ripe grain. Their tools are light and easy to manage. But as they go, thrashing left and right, those other workers, filled with resentment, jealousy, and pride, shout against the successful works and demand that they stop. That they lay down the simple tools and take up big, shiny (useless) tools like their own - for the sake of unity and glamorizing the appearance of 'God's Kingdom' (which in reality is their own kingdom).

And whenever possible, these proud 'workers', at every opportunity, take for themselves as much fallen grain for themselves as they can manage to grab. Taking advantage of the rich harvest of the few workers who are 'getting the job done'.

vs:5 ***These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans.***

Jesus sent out all 12 of His disciples. Though they have a great variety of talents and personalities, all 12 were 'sent out'. None were exempt. Why? Because they all possessed the necessary tools to do what Jesus required.

What were the 'credentials' of qualification the disciples carried? 'Degrees' of reaching certain standards? 'Diplomas' of achievement? 'Graduation certificates'?

There were none! The 12 carried none of these things. The qualifications they had were an endorsement by God Himself. An endorsement of 'authority and power' from God Himself to do what no one else could do. This endorsement is given to 'disciples' only!

The disciples are 'sent out' to 'go do'.

Jesus' instructions are not complicated. They are simple, general, but require 'going forward'. ACTION!

1. Do not use your time dealing with non-churched people.

vs:6 ***Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.***

2. 'Go to' the people who are hungry for God, but who have lost their way in their search for Him. How can we identify these kinds of people? Where do you look for them?

vs:7 ***As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'***

3. While you are going, 'preach':
 - a. The 'Kingdom of heaven' (God's righteous government system) is near.

What is the 'Kingdom of Heaven'? This is a most important question and must be understood by Jesus' disciples.

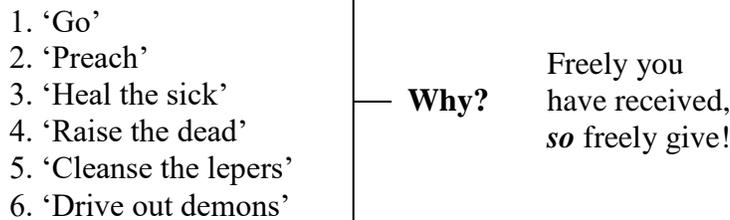
How does 'religion' define the Kingdom of Heaven? How does this compare to the example of 'God's Kingdom' in action and reality, lived out in the life of Jesus? How does your Christian life compare?

"As you go... 'preach'." most preachers do not go out, but rather stay in one place and call the people to themselves in the church.

vs:8

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Is this the way Jesus taught?



What had the disciples 'freely' received?

1. Discipleship
2. Authority
3. Power
4. Vision

What do you want from Jesus?

vs:9 & 10

Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.

If you seek wealth, status, identity, comfort, or self-glorification, Jesus offers just the opposite! Your wealth, materialism, and worldly comforts will only hinder you from doing the work that we've been called to do when we 'go out'.

If you have no money, status, or 'things', what can you give? In our corrupted western thinking, we actually substituted giving the power and authority of God over evil, with giving material 'things'. If the 'power and authority' is a free gift, why do we not use it?

'Power and authority' does not wait for an invitation from the one who is in need of its ministry. A policeman does not wait and pray for someone who is committing an offense to come to him requesting the ministry of the police's 'power and authority'.

Similarly, how foolish for a disciple who has been called, empowered, and sent out, to sit around praying for 'open doors of ministry'. Rather, the disciple should go in his authority and power and take command over those who are 'harassed and in helpless situation'; *Matthew 9:63*.

The 'worker' is worthy of the reward. Too often the disciples want the rewards first, to support their work. But Jesus requests that we begin the work with nothing, but the supernatural gifts He has given us. As we are faithful in doing the work, Jesus will take care of the rest. Work first, then receive your provisions, second.

This leaves NO EXCUSE for not 'going'. Serving Jesus is not dependent on your abilities, status, education, possessions, or location. It is based on faithfulness to Jesus in following Him and receiving His gifts.

Kingdom Lesson: To be the best spiritual leader, you must first be the best follower.

vs:11 ***"Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave.***

"Whatever town or village..." Where you go is not the real issue. Just go!

"...search for some worthy person..." Someone who will respect your message. Respect is not to be based on the world's standards of 'worthiness'.

"Stay in that person's home until you leave". Don't go running around to everyone's house at his or her request. You have a job to do. Let the people come to you so that you establish a gathering point with a 'worthy' person who will automatically be able to continue with the ministry after you leave. This is 'discipleship'.

vs:12 ***As you enter the home, give it your greeting.***

Give proper respect to the home you choose to stay at. You'll certainly see things that you won't agree with. But if the person shows respect for the gospel, you show respect for their home!

vs:13 ***If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you.***

On the other hand, if the people in the house reject the gospel and turn against you, then you treat them in a like manner by withholding the 'blessing' of the gospel.

Don't bless people casually. Let them prove themselves worthy of God's blessing first.

vs:14 ***If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.***

In fact, if you are completely rejected by a person or town, you must let them know that they have not only rejected you, they have really rejected God Himself. Don't try to 'win' their hearts. Their heart is already against God. Let them know that because they have rejected God, as His representatives, they have rejected you. Don't hide the hard truth from them.

vs:15 ***I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.***

To reject the truth of the gospel and God's servants who bring the truth will result in a terrible punishment for that person or group of people. This punishment can't even be compared with what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah for their great wickedness.

vs:16 ***I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.***

Don't be ignorant about what I am asking you to do. It is a dangerous, hateful world! The people will often look at you as easy prey. They will try to deceive you to take advantage of you. Because you do not carry the worldly symbols of power and strength, the strong will seek you out for their own purposes.

* Remember, Jesus was sending the 12 disciples to God's chosen people, the 'church' people, not just to some ungodly heathen!

Where are these 'wolves' hiding? Answer: In the churches and under religious pretenses!

Therefore, be wise and alert! Look innocent and harmless. Be the aggressor, but beware! Be a reflection of Jesus Christ, but not gullible!

vs:17 ***"Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.***

Just who or what are these 'wolves' in reference to? Men! Which men? The people that the disciples are being sent to minister to. The religious community! These men are going to be taking you to church ...where you will be interrogated and whipped!

In some countries this could still be a possibility, but most likely not in the modern western churches at this time... Or will the whipping take place in a different form? Probably more damaging to a person than a whipping are 'words': twisted, distorted, lashing, cutting, not into the flesh, but into the very soul of a person.

BEWARE!

vs:18 ***On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.***

For the cause of Jesus and the introduction and establishment of God's Kingdom, you will be 'brought' before the nations leaders. Your ministry will begin among the religious community and they will be the cause of your ministry expanding to the 'non-religious' political community.

vs:19 ***But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say,***

Don't expect to find sanctuary among the political leadership. Their allegiance is to the masses, not to the 'religious' few'. They will arrest you and when they do, 'Don't worry!' God will be with you. He will be your legal advisor and defender. He will reveal to you what it is you will need to say and do ...at exactly the right time. Just don't worry about it. That is your duty because one way or another, through the situation, God's Kingdom will triumph!

vs:20 ***for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.***

When you are in the court of men, the words you speak will not be your own. The words will be the very words of Father God Himself, speaking through you, on your defense by His Spirit.

...The Spirit of God speaking through you! There are conditions for this though, which are:

1. You must be a disciple of Jesus, not just a follower or believer.
2. You must be called 'to go'.

3. You need to have received your 'gifts' of power and authority.
4. You must be obedient in 'going and doing' in all things.
5. You must be full of faith, free of worry!
6. You need to have full trust and obedience in Jesus' promises.
7. You need to know who you are in Him and who He is in you.

vs:21 ***"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death."***

The 'commission' Jesus has given His 12 disciples is to 'go' and introduce God's Kingdom. Jesus moves into a prophetic message, a detailed description of conditions that can be anticipated resulting from the arrival of God's Kingdom.

This is not the kind of result we would expect! Division that cuts right in the heart of the family, separating what was once an indivisible unit; Tearing father from son; Brother from brother. The seeds of animosity will take such deep root in the hearts of the children they will consider it better for their parents to be dead, having such deep resentment of the division God's Kingdom will bring.

vs:22 ***All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.***

All men will hate you because of me, Jesus said!

So how can you dare to hold to Jesus' teachings and calling to obedience? You can, only if you are fully convinced that God's Kingdom is of more value than life itself! And only if your love, devotion, and loyalty to God's Kingdom and the purposes of Jesus surpasses your love and devotion to the 'things' of this world!

Jesus understands our dilemma, our sacrifice of life itself in order to obey Him. Then He makes this wonderful promise that 'whoever' endures and stands firm - to the very end (whatever and whenever that may be) - for His cause, which is the kingdom of His Father on earth, those people will be rescued. Saved!

What a sad thing it is for those who obey Jesus through much suffering, but then give up and cast aside Jesus' promises and the blessings of God's Kingdom before they have reached the 'end'. How will these kinds of people 'end up'?

vs:23 ***When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.***

'When' you are persecuted... Jesus is assuring us that if we fully follow His instructions to 'go into all the world' we must expect persecution and opposition.

What are some forms of modern day persecution? What is the real source of the persecution? Who is the real enemy?

Don't be too proud or religious to run away from persecution. When it comes to you, just move on. But don't stop preaching, healing the sick, and delivering people from Satan's bondage. Keep your eyes firmly fixed on your calling and purpose. Flee persecution only for the purpose of expanding God's Kingdom!

And don't worry, there will always be people and places where the gospel needs to be preached. This job will always be before you, right up to the time that I return (probably in reference to Jesus' second coming to earth; *Revelations 21:7-21*).

vs:24 ***"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.***

"Now don't go off and get a puffed up head!" Don't go thinking that because of your power and authority you are better than Jesus or that you no longer need Him to be your Lord. We must be satisfied with the position and job Jesus has given us and not compete with each other. Rather, set your eyes, focus on Jesus, and strive to become more and more like Him.

Jesus is our 'Teacher'.

Jesus is our 'Master'.

Therefore, our relationship to Him must be one of both 'student' and 'servant'. Do you have this balance in your relationship with Jesus?

vs:25 ***It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!***

Be content to be like Jesus, which, by the way, will put you in a very controversial position. If the people treated Jesus like He is the devil, you can be certain that if you remain a dedicated disciple to Jesus, you will be accused of similar things.

Jesus speaks of His followers as being students and servants. But then He also speaks of them in reference to being a family, members of a household, Brothers and sisters with God as our Father.

vs:26 ***"So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.***

Don't be afraid of people. You can be certain that at the right time everything will be exposed. The slander, lies, gossip, manipulation, politics, hypocrisy, etc. will be openly exposed and your cause to establish the Kingdom principles will shine clearly. But if you fear the people... then the kingdom of fear is the kingdom you will live in.

vs:27 ***What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.***

What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.

The 'truth' that comes to you in the quiet of the night or is revealed to you in the simplicity of your daily life! Don't be shy. Don't hold the truth for yourself. I give you truth so that you can speak My heart to the world. Take it out of your house to a place where all can see you and hear your message.

vs:28 ***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.***

Don't be afraid! The worst thing that people can do to you is to destroy your body. They can never kill your soul. But fear does have its place and we must be sure to focus it in the right place! You must fear God alone who has the power to destroy both your soul and your body - in hell! What a motivation! Serve Jesus out of love and loyalty. Serve Jesus because of the unique gifts of power and authority He has given you. Serve Jesus because

of the perfection of the cause of His Kingdom. Serve Jesus because you fear the cost of not serving him.

vs:29 ***Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.***

Are you still afraid to stand out for Jesus? Do you think you are too insignificant and that God will forget you are 'out there' representing and serving Him?

How much is a sparrow worth? Not much at all! But be assured of this fact, that God keeps detailed records of every sparrow. He knows exactly where each sparrow is at and when one dies. It's according to His carefully planned schedule for the sparrow's life. So, if God is so detailed about the life of a little bird, how much more will He be involved in your daily life?

vs:30-31 ***And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.***

So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

You question God's concern about the details of your life? God is so involved with you that right now He has a record of exactly how many hairs are on your head! You can't do anything without God's knowledge and involvement. So you really have no cause for fear in this life. In God's eyes you are far, far more valuable than the little sparrow!

vs:32 ***"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.***

In this life, with all the trials, confusion, troubles, pain, disease, spiritual assaults, hypocrisy, and abuse, what more important contact could a person need other than recognition from God his creator.

If you want to get God's attention, start giving attention to Jesus and openly declare His name, His cause, and the vision of God's Kingdom - in the same way that Jesus taught His 12 disciples to do. That gets God's attention and Jesus will make sure of it.

vs:33 ***But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.***

But if you avoid your call to represent and promote the Kingdom of God (or do it in a way that falsely represents Jesus) in the world, Jesus will make sure that God gives you preferential attention.

Kingdom Lesson: Stand up for Jesus, and he'll stand up for you! Put Jesus on the back shelf of your life, and he'll put you on His back shelf!

Do you strive to get attention from other people? Wouldn't it be better to strive for God's attention? Jesus has just taught you how! And if you are a person who has God's attention, others will see it and pay attention to God, too.

So, stop focusing on yourself. Instead, strive to draw people's attention to Jesus, and God will give you the attention you are longing for.

vs:34-35 ***"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.***

For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--

What do you 'suppose' about Jesus? The message of God's Kingdom is confrontational. It is divisive. It tears down what has been established, what the whole world system and pride has been built upon - politically, socially, spiritually - in families, churches, in your most intimate relationships.

vs:36 ***a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'***

You will have enemies because of me! And they won't be nameless and far away enemies. They will be the very people you love the most. Your very own family!

vs:37 ***"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;***

If you want the benefits of God's Kingdom, you must be completely loyal to Jesus. This means YOU! Do you love your children, parents, wife, anything, more than you love Jesus? If so, you are unworthy of Jesus, His love, His kingdom, His power, His authority, - Jesus!

vs:38 ***and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.***

The bottom line is this. You must follow Jesus in every way according to the example He has set before us. Not according to what you think He wants. But rather, in a simple day by day spiritual journey through life. This will cost you! It will cost you everything! Your loyalties must be on Jesus alone. This means daily sacrifice of your own desires and plans. It means having a mind-set that at any moment my love for Jesus may cost me my very life.

This is what is required in order to qualify for the benefits of God's Kingdom! Anything less is unacceptable!

vs:39 ***Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.***

So if your love is for the life that this world offers, you can get it all. But it will cost you eternally the real life that Jesus offers you in His Kingdom.

But if you are willing to forfeit this world's life, to live outside its systems as an outsider, for the sake of Jesus, you will indeed find the real life, joy, fulfillment, and hope beyond anything this world can even dream about.

vs:40 ***"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.***

The way that you respond to people and situations can have far reaching, yet unnoticed affects on your life and on your relationship with God.

Just who are you, anyhow? That would make God respond to a person based on the way they respond to us!

If we are received (as a representative of the gospel of God's Kingdom and the person of Jesus Christ) then the person receiving us also receives God! How careful we must be then, to accurately represent God before the people we contact.

Who do people see when you make contact with them? God and His Kingdom in action? A church organization? Your 'normal' carnal character? Your company or special interests? Or do people encounter the love, compassion, and ministry of Jesus through you?

When you fight or resist a person who comes to you in Jesus' name (maybe to bring you an un-welcomed message of truth), who do you really resist - that person or the Holy Spirit?

vs:41 ***Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward.***

When you join in heart with one of God's representatives, a servant of the gospel, you also join in God's blessings to that person. You share in His rewards.

There are rewards to be received in God's Kingdom. The rewards will vary depending on the kind of ministry and the level of Christ-likeness a person has taken on.

vs:42 ***And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."***

And speaking of rewards, God will not overlook even the slightest deed that is born out of love for Him and His servants. God will notice and respond with a reward.

God wants us to take care of every one of His disciples, without regard to that person's spiritual status in God's Kingdom. Whether they have just gotten saved and are struggling in the simplest areas of 'Christ-likeness' or whether they are mature both in character and in ministry. God wants us to treat both with the same amount of respect. And in return God will reward you!

Have you ever been one of those 'little ones' who received some small thing? To you it may have actually seemed like a big thing and your gratitude was profound. On the other hand, the one who had given to you barely felt the cost. Remember this and remember to always give, no matter how small or trivial your gift may seem to you. You cannot measure the value of your gift accurately. Only the one receiving it can!

Matthew 11

vs:1 ***After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.***

The proceeding teaching was directed specifically to Jesus' disciples, not to the 'normal' crowd of followers. He had other things to say to the people who were not disciples.

Jesus does not discontinue His normal ministry now just because He has trained 12 others to do the work He was doing.

Some ministers make 'training others' to do their ministry their 'tower of success'. They are only good at training others, but to do the ministry themselves becomes a thing of the past. Actually, apart from training others through study of the word, we need to train by example.

vs:2-3 ***When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"***

John! What a powerful and important ministry he had in setting the stage for Jesus arrival. Faithful, self-sacrificing, suffering - he did his job completely. But where is his reward? The end result of his ministry is prison. By all appearances, he ended as a failure. But he is not a failure. He attains the highest reward, too! His reward is Jesus! Fulfillment of his prophecies! World revolution and eternal changes! Yet now he sits in a dark filthy prison, not even aware that his prophecies and ministry has born its fruit. Uncertain, confused, and probably depressed.

Despite John's apparent failure he still has men who are loyal, disciples whom are in contact with him. These disciples still continue to identify with him despite the humiliating circumstances.

Are you unsure about Jesus? Do you wonder from your prison of life if Jesus really is the one who will 'open prison doors and set the captives free'?

Certainly John must have anticipated that if Jesus was indeed the Son of God, He would come to John who had sacrificed so much for Jesus, and do what He was prophesied to do. That is - set him free!

Has Jesus ever let you down? Not done in your life what all the Bible verses said He 'had to do'? Have you quoted verses and demanded that Jesus 'keep His word'? John certainly must have considered how the Messiah was prophesied to liberate prisoners. Yet where was Jesus? Why was he, of all the most worthy of the worthy, still left in the cell?

When Jesus doesn't come and do what we think He must do, do we ever question whether God's Word is really true? Do we ever question if Jesus really is who He says He is?

If any one had a right to 'name it and claim it', John did. Yet the deliverance he desires never comes in the way he expects.

vs:4 ***Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see:***

What would people report about your life? What would they 'see and hear'? Would they know you are a child of God because of your words and actions?

vs:5 ***The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.***

What should the signs of a Christian be? Church buildings?

Matthew 10:8; Jesus' disciples were given power and authority to do the same things that Jesus did! Should not our Christian lives also be a reflection and continuation of Jesus' life and ministry?

Have you considered that you should also heal the sick, cast out demons and preach the gospel? Or is your Christian life only identified by church attendance, clothing styles, religious culture and communication? What does God desire that the world see in a Christian's life?

vs:6 ***Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."***

Our lives should cause people to draw closer to God, not drive them away from God. Is your life bringing blessing into peoples lives? Religion will drive people away from God.

In time it will begin to cost you to follow Jesus. But if you persist in trusting in Him and His teachings, you will be blessed.

vs:7 ***As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?"***

Some people are disciples of Jesus. Some are disciples of another spiritual leader.

Jesus had great respect for John and his ministry, yet at this point in life John certainly must have felt like a failure.

Why did you 'go to church'? What did you expect from the church? Certainly you had high expectation, but what did you actually see? A wilderness of 'religious organization'?

vs:8 ***If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces.***

Maybe you didn't expect anything. If not, what did you see? A man dressed in fancy clothes? Not in the 'true church' of God's Kingdom! Fancy clothes should be left for the politicians and people who build their kingdom on outward appearances.

vs:9 ***Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.***

So what do you really want to see? What is it that makes you so desperate that you are willing to go to extreme measures? Are you searching for a person who will restore your relationship to God? Who will speak God's Words of truth and direction? Yes, this is what a person's heart really longs for.

And this is the kind of person John was. He was not religious, not political, not a socialite, not a people-pleaser. Though indeed he was a misfit of society, yet he was in touch with the living God. Yes, this is who John was. A real prophet, and yet even more than that.

vs:10 ***This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."***

John was a person that was prophesied about! He was a fulfillment of prophecy.

Can we as 'disciples' be a fulfillment of prophecy, too? What has been said in God's Word about our generation? Are we seeking to live up to that? What is God's standard set for one who believes and follows Jesus? What is the 'churches standard for a Christian? Which standard are you living up to?

vs:11 ***I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.***

Now pay attention to this important truth: Jesus said that up to this point in time, there had never been a greater person to walk the earth than John the Baptist. Yet get this... In God's Kingdom, the one who is least is going to be of greater importance than John the Baptist! Why?

Do you feel that you are unimportant and insignificant in God's Kingdom? Yes? Well, you're wrong! If you are willing, YOU can be used to a greater extent than even John was! You are very valuable and useful in God's Kingdom. So quit focusing on your supposed weaknesses and let God use you to your maximum capabilities!

What does it mean to know that you are 'greater' than John the Baptist? How should this affect your life?

vs:12 ***From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.***

The Kingdom of God began with the ministry of John the Baptist. What was John's message?

"REPENT"!

Stop doing what your heart and emotions desire and start doing what is 'right' in God's eyes. The kingdom is advancing by force! It takes a forceful person to repent. A person who commands his 'will' to over-ride the desires and passions of his flesh, the standards and fashions of this world, and the strife of the human heart to appear successful in the eyes of worldly men. All this in exchange for 'doing what is right' according to God's will and plan for that person. Our sinful nature rebels against this. Yet, if we choose, our 'will' can force our sinful nature into obedience to God's will.

God's Kingdom... do you want to see it established in your life? Then choose to 'force' your sinful nature into obedience to God's righteousness. It's the only way!

vs:13 ***For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.***

John is the climax of the Old Testament. Everything in the Old Testament points towards man's hopelessness in living to please his sinful nature and towards humanity's need to repent.

The message of the Old Testament is 'Repent'. There will be no other way for humanity to reach God.

vs:14 ***And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.***

Our 'will' is a very powerful force within us. We can choose (will) to believe whatever we want to believe.

Jesus is declaring the power of faith and what results from 'believing'. Jesus knew John was the fulfillment of the prophesied return of Elijah. Though not a physical resurrection of the old prophet, the Spirit and character of Elijah was upon John. Both were yielded 'tools' through which the Holy Spirit worked. In fact, later Jesus clearly declares that John the Baptist and Elijah is the same, *Matthew 17:10-13*.

This passage cannot be a foundation on which to build a doctrine of reincarnation of man. You must remember that Elijah never died physically, but rather was taken up to heaven physically in a whirlwind. Most unusual!

'If you are willing to accept it... it will become reality to you. But who can believe? Who has the ability to choose what to believe? Believing comes after 'facts', proven and established beyond a doubt.

vs:15 ***"He who has ears, let him hear."***

Jesus throws out a challenge. If you want to hear the truth, if you have the heart for it - then choose to hear it. "Let" your heart be open!

This could also be a general prayer for healing of the ears of the audience. Healing of the spiritual ears that had become closed to the voice of the Spirit of God by hardness of heart and sin.

"...let him hear". The creative power of God at work;

"...let there be light." *Genesis 1:13*; The creative power of God's Words.

Have you allowed God to create in you 'spiritual ears'? You may have physical ears, but do they hear the voice of the 'Revealer of God's mysteries', the Holy Spirit?

vs:16-17 ***"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:***

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

How do you see yourself? What about the society you live in? What is it comparable to?

What really matters is not what you think about yourself or your society, but rather how God views you! Jesus compares His own society to that of people who have lost their 'spark'. No interest in partaking in the joys of traditions. They are unsatisfied, bored, tired of the 'same old - same old'. They are uncaring and uninterested in the concerns of others. What was normal in the past no longer sparks their concern or interest. In fact, they rebel against it. Even children are a bother, a hindrance to their own selfish program.

vs:18 ***For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'***

Whatever someone says or does, they oppose them. That is the way of this society of Jesus time. Then when John came and taught a new way (actually succeeding in becoming the antiestablishment figure everyone was seeking to become themselves) it made them mad. He was different and they concluded that the only way he could break out of the anti-establishment society was by the aid of demonic powers.

vs:19 ***The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."***

Then Jesus came along behaving just the opposite of John and He was judged by the general society to be a worthless, no good alcoholic and an enemy of society and the religious traditions.

If you allow God's Spirit to take control of your heart, if you choose to repent and open your heart to God's Kingdom, you'll be an outsider of the society. You'll be strange! You'll be misunderstood and unaccepted. But don't despair. The truth will be revealed by the actions of the repentant ones.

How are your 'actions' different from the actions of the society around you? Can society see the wisdom of the choices you've made with your life? Are you only 'all talk'? Can you back up your words with actions and a changed life?

'Wisdom'; Jesus refers to it as a female. So does Solomon throughout the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is not something you grow into. It is a spirit! A Spirit that only comes from God by His Holy Spirit.

'Action'; It speaks louder than words. So wisdom is to evaluate a person by what they do, how they live their life at home and at work. It doesn't evaluate them by what they say when they're trying to create a good impression on themselves.

vs:20 ***Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.***

Jesus denounces the cities, not the individuals (in this case) who rejected Him. These are cities where most of His miracles were performed! The hearts of the people were just as hard then as they are now. Even miracles will not convince a person that Jesus is God's Son.

Why didn't the cities accept Jesus? Because to accept Jesus meant to 'repent' from the pleasures of sin and to denounce their past standards of living. People would have to come out from under the powers and influences that controlled their lives and thoughts. Powers of 'peer pressure', family traditions and standards, religious institutions, and finally, spiritual influences.

The purpose of miracles is to bring repentance. Do we need to repent? Do you need to lead others to repentance? Then we need to have miracles!

vs:21 ***"Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.***

You're in big trouble if you have had miracles in your life and yet refuse to repent!

It is possible for entire cities to repent. Nineveh is one example.

vs:22 ***But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.***

People always want miracles - for what they can get out of them for themselves. But Jesus performs miracles for what He can get. And what He wants to get is 'repentance'. If you get a miracle and yet refuse to give repentance in return (if there is a sin), your judgment on that 'great day' will be more severe.

vs:23 ***And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. [44] If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.***

You think you don't need to repent because you are so rich? You don't need miracles because of your financial power? This is a sure road to 'Hell'! There have been others who were rich and powerful. But where are they now? They are gone forever.

vs:24 ***But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."***

And though they are gone and seemingly forgotten, the reality is that they have yet to be judged for their actions while they lived on this earth. That judgment will be less harsh for them than for you because you have rejected the miracles and failed to repent - something that the others never had opportunity to do.

vs:25 ***At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.***

If Jesus gives praise to His Father, how much more should we? In His expression of praise, Jesus clearly identifies 'who' He is praising and 'why'. He is worthy of this praise.

The praise is done in public as a testimony.

God deliberately hides the secrets of the Kingdom of God from the people. You can never understand them by much study and analysis. Rather, the mysteries of God's Kingdom are given by revelation, one person at a time, to the ones who simply believe and trust God.

Kingdom Lesson: *Matthew 6:33*; Jesus told the disciples to 'seek' for God's Kingdom. Now in *Matthew 11:25* He tells us where our understanding of the Kingdom of God can be found. It can only be found by revelation and this revelation only comes to the 'little children' of Father God. That is, children, who approach Father God with the simplicity and faith of a natural little child to his parents.

If God holds the secrets of His Kingdom and He only gives those secrets away by revelation to people with child-like faith, then the way to find this revelation is to go to God. And this is Jesus mission - to lead men and women to God where revelation of His Kingdom can be received.

Are you longing to discover the secrets of God's Kingdom? Make this your priority in life above all else. Seek for God who is the source of revelations!

Why is Jesus so happy that the Kingdom of God is hidden from people? Because people must come to Father God and know Him in order to get the revelation. Jesus is so excited for people to know God, the same one that He knows and loves so much. And the drawing power of God's Kingdom will require an ongoing relationship with God. That's what Jesus longs for. To entice us back to our Father.

vs:26 ***Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.***

Why does God hide the kingdom? Because He simply wants to! He is God and He can do whatever He wants.

vs:27 ***"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.***

Do you realize that everything, all power and authority, things in earth and heaven, EVERYTHING, has been committed to Jesus? He is in charge of it all! Nobody really knows who Jesus is. Nobody really knows who God is except Jesus, His Son. Yet Jesus, in His extremely privileged and rightful position, is willing to let humans of such sinful decent build a relationship with His Father!

This relationship (which is necessary in order to receive the revelation of the secrets of God's Kingdom) can only happen when Jesus chooses to reveal God.

So, the bottom line is this. We are challenged to discover the secrets of God's Kingdom. But these can only be discovered through a relationship with Father God. Then we find out that we cannot get or have a relationship with Father God except by Jesus who has the power and authority to reveal

God to whoever He chooses. Therefore, the only way to the secrets of God's Kingdom is by special revelation from Jesus.

So if you want to know the secrets of God's Kingdom, you need to seek after Jesus. Follow Him! Forsake everything in exchange for the treasures of the mysteries of God. **Jesus is the key!**

vs:28 ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.***

Then Jesus makes it so clear and simple. He challenges the audience; "Come to me"! Don't wait for Him to come to you or for a right opportunity to come to Him. That will never happen! But rather, leave whatever seems to hold you back and simply 'come to Jesus'.

This invitation is extended to the people who have the most logical excuses to NOT be able to 'come'. The weight of responsibilities and the exhaustion of life are such good reasons not to 'come'. Yet Jesus' challenge is to 'leave it all behind'. Because when you come to Him, you will find rest.

Where will your 'rest' come from? From Jesus. A gift from being in His presence!

Jesus wants relationships! Amazing as it is, the one who is in charge of 'everything' wants you to be in relationship with Him. Why? So that - He can bring you into relationship with God - so that - God can reveal to you the secrets of His Kingdom - so that - we can accurately reveal God's love to this world and bring glory to His name!

You qualify! You don't have to be strong and capable. All that it requires is that you 'come to Jesus'!

vs:29 ***Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.***

When we find Him, when we find Jesus - He will take your heavy burden and replace it with one of His own. The burden God originally intended for you to carry in this life. It's the easy burden! It's a burden that simply requires you to follow Jesus, to learn from Him, and obey.

Jesus is Lord of everything, yet He is not fierce, forceful, or cruel. Rather, He is gentle, humble, compassionate, and understanding - from His heart. With Him you'll find peace and rest for your soul.

vs:30 ***For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."***

The reason your burden will be light is because Jesus will be committed to share it with you. Like a team of oxen, yoked side by side, working together to get the job done.

Would you like to be 'yoked' together with Jesus in order to accomplish the purposes God determined for you to bring you meaning and fulfillment in this life?

Matthew 12

vs:1 ***At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them.***

Jesus had a destination to reach. To get there required traveling on the 'Holy' day. And because of Jesus' requirements, the disciples found themselves in

a compromised situation. They had to choose between breaking the 'traditional laws' of the Sabbath in order to get the energy to continue with Jesus, or they could choose to be 'religious', save face and compromise the goal Jesus had.

vs:2 ***When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."***

See Matthew 9:39; Sure enough, as soon as the disciples broke a rule the religious leaders were quick to criticize. They had no concerns about Jesus and where or what His purposes were. Rather, they only cared about maintaining an exterior appearance of Godliness, not actually 'doing' the work of God.

You can be sure that when you are committed to 'go' with Jesus, there will be the religious people who will try to stop your progress by forcing you to focus on trivial matters. They will be concerned about your public image and 'what people will think'. They will be motivated by fear that you might change their self-centered agenda. Their concern is that you (whom they consider to be religious people like themselves) have broken ranks and are no longer under their control. They are afraid that you will raise a new standard that will attract the masses of 'unsettled, lost sheep'.

Jesus is concerned about the harvest of the real 'harvest field'. Religion and its concern for the 'appearance of Godliness' will be quick to stand in opposition to the 'improper methods' Jesus uses to reap that harvest. Religion will weaken any 'harvest' effort if you let it.

vs:3 ***He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?"***

Jesus responds to the religious people with a stinging question. ..."Haven't you ever read your Bible?" This question hits at the heart of religion because religion certainly is built on scriptures. But the error of religion is that it uses scripture for self-seeking gain. Thus religion is a misrepresentation and manipulation of God's Word for the purposes of self-serving men and institutions.

I must note here that the kind of 'religion' we are referring to is saturated with hypocrisy, formalities, institutionalized forms, systems, and traditions where God's Word has become an authorization for crowd control. It looks good on the outside, but inside is a system established by and for men who exalt themselves to a position of power and authority that ought to only belong to God.

vs:4-5 ***He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread--which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.***

Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?

People who are concerned only for religious appearances read God's Word in an effort to manipulate it for their own purposes. But God's Word is here for us so that we can freely serve God's purposes. It's liberating, not confining. It frees us to travel the whole distance with Jesus. It strengthens us to do the job God leads us to do... if you read the Word without filtering it through religious traditions. *Matthew 15:6*

vs:6 ***I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.***

Traditions and religion prevent you from seeing what God is doing. Jesus can be right there among you and you won't recognize Him.

Temple = legalistic system devised by God, but recreated by men in an attempt to hide man's sinfulness in order to give an appearance of restored relationship between God and man.

Jesus = God exposing man's sinfulness, dealing with it permanently through Jesus Christ in love, grace, and mercy in a way that would not destroy the man, so that God and man can have real and lasting, open and honest relationship. In other words, God through Jesus Christ recreating man to be a temple for His Holy Spirit!

vs:7 ***If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.***

Religious traditions bring condemnation, guilt, and injustice. God's Words are intended rather to bring mercy and justice.

vs:8 ***For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."***

But because religion has blinded you to see what God is really doing, you totally miss what God's Word really says. You lack accurate perspective of God's Word and thus you misrepresent it and lead the people into error and away from God!

* Beware of religious showmanship!

* Beware of religious leaders!

* Beware of coming under the authority and power of religion!

vs:9 ***Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue,***

Jesus went from the field where He had just had a confrontation with the religious leaders and goes to the center of religion and opposition towards Him - the synagogue. Obviously the religious leaders were quite angry by the rebuff they had just gotten from Jesus. Now that Jesus is on their territory, they go on the attack. But again, they show their ignorance of God's Word by basing their accusations on one of their own traditions, not on God's Word.

vs:10 ***and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"***

The concern of the religious leaders is not for the suffering crippled man. Rather it is for the survival of their institution and their own position of power in the society.

Jesus replies to the trick questions of the religious leaders in His normal fashion - by asking a question.

We don't always have to give an answer to people for our actions. But we must always be ready to give an answer to God!

vs:11-12 ***He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?"***

How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Jesus uses his question as a foundation to reveal the lack of love and concern the religious leaders have for the suffering, the very ones God is so concerned about.

'Religion' uses people for its own end. God has little use for religion and its systems except when it's used for truly helping those who are suffering. *James 1:27*; "Pure religion is to visit the fatherless and widows and live a spotless life."

Jesus uses even this attempt to trap him to expose hearts and teach what God really desires; compassion, love, and righteousness.

vs:13 ***Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.***

Then Jesus goes far beyond just talking about what God wants. He expresses God's love with God's power to express it.

The man is publicly exposed. His weakness is brought to the attention of all. If you need a miracle from God, be humble about it. God wants to bring glory to Himself by the miracle and so you must be willing to allow your situation to be fully exposed so that all can see the glory of God in it.

As soon as the man 'obeyed' Jesus, the miracle happened. Jesus only spoke the words to the man. Jesus never mentioned healing. But as God's power flowed through Jesus as the man acted in obedience, the miracle happened.

vs:14 ***But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.***

You would think that the religious leaders would have been happy to have Jesus in their 'church'. But their minds had been twisted by the hardness of their proud hearts. Jesus had again exposed their ignorance of God and rather than repent and make things right, they went off to make plans for silencing Jesus forever!

Certainly Jesus had immediately 'stolen' the hearts of all the people in the synagogue that day and the concern of the religious leaders was that their religious system (based on misrepresentations of God) was being exposed and they were powerless to stop it. They were powerless except to continue creating new deceptions and distortions of the 'truth'.

vs:15 ***Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick,***

When dangers come, don't try to be a spiritual hero. It's all right to side step danger. At the same time, don't let danger stop you from doing what God has called you to do.

If you are doing God's will, nothing can prevent you from moving forward. Despite threats and identifying with a marked man, the crowds follow Jesus. He had power and authority that His accusers never dreamed of possessing. He healed everybody who followed Him!

vs:16 ***warning them not to tell who he was.***

He warned the followers to keep His identity a secret. There's a time to talk and a time to be quiet.

Some Christians think their only job is to talk. But sometimes its Jesus' will for His followers to control their tongue and keep quiet.

vs:17 ***This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:***

The things that were happening in Jesus' life was reinforced as 'God's will' because they lined up with prophesies of Isaiah.

Prophecy is for reinforcing the direction a person is going in. It reassures correctness with God's purposes. Prophecy is not a guideline that we are obligated to fulfill.

vs:18-21 ***"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope."***

These are the words God spoke through the man Isaiah regarding a future person. Jesus is the fulfillment of these words.

Now we who believe and follow Jesus are His body. We represent Him in the earth. Therefore this scripture is also a fulfillment of the 'church'; *I Corinthians 12:27.*

Are you reaching this standard?

(vs:19) "...no one will hear his voice in the streets..." yet Jesus spoke everywhere! But in truth, it was not Jesus speaking, rather it was the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through Him.

How much of your communication is your own opinion? How much is the Holy Spirit getting to communicate through you?

vs:22 ***Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.***

Where is Jesus in your community? In church? Where is the power of God working? That is where you take people for help. (This may not necessarily be at a church meeting!)

Are you willing to be identified with a demon possessed person? Do you want these kinds of people in your meetings?

People then knew enough about Jesus and His power that they were confident Jesus could heal any sickness or destroy any satanic power. But now, do we have the confidence to bring these people into a meeting for deliverance? Maybe not. And so rather than 'lose face' and be left with a big problem on our hands, we leave the 'serious cases' alone.

Where is Jesus today? Right now, at this moment?

With Jesus, there is always hope. And with people who believe and trust in Jesus, there is always hope.

vs:23 ***All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"***

It is God's power at work that 'wakes up' the community.

vs:24 ***But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."***

And it is God's power at work that stirs up Satan. And it is among religious people that Satan has established one of his many bases of operation. Beware!

vs:25 ***Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand."***

"...Jesus knew their thoughts..." Whether you are a believer, a non-believer, you just pretend to believe, or you are simply acting religious, Jesus knows your every thought and imagination.

- What do you enjoy thinking about?
- What thoughts 'possess' your mind?
- Do you need to change some of the things you're thinking about?

Though the religious people looked so Godly, in their hearts (where the truth can be found) there were dark, Satanic inspired thoughts.

Does Satan have a place in your heart?

Jesus responds to the religious leaders accusations with a practical illustration. Kingdoms, cities, or homes in division and with opposing goals cannot reach either goal, and in fact, cannot even maintain their very existence.

vs:26 ***If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?***

Only fools would fight against their own objectives! If you use your strength to tear down what you're building, what you're building cannot stand.

This was a great rebuke to these religious leaders who, in their efforts to build God's Kingdom, were fighting against God and, in fact, even trying to murder the very one they worshipped!

vs:27 ***And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges.***

If Jesus power and authority came from Satan, where does the power and authority come from for those religious leaders? They also can and do have power! Where do the people whom have been delivered from demon possession by the religious leaders say their power and authority comes from? They can't! Legalistic religion can only accommodate demon possessed people, not set them free.

vs:28 ***But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.***

Either Jesus drives out demons by Satan's power or by God's power. If by God's power, then you must acknowledge that the kingdom, power, and message I bring is from God whom you are fighting against.

As Christians, we must be verifying the source of the power of God's Kingdom by setting people free of demon powers.

vs:29 ***"Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.***

Jesus equates Himself to an 'invader'! He is invading the devils stronghold of 'religion' to carry away the 'lost sheep', the souls that have been held captive there. In order to do this, Jesus must first render powerless the source of strength of religious institutions - Satan! Then He can take what He is after. This in the strategy Jesus uses and we must do the same too, through the power and authority we have in His name; *Matthew 10:5-6*.

Satan has come to steal from God's Kingdom. He steals the souls of people from God's blessings and promises and love. Yet Satan has never been able to bind the 'strong man' of God's household. Therefore whatever Satan claims, is really a false claim! He can only create an illusion of possession. But if we choose to believe he possesses something, then it is as if he really does.

The bottom line though, is that God owns everything! He created it all. Satan owns nothing except what we give him.

Do you 'feel' that Satan possesses or controls a part of your life? Reject his claim and declare full ownership of yourself to God.

vs:30 ***"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.***

You're either 'in' or 'out' of God's Kingdom. You're either helping or hurting Jesus cause. There is no middle ground. No compromise can be made with your relationship with Jesus. There is nothing 'halfway' in God's Kingdom.

- You're either saved or lost.
- You're either a believer or a doubter.
- You're either going to heaven or hell.

vs:31 ***And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.***

Blasphemy: Saying what the Holy Spirit does is done by the power of Satan.

All sins are forgivable except the sin of giving Satan recognition for what has been done by the Holy Spirit. Unforgivable!

vs:32 ***Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.***

You can say much against Jesus and He'll forgive you. But speaking or even suggesting something against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable. You cannot ever be forgiven!

Why can this sin never be forgiven? Because you have denied the source of convicting power. If you reject the Holy Spirit and his counsel, who can convict you of sin against God? Certainly not human wisdom which teaches that there is no God.

vs:33 ***"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.***

Tree = human heart, church, relationships, business etc.

Fruit = what is produced from the tree after the process of time.

A tree doesn't produce fruit immediately. Just give it some time and the truth of what is 'seen' (the tree) will be revealed. Time will tell everything about a person's heart.

Don't be too hasty in passing 'judgment' (discernment) regarding a person, ministry, event, etc. sometimes it's good to just have a 'wait and see' attitude.

We need to know what the fruit is! There are many, many great looking 'trees' out there. But don't be deceived. Know what is good or bad the fruit, not the leaves!

vs:34 ***You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.***

Jesus brings His teaching home! He addresses the religious leaders who had prided themselves in their beautiful institutions. Now Jesus exposes their fruit. He doesn't play politics! He hits hard and fast, straight to the heart of the problem.

"Snakes! Vipers!" In reference to food and bad trees, the religious leaders were certainly called into remembrance of the beautiful 'Garden of Eden' where a beautiful tree bore 'bad' fruit and resulted in deceiving the world.

Now Jesus calls them snakes! Satan came as a snake in the Garden of Eden, enticing Eve to believe that what was bad was in fact good. Enticing her to judge the tree and ignore the fruit.

In the same way, the religious leaders wanted the people of Israel to only concern themselves with the beauty and regulations of the temple and worship form. In doing this, they would blind their eyes to the evil and sin that was implemented to maintain this system and satisfy the greed and pride of the religious leaders. They were like the snake in the Garden of Eden and Jesus hates it!

Kingdom Lesson: Learn to listen to the heart! People can speak with words, but within the words is the spirit messenger of the heart that reveals the truth. To hear that message, you must listen with spiritual ears.

vs:36-36 ***The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.***

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

Whatever you have stored up in your heart will color whatever you speak. Evil thoughts, bitterness, anger, self, jealousy, pride, religion, all will be interwoven in your communication and will minister 'death' not life. That is why someone can preach the right message, but leave the listener feeling spiritually dead.

But if your heart is filled with the love of God, humility, truth, joy etc., your ministry will bring life. That is why a person may not have the talent to communicate skillfully, but what little he does say ministers 'life' to the listener's spirit.

What is in your heart? What occupies your thoughts?

vs:37 ***For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."***

God can instantly interpret the spirit messenger within every word you speak and one day you'll have to explain the real meaning that your careless mouth has spoken! God cares greatly!

You hold the keys to your own judgment by what you speak. You can say all the right words, but if your heart is wrong you'll condemn yourself. Your words have produced death. The same is true if your heart is good. You may not be a gifted speaker. But your words will bring life.

vs:38 ***Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."***

These religious leaders had already exposed their heart to Jesus. They were evil men in righteous clothes and now they try to reposition themselves by calling Jesus "Teacher" and expressing interest in seeing a miraculous sign. They wanted proof for their 'intellectual' minds that Jesus was operating by God's power, not Satan's. Of course up to this point, often these same men used Jesus' miracles as a reason to accuse Him and justify their intentions to murder Him.

vs:39 ***He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.***

Jesus answers by re-focusing attention to the real point of the religious leader's intent. That is to cover the wickedness of their hearts by feigning to search for the truth.

Jesus calls them for what they are. He has no nice words!

Who is it that runs around looking for miraculous proof? Jesus wants us to believe by faith, not by proof. That will come after you believe by faith.

Jesus performs miracles because of His love and compassion. We also should have that heart when seeking a miracle from Him.

If you want signs, read your Bible and believe it! There is enough there to convince any intelligent inquirer.

vs:40 ***For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.***

Jesus challenges the people to read and understand that what happened to Jonah would happen to Him, too. Jonah was a pattern of Jesus. What happened to Jonah physically would foreshadow what would happen to Jesus spiritually.

vs:41 ***The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.***

If the wicked city of Nineveh was brought to repentance by a miracle in the life of a rebellious prophet, how much greater the miracle and fruit of it when Jesus, the Holy Son of God, fulfilled the living parable that Jonah's life had foreshadowed.

'Preaching' should bring repentance

'Miracles' should bring repentance

'Repentance' should restore man's relationship to God.

vs:42 ***The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.***

People are watching us! And people are searching. We claim to have answers, but what is the reality of what they see in us? Do they see a carefully orchestrated 'front' that hides the failures of our ability to provide answers to the seekers? Or do they see that there is indeed a power at work in us? And if so, are we providing a clear path to others to find the source of this power.

Are you a seeker of truth and wisdom? Or are you pretending to have all the answers (putting up a religious front)? Or have you discovered that One

who is greater than Solomon and if so, what will others see in you when you are carefully examined by the seekers?

vs:43 ***"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it.***

Evil spirits:

1. They live in people
2. There is a time when they are outside of a person, and when it is, it is going around urgently searching for another place to reside in (another person).
3. The evil spirit is 'restless' going around searching, because there is no place like the place it just left.

vs:44-45 ***Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order.***

Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

4. Evil spirits can communicate. Who do evil spirits speak to? Other people? The devil? The person possessed? God?
5. Once you've been 'delivered' from an evil spirit, you can expect it to return seeking to repossess you.
6. When a person is possessed by an evil spirit, that person's life will be 'lived in' (used), not maintained, dirty (in thought, character, and outwardly), having disorder, confusion, and no direction. It stands to reason that a person 'possessed' will be the opposite of an 'un-possessed' person, who is clean of heart and mind and body, organized, logical, and motivated by God's purposes.
7. When the evil 'evicted' spirit finds his former residence is unoccupied again, it communicates to seven other more wicked and evil spirits and together they repossess that person. Thus the end situation of that person is far worse than when they were first delivered. Going from bad to worse!

Jesus predicts and declares that generation of people (speaking to the religious leaders) is like this example. It is their future!

Kingdom Lesson: It is a great disservice to 'deliver' a person of an evil spirit if you don't make it a permanent thing. Being filled, possessed, by the Holy Spirit is absolutely vital for a person. If you are not possessed by the Holy Spirit, you are a wide-open target for evil spirits to take up occupancy. Neglecting this is a big error that has brought great distress right into churches.

Example: A person possessed by an evil spirit is delivered. Then that person is made a church member, given a leadership position and honor. Later, because he is not filled with the Holy Spirit (Baptized in the Holy Spirit) he becomes repossessed in a worse way than before. But now he has learned the art of religious acting, hypocrisy, and carefully covers up the evil that is lurking in his heart. People without discernment cannot detect the problem until God exposes the truth through much damage and pain to the church or personal relationships.

Be filled with the Holy Spirit! It is a MUST!

vs:46 ***While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him.***

While Jesus is doing His work, He gets interrupted. His own mother and brothers have an attitude that they have 'rights' over Jesus and that they can get special attention. They were family, they had an inside connection, Jesus had to give them preferential treatment - or so they thought!

Sometimes we who are disciples and family of Jesus think we can get away with special attention. But God is just. He cares about all His children and He will not allow our religious selfishness to interfere with His mission.

vs:47 ***Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."***

Though Jesus' family members did not try to interrupt Him, others did. They were manipulators, trying to control events and make Jesus give them attention.

Are you one of those people who is using any occasion to try to draw attention to yourself? You will get attention all right! But you may do so at the cost of interfering with the work of the Holy Spirit. And that, I can assure you, will bring you the wrong kind of attention!

vs:48 ***He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"***

Jesus stops His message and is forced to reply to the interrupter. He asks a question that gets no answer. "Who is my mother and brothers?" Obviously the interrupter could not answer! He was just a simple person who was jealous, self-centered, and wanted attention. But instead of getting what he wanted (recognition as in 'insider') he was publicly humiliated.

vs:49 ***Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers.***

Of course Jesus knew who His family members were, but He took advantage of the situation to make a point. Turning to His disciples (those people who had left all in their commitment to follow, obey, and be unified in Jesus' vision and purposes), Jesus declares that these people are really His family. These are the people who have an inside connection to Him. Their relationship supersedes the blood-ties of physical family. The spiritual bonds are tighter than natural bonds.

Do you want an inside connection? Be a disciple of Jesus, not a follower of a church or a person. Commit all of your life, plans, possessions, time, and future into Jesus' hands for the privilege of joining Him and His mission.

vs:50 ***For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."***

Jesus' family is those people who do God's will. You might be able to talk about God's will or teach about it. You may have a heart that desires to do God's will. But Jesus' family is made up of doers, not merely those with good intentions. People who risk all to walk by faith in God's purpose for them.

Are you a 'talker' or a 'doer' of God's will? Do you think that God's will must line up with your own will before you obey? Or are you the one who leaves everything for the joy of doing God's will, no matter what the cost?

If we are children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, then we must be highly focused on doing God's will. It must be top priority!

Kingdom Lesson: The long term benefits of God's Kingdom belong to the family of God - those who are disciples of Jesus Christ - wholly committed to doing God's will.

Matthew 13

vs:1 ***That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.***

Jesus' ministry took place anywhere and everywhere. In synagogues, markets, homes, and out in the open. And this is the place where we are called to 'do Gods will' too ...wherever.

The Kingdom of God is about people with needs. If you want to be a disciple and share with Jesus and His vision, you must be prepared to deal with all and every kinds of persons.

vs:2 ***Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.***

Most people think that it is God's will for them to get away, to be alone with Him in a peaceful setting. But that is only a great luxury for Jesus. Even in the quiet secluded places, the crowds swarm upon Him. Why? Because He had more than just words for them, He had the power to confirm that His words were from God.

vs:3 ***Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed.***

These people were most likely the average people and represented among them were a wide variety of reasons for coming to Jesus.

Jesus doesn't speak with complex concepts or lofty words. He speaks on the level that children can understand. He uses parables (stories) that illustrate a second, often spiritual meaning.

Do you communicate the gospel so that a child can understand it? Or do you speak so that religious people will be impressed with your knowledge of the scriptures? In other words, do you speak to bring salvation and conviction of sin, to encourage and correct, or do you (sometimes) speak to draw attention to yourself and fulfill some special need of your own?

The parable of the sower:

'a farmer' = a simple, hard working person, one who intends to plant for a harvest. It doesn't take a university degree to be a farmer. This 'farmer' can represent Jesus or a Christian servant.

'Went out' ...needs to leave the comfort of his home, friends, church, etc. and 'go out' to the place where he intends to plant the seeds.

'To sow'he had a purpose and expected a result for his efforts.

'His seed' ...these were seeds, 'truths' what were his own. Not someone else's seeds. What has God given you?

What kind of 'seeds of truth' do you have? We need to invest what God has given us. Invest it in the right places using our own efforts and methods that work for us.

Kingdom lesson: You can't expect to sit in a church building and flaunt your knowledge of the gospel week after week and expect to get much result! You must go out. Everybody in God's Kingdom is like a farmer. We all have our fields to sow the seeds of truth in which God has given us.

vs:4 ***As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.***

'As he was scattering the seeds' ...his method was not very selective. Rather he scattered the 'seed', the truth, which fell on all kinds of soil (to anyone who would listen). And as he did this, things happened.

Are things happening in your ministry?

vs:5-7 ***Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.***

But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

We must be prepared for receiving some negative results. Some of the truth will fall on people who are not going to receive it or appreciate it the way we would like them to. But we must not be discouraged by these results. We need rather to look at the 'long term' results.

vs:8 ***Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.***

"Some of the seed fell on good soil." We will see later Jesus' explanation of the different kinds of places or people the truth touches. But first it is good to note that when seed goes into good soil, at first we will see no results. The seeds seem to disappear into the broken soil and only after time passes do we begin to see little by little the good results.

The seed that fell on the path and was eaten by the birds was an immediate and obvious result. Very discouraging! We must not let things like that discourage us from continuing on with the sowing. In time we will definitely have the reward (providing that we actually 'went out' to sow the seed).

Be patient and keep investing the word of God (what God has given to you) into the lives of people everywhere. You will get results!

'Seeds' must not be dead inside. They must be alive in order to grow. The same is true with God's Word, His 'seeds' of truth. Some truth is alive! It burns in us! It is full of the Spirit of life. At the same time, for a different person, that same truth may be lifeless. Why? Because he has received that word of truth only with his mind, intellectually, or selfishly, and has rendered that truth - lifeless.

Matthew 15:6; You cannot ever expect to reap a harvest, a living 'kingdom harvest', using truth that is powerless. This truth is made powerless because of traditions and hypocrisy. You will only reap a harvest of more lifeless, legalistic, religious hypocrisy. There will be no joy in the harvest. This kind

of harvest will only bring the burden of trying to make these new religious members act like they are Christians.

What kind of harvest do you want? A living 'kingdom harvest' or a 'dead religion harvest'?

vs:9 ***He who has ears, let him hear."***

"He who has ears..." We all have ears!

"...to hear..." Hear what? The spiritual truths behind the stories Jesus told. To hear is to have the deep desire to understand.

"Let him hear." This seems more like a command, a healing of ears that couldn't or wouldn't hear. A healing of spiritual ears so people can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit who teaches the true meaning of the 'kingdom principles' within the framework of Jesus' parables.

Even Jesus' own disciples couldn't understand the real meaning of the stories. We need a 'healing of spiritual ears' miracle in order to hear the truth of God's Word.

Do you need a healing of your spiritual ears? It is very necessary.

vs:10 ***The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"***

Jesus uses methods that aren't familiar. The disciples certainly desired to understand the truth that Jesus was bringing, but the method of parables was confusing. Why couldn't He speak in 'plain English'?

The problem was that the disciples didn't 'have ears to hear'. It wasn't Jesus' fault. Actually, the abstract parable illustrations were the foundation on which the Holy Spirit revealed and taught the secrets of God's Kingdom. But without a heart and ears to receive the Holy Spirit's revelations, the parables seemed to be incomplete stories.

vs:11 ***He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.***

"The knowledge of the secrets of God's Kingdom..." What a treasure! The disciples had this knowledge, but they didn't know it! Just the fact that the disciples had left all to follow Jesus proved that the disciples had received some revelation and working of truth in their lives.

The knowledge of the secrets of God's Kingdom are a gift! They are given to those who fully commit their life to serve, follow, and obey Jesus Christ - every day of the week.

Can the 'secrets' be learned through traditional study methods? NO! Because they will only be applicable to those people who have hearts that are fully committed to Jesus; people who are seven-days-a-week disciples of Jesus Christ. You can learn about the concepts of God's Kingdom, but the concepts won't work in reality without the right heart condition proven by our life style of disciplined 'following'.

So, some people get it and some don't. The choice is up to us!

Have you known the joy and thrill of receiving clear revelation in your heart from the Holy Spirit as you read God's Word and in the daily activities of life? Anything less will leave you with empty religious traditions.

vs:12 ***Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.***

If you have received the revelation of a truth from God, you're going to have the hunger and ability to receive more until the revealed truth fills you to abundance. But if you don't have a heart that is 'right' to receive revealed truth, even though you've received a clear explanation of it, you will lose it. It will be taken from you because it was only in your head and not in your heart.

God expects us to use what He has so graciously given us. And if we don't act upon the revealed truth we've been given, we'll lose the impact of that revelation.

vs:13 ***This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.***

Why did Jesus use simple stories to explain such important spiritual truths? He did it so that people would be drawn to listen, yet only those people whose hearts were right would be able to catch the hidden meanings of the stories.

What makes the difference between a person who can understand a parable and those who can't? I.Q.? Religious background? No! But rather a person who has 'repented'! Who has turned from an attitude of selfishness and sin. In Jesus time, these were the people who had 'prepared the way of the Lord', repented under the teaching of John the Baptist and had received public water baptism.

Kingdom lesson: Sin is a sure-fire method of turning off the spiritual ears that can hear the revealed truth of the Holy Spirit.

So you can be a very religious and intelligent person who searches the scriptures diligently and yet even the simplest truths will not register in your spirit. And you can be the most active church attendee, go to seminars and listen to endless teaching tapes, and still 'not get it'. Why? It's a matter of the heart and its priorities! It's a matter of real repentance!

vs:14 ***In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.***

Isaiah prophesied about people like this. They will be forever searching, analyzing, discussing, and evaluating the scriptures. But though they know it is truth and believe it, it never makes any sense! Why?

vs:15 ***For this people's heart has become callused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'***

It's because their hearts are hard! They refuse to admit they were wrong. They refuse to accept a new direction. They refuse to repent of sin and pride and the 'head knowledge' that they supposed was God's meaning in the scriptures they misunderstood!

But if they would stop being stubborn and simply throw themselves open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in true repentance of sin and past (wrong) religious conclusions, they too would be able to receive the clear and simple revealed truth of God. Not receiving it with their minds, but with their hearts. And it would be life changing! It would bring them into contact

with God Himself and He would heal them, restore them into the condition He desired for them.

Are you struggling to understand God's Word? Are you trying to make God's Word fit into a religious tradition or doctrine that has been handed down to you by 'respectable' (but hardhearted) religious authorities? Is there unrepented sin or pride at work in your life, hardening your heart and closing your spiritual ears?

'Repent'!

vs:16 ***But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.***

Those who have repented and committed their life to discipleship and obedience to Jesus are so blessed! Why? Because they are the ones who get to see and hear, by the Holy Spirit, the mysteries of God's Kingdom.

vs:17 ***For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.***

Jesus was speaking to 'normal' people. Not highly educated people or deeply religious people. Yet they were at the 'right place at the right time' and were getting in on the 'great revelation' that the ancient prophets and religious leaders knew would come. They had anticipated it, but could not understand because the time of the revelation of God's Kingdom had not come.

What do your ears long to hear? What do your eyes long to see? The latest new music or TV shows? The latest 'charismatic' preacher or 'worship' experience? Or do you long to see God's Kingdom principles at work in your life and in the earth? Do you long to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit leading you day by day and revealing the secrets of God's Kingdom throughout His word?

vs:18 ***"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:***

Some people only listen to the 'story'. They read their bible as a ritual only gaining from it a list of historical facts and stories. But that is not the purpose of reading God's Word. All of God's Word points to a deeper hidden meaning that can only be unveiled by the 'Spirit of Truth'.

Jesus could explain the meaning of His parable because He is 'Truth'.

vs:19 ***When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.***

It certainly isn't enough to hear God's Word. We must 'understand' its meaning. If we don't, Satan comes to us to take away that seed of God's Word that was planted in the soul of our heart. The question is, does sin, self-centeredness and pride harden the soil of our heart? Or has it been broken, plowed and prepared for the seed of God's Word by repentance and obedience?

Satan hates God's Word and wants to get it away from you before you receive revelation of its hidden meaning.

God's Word is of little value to a person if they are unrepentant and hard-hearted. Yet some of that 'word seed' will work its way down into a person's heart.

1. Seed = God's Word
2. Ground = a persons heart where God's Word must enter. It may have a variety of conditions from hard to fertile.
3. Path = don't understand God's Word

vs:20 ***The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.***

4. Rocky places = hears the word and receives it with joy (emotional)

vs:21 ***But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.***

5. No root = When the emotional thrill of new truth wears off and the time of proving the truth comes, they fall back on what gives them an emotional thrill rather than establishing themselves on what is right.

Some modern churches seem to cater to these 'thrill seekers' and continually chase new 'revelation' rather than become established in the truths already received.

vs:22 ***The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.***

6. thorny places = people who hear and understand the word. They apply it to life, but mix it with efforts of their own to control a desirable destiny. They are motivated by what they see with their natural eyes rather than what they have seen with there spiritual eyes. Fear and worry about this life control them. They strive to do for themselves what God has promised to do for us if we fully rely on him. Thus, because of their preoccupation of self-sufficiency, God's Word has no effect in their lives. They do not see God's Kingdom working!

Yet churches all across America accommodate and cater to these kinds of 'unbelievers'! And all the while they are wondering why they never see God at work in their own lives and church!

vs:23 ***But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."***

7. Good soil = the word goes down into the broken soil (repentant heart) of a person. It takes root. Revelation comes and with the understanding of the Holy Spirit leading, that person obeys and invests the truth wholeheartedly into God's Kingdom.

This will produce results. It must! And this is what God is looking for in the people who call him their Father

From the time that you have received God's Word in your heart, what has your life produced? Are you making a conscious effort to reproduce in others what God has done in you? The deep desire to share with others what God has done for you should be a natural response from you if you have truly received the revelation of the mysteries of God's Kingdom in a repentant heart.

Is your passion for that which lasts eternally, or is it for the things of this world and its systems that are passing away and failing all the time?

vs:24 ***Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.***

Jesus told another story that illustrated what the kingdom is like. Can you discover the hidden meaning? Remember that it is the Holy Spirit who must reveal it to you. You can't simply figure it out by relying on normal methods of evaluation and application. The Spirit may reveal different things to different people depending on their situation.

"...the kingdom of heaven..." = God's righteous standards and systems to ensure a life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit of Holiness; *Romans 14:17.*

"...everyone..." = other Christians. The kingdom of God involves people who give and invest the Word of Truth in the place God has put them.

vs:25 ***But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.***

You may feel all alone. You may feel that no one else is concerned about what you are investing and that they won't lift a finger to help protect what you are laboring for. They choose to only be concerned for themselves and their needs. In this case the need and concern was for 'sleep'.

In God's Kingdom there is a real enemy whose ambition is to destroy what you are working for. Did the enemy make the other people sleep? No. That was their own choice. But the enemy certainly takes advantage on the churches lack of enthusiasm for building and protecting God's Kingdom.

Amazingly, when the church finally wakes up, they find that what was once their beautiful field of good plants has now become polluted with weeds. They thought they could have it all! A great harvest, plus a nice nap! But Christians can never get lazy or coast through their Christian life. It won't work because, though everything actually looks very secure, there is a real enemy who is just waiting for us to give him an opportunity to undermine the work of God and His people.

Do we ever see Satan? Normally - no. If he ever let us see himself, we would be frightened into a state of 'red alert'. Satan certainly doesn't want us to be on full guard against him!

vs:26 ***When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.***

Satan's work among lazy Christians is not normally sudden. It is gradual and only shows up at the time we are expecting the harvest in God's Kingdom. Then suddenly our failure becomes clear. Instead of joy, there is disappointment.

vs:27 ***"The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'***

8. The owners = Jesus; the Holy Spirit
Servants = Christians; the church

9. Your field = the hearts of new Christians are so surprised when they see what appears to be flaws in the purity of God's Word and its results. They assume that the problem is the failure of God's Word. "Why are these problems in their lives and in the church", they ask. "Where did this sin come from." And their first reaction is to blame the Lord.

vs:28 ***"An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'"***

We have an enemy! This is very, very important for us a Christians to realize. Our enemy wants to destroy God's Kingdom. He wants to destroy YOU!

So how do we respond now to this revelation? The harm has already been done. Should we now get busy to try to 'fix' all the problems around us? Do we go to the different people in our churches that are in sin and force them to leave? Do we now focus our attention on the problem?

vs:29 ***"No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.***

Jesus says "No". Leave the problem alone! Why? Because the work of the Lord is so very precious. Jesus doesn't want to risk adding any further harm to the Lord's work by 'pulling out' the work of Satan. Furthermore, Jesus knows that the work that He has done in a person's life is good. It will continue to grow regardless of Satan's strategies - if the seed of God's Word has been planted in good soil, a repentant heart. It will grow regardless of the havoc of Satan going on around.

So don't focus on problems. But learn from your mistakes and continue to focus of the good things of God's Kingdom. It is strong and will prosper regardless of our weaknesses and Satan's havoc.

vs:30 ***Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"***

In the world you will have both good and evil seeds growing. In time, the different kind of plants will become more obvious. But don't worry. Let the various plants continue to grow

Note: In these end times we will see more and more blatant and evil sin around us. The evil seed is maturing. But remember the seed of God's Word is maturing also.

Then comes the harvest! It is God's harvest field and He will reap the good seeds that He has planted. At that time the various seeds will have matured fully. God will send out His harvesters to separate out of the field the weeds, the ungodly and evil (words, thoughts, concepts, etc.) for destruction. All people who live for that which is evil and Satan inspired will be identified, separated, and bound up in their sin with other sinners for their destiny to destruction.

Once the evil ones have been separated, bound, and predestined, the ones who are born of eternal life, who have received the seed of the word of truth and life in repentant hearts, will be gathered together by the harvesters and brought into God's place of safety.

This parable clearly points towards world conditions in our own generation. We are seeing a rapid decline in the moral standards and a greater and greater tolerance for evil and ungodly actions. Evil is rising up among the nations like a plant that is making its identity known as it matures and its fruit declares its kind.

As believers we must be determined to not compromise with the subtle emergence of 'weeds' among us. We need not fight against the 'seeds' or be alarmed as their identity becomes clearer. Rather we must continue to focus on being what God intends for us to be. Bearing the fruit that we are destined to bear and not allowing the evil around us to influence us or control our growth in truth.

There is a day coming and the truth will be clarified as God separates His 'seeds' from Satan's 'seeds'. In that time each 'seed' will be harvested. Those that are good and useful to God will be collected for His purposes where as those who lived unto their own evil passions and the will of Satan will be harvested for their destruction, an eternity in the fires of hell.

As we observe the world around us exploding in sin and confusion, determine and live a Godly life that will be easily identified as different from the world. And then -- Rejoice! The harvest time is getting nearer and nearer! Get your eyes on Jesus - not on the evil around us!

Harvester = angels

vs:31 ***He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.***

"The kingdom of heaven is like..." A mustard seed

Mustard seed = looks like nothing, but inside is 'life'. This is like many of God's people. They look like nothing from outward appearances, but inwardly their hearts are filled with the life of God.

Maybe you see yourself as 'nothing'! But God sees you as someone who has great significance in His kingdom.

The mustard seed is useless until it is planted. For you to receive the promises of God's Kingdom, you must allow the 'man' (Jesus) to plant you - wherever He wants to plant you.

Planted = separated, isolated, to do a specific job, to be allowed to 'die' so that the life within you can emerge in transforming power. God wants to plant you so that you might die to self and so the life of God within you can multiply and expand His kingdom.

The 'seed' cannot tell the farmer when and where to plant it. Rather the farmer determines it. The job of the seed is simply to 'die', submit to the will of the Lord Jesus, so that the life of the Holy Spirit might shine forth.

Field = place of investment. There are many kinds of 'fields'. Where is your life invested? Did you choose your 'field' or did God assign you to His choice?

vs:32 ***Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."***

God's Kingdom seems very insignificant when compared with the other kingdoms in the earth. But when it is planted and time passes, what emerges is indeed so significant that it provides a place of shelter and rest for those who are in need.

God's Kingdom in your own life may not seem like much. But take what you have, the 'seed of faith' and allow the Lord to have whatever you can

offer and in time see what will emerge! You will see something beautiful that seemed to come from nothing!

vs:33 ***He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."***

Another example of what God's Kingdom is like; it's like yeast...

Yeast = again something very small, seemingly insignificant.

"Woman took..." = the woman had a plan. Not just to have the yeast, but to use it to produce results (bread). God's Kingdom must be received. By itself, like yeast, God's Kingdom has little value unless it is received for a greater purpose.

"Mixed into a larger amount of flour..." = in this world, God's Kingdom has little value unless it is mixed with faith and worked into our practical daily lives. If you don't use the yeast, it loses its effectiveness after time passes.

"Worked all through the dough..." = the word of God, the seed of truth (the yeast) must be worked thoroughly into the dough (every area of our lives).

When we receive the yeast of God's Word into our lives, we must allow the Holy Spirit to completely work God's Word in us. We must not hold back in any area of our lives. Otherwise the dough (our lives) will not develop properly and the end results will not be desirable.

The purpose for mixing yeast in dough is to make soft bread. The purpose of bread is so that it can feed people. Thus the purpose of God's Kingdom working effectively in us is so those around us can be fed spiritually, their hungry souls satisfied and hearts convinced that God's Kingdom is the source of life.

Don't resist the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. But surrender to the truth of God's Word completely and let it change every area of your life, so that those around you can see that God's Word is powerful and effective for every situation.

vs:34 ***Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.***

Everything Jesus said was supported with parables, events that the average person could easily understand, if they allowed the Holy Spirit to reveal the hidden meanings to their heart.

vs:35 ***So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."***

This method of teaching was also a fulfillment of what was prophesied about Jesus; that He would speak the mysteries of God in story form. These kingdom principles have been hidden for thousands of years - since the world began. We can't even imagine how privileged we are to have the opportunity to receive the revelation of these hidden truths. They are so precious that God will only reveal them to people who are committed to seek God and turn from their sins.

vs:36 ***Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."***

After Jesus had told these parables, He left the crowds of people and went into a house where the disciples came, admitting their inability to understand the hidden meaning of the parables. So Jesus took the time to explain.

If the disciples hadn't come to Jesus and asked, they probably never would have understood the parable. We need to pursue Jesus until we understand the mysteries and can live in the truth.

vs:37-41 ***He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.***

The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,

and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

Jesus teaches us how parables are to be understood. Each character, event, and object represents something in the spirit world, moral condition, or result and effect. We need the Holy Spirit to show us what is represented throughout each story.

vs:42 ***They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

Hell. It's real! It's a terrible place to be! Forever!

vs:43 ***Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.***

We must ask the question, "Why"? Why does God's Kingdom require us to leave the 'weeds' (the sons of the evil one) alone, letting them prosper? Why does God require His angels to be the ones who sort out the harvest?

"Then..." after the harvest, those who have been proven as sons of God, who have been 'harvested' will 'shine like the sun' in the kingdom of their Father. The winners! The joy and glory of victory will belong to the Gathers because it is His kingdom, His power, and His glory that causes the victory to come.

It is the 'righteous' who will shine. Those people committed to the discipline of following Jesus in to the righteousness of God's Kingdom.

Whose kingdom are you a son of? Are you committed to the discipline of living in righteousness? What standard of righteousness governs you? A religious interpretation of Jesus Christ that satisfies selfish ambition, or a social form of righteousness?

"He who has ears, let him hear..." Pay attention to this story! Open your heart to receive revelation. Repent and hear! It's a matter of life or death!

vs:44 ***"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.***

"The kingdom of heaven is like..."...

"Treasure" = It's priceless, what everyone dreams of obtaining.

"Hidden" = You know it exists and that you can find it if you get the right opportunity.

"In the field" = The place where planting and harvesting takes place. The mission field.

The priceless treasures of God's Kingdom, its principles are real, yet most Christians never or only occasionally see or experience the reality of these truths. Why? They are looking for God's principles in sincerity - but in the wrong places. They must go to the 'field'. Not waiting in church, running from meeting to meeting, reading book upon book. But it is in the 'doing', by faith, going to the 'field', the lost, and actively planting and harvesting the seed of God's Word. It's in evangelism, teaching and discipleship. That is where it is!

When the man discovered this truth, he joyfully sacrificed everything in order to get to the field, to possess it and begin receiving for himself the joy of God's Kingdom principles working in his life in reality.

Where is your 'field'; your place of ministry? Where are the lost souls that only you can reach? Go get it! There is treasure there. It's your place in God's Kingdom where the promises become reality for you!

What is the cost of your field? Whatever it costs - if you want it sincerely enough, you can get it! And you can get it along with all of God's blessings - if you do it God's way! Using men's methods to take the field may also result in success, though God's blessing will be lacking and the 'field' will become a great burden.

vs:45 ***"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.***

Here is another example of what the Kingdom of God is like. It is like a businessman - a person who dedicates his life to search for good business opportunities - whose search had lead him into the pearl business.

He had a goal and he had narrowed down his field of search to a specific area.

vs:46 ***When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.***

After a period of searching, he found one special pearl of very great value and sold everything he had in order to purchase it. He invested everything in order to have this remarkable treasure.

What was the value of the pearl if the merchant only put it in a safe place? You can't eat it. You can't wear it. It won't protect or house you. It can't heal you. It's only value is in its resale. It is an investment that after being crafted into a beautiful piece of jewelry must be resold. Otherwise, the owner will starve to death!

So it is with God's Kingdom. After you invest everything you possess into God's Kingdom, including your time, energy, and resources, and when you finally receive the revelation of the truth and power of God's Kingdom, in itself it remains of little value until you re-invest it in other people. God's power is of little value unless it is used to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, preach the good news, feed the hungry, cloth the naked, care

for widows and orphans. Freely given away, and in doing so, then you'll freely receive from the limitless treasury of God's storehouse!

What is the Kingdom of God, His promises working in reality in your own life, worth to you? The more you possess, the more it will cost you because the price is simply - everything!

Both of these parables clearly show that God's Kingdom must be searched for. And when you find it, it's like the discovery of a lifetime. It's worth the value of everything you possess and worth sacrificing all of it. To possess these Kingdom principles of God working in your own life! What a treasure!

Is God's Kingdom working in your life? It's not enough to simply discover the truth of God's Kingdom. You must sacrifice whatever is necessary in order to live in God's Kingdom. Only then can you truly understand the real value of God's Kingdom.

In America it seems that people are content to simply understand the mysteries of God's Kingdom, but because of comforts of life and the high cost, they never enter in to the place where they see God actively working through their daily lives.

What more does God want from you? What is hindering you from experiencing God's power in you and through you, changing lives around you?

vs:47

"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.

Are you beginning to understand some things about God's Kingdom? Let me give you yet another example because I really want you to understand. God's Kingdom is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.

Net = the people of God's Kingdom linked together in love and the power of God's Spirit, unified in vision and obedience to the purposes of God; the church.

Let down = immersed into something beyond our natural range of vision.
The net is used by people who immerse it at the place of their own choice.

Have you ever felt that God has 'let you down'? This is not the time to feel sorry for yourself! It is part of the natural process of fulfilling God's purposes. This is the time to determine whole-heartedly that despite the feelings of being 'let down', you are going to remain united in vision and purpose to the ones God has joined you with. You must determine that you will not become a 'tear or hole' in the net by isolating yourself or becoming contentious. Our purpose is to - catch fish, or in other words, win souls. Just being there, hanging in there, waiting, until the fish get caught.

All kinds of fish = all kinds of people in all kinds of situations immersed in a sea of darkness and separation from the Kingdom of God.

Lake = the world. There are two worlds to consider. The systems and standards of this world and the system and standards of God's world (kingdom).

We must be willing to be 'let down' from the delights of God's Kingdom and put back into the world for the purposes of 'catching' and drawing out other people.

vs:48 ***When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.***

When it was full = when the time is right in God's plan. Don't pull up the net before the full amount of fish arrives. Don't get frustrated with your ministry and give up because the results aren't what you expected. It takes time!

The fisherman = Jesus

They = the angels who help with the harvest; vs. 13:41 & 49

There will be a time of separation between those who belong in God's Kingdom and those who don't. The Lord will decide! Our job until 'that day' is to be a net cast by the hands of the master fisherman into the world around us.

Are you tightly united with the other true Christians around you? Do you even know who they are? Do they understand what their purpose is in the earth? Have you allowed bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, faithlessness, lack of love, unrepentance, worldliness, etc. in your life create a tear in the net? How many 'fish' have been lost?

vs:49 ***This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous***

This is an example of what it will be like at the end of the world. There will be a separating of the righteous from the wicked. For now, we must endure the wicked among us and hold forth the light of truth in the power of God's Kingdom. It is not our position to try to force a separation of righteousness from evil. That will be done at the 'appointed time'.

vs:50 ***and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

Not only will the wicked be separated, they will be destroyed in fire, deep regret and anguish for their stubborn refusal to embrace God's truth. There will be no more hope for them in their great suffering.

Wicked = those who have no regard for God's righteous standard, who live according to the dictates of their evil nature, who reject the free gift of salvation through Jesus' blood.

vs:51 ***"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.***

Do you understand? Do not go on from here until you do understand! And if you don't understand, it's because you lack the revealing power of the Holy Spirit in your life. Why? Is there hardness of heart, unrepentance, or sin in your life? Have you been too busy thinking about the things of this world? Are there too many imbedded traditional concepts and teachings? Maybe you just don't care? Jesus wants us to learn to understand and to interpret the hidden meanings of His stories, which are examples that represent truths of God's Kingdom, revealed in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit.

vs:52 ***He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."***

Most of the time when we think of treasures we think of things that are old, like antiquities, artifacts, sunken ships, etc. Those people who are students and teachers of God's law, the Old Testament, are like men who have a storeroom of rare and ancient treasure.

Meanwhile the treasures of the freshly revealed mysteries of God's Kingdom are indeed real treasures. These are things that never existed in the hearts of men before. These treasures are useful! Not just fascinating and useful only for the resale value like we normally think of buried treasures. God's fresh Kingdom treasures are priceless. They come as a gift.

A person who understands the old law and who also have received the treasures of God's Kingdom has a storehouse that is beyond comparison. Why? He has perspective! Of where man has been, where God wants him to go, and he has the 'vehicle' to get there, this is ...back to right relationship with God through Jesus!

Where is your treasure? What is your treasure? Is your treasure 'stock value' growing? Are you continually getting fresh revelation and vision from God? Are you living out God's plan in an ever-renewing source of Holy power? If not, why not?

vs:53 ***When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there.***

Just because you're in a place where your ministry is flourishing and the people are hungry doesn't mean you will always stay there. On the other hand, like Peter in his Jerusalem ministry recorded in the book of Acts, the Lord may have you stay in one ministry long-term. The issue that we need to accept is that whether we are short-term or long-term in one place, we must be ready and willing and in tune with the guiding voice of the Holy Spirit.

vs:54 ***Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked.***

Coming home! This must have stirred a lot of memories, emotions, and created a lot of interest in the community. Imagine returning to your own parent's home with 12 loyal disciples!

Jesus doesn't get sidetracked. He continues to do what He always did - preaching the gospel with God's power.

How well do you function in your own home community? Does your past behavior, influence of former friendships, or family expectations affect your ministry?

vs:55 ***"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?"***

The people found that Jesus was very different now. They had known Him as a simple, normal family member like all the rest of the community. Now He shows up completely changed. He's no longer one of the 'good ol' boys'. He doesn't meet their expectations of Him.

vs:56 ***Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"***

They just couldn't understand why He would ever want to leave them in the first place. Wasn't their community good enough for Him? Why did He think they needed to change? Hadn't they given Him opportunities, good business, good Sunday Schools etc. in the past? "Who does this young man think He is anyway?"

vs:57 ***And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."***

Instead of being open hearted to receive His message and God's Kingdom, they were offended, insulted. Their pride and preconceived ideas of Jesus kept them from God's Kingdom.

This is very important to understand! Do you have preconceived ideas about who Jesus is and how He should behave? Don't hold to traditional concepts of Jesus! He will not fit! You must change - throw out your expectations and open your heart to 'whatever' He has to give to you. They didn't understand Jesus anymore and that scared them. What if He stayed indefinitely? How could they deal with Him and His gang?

How often, in the church, people take offense at the presence of the Holy Spirit because He doesn't fit their expectations? And what are the results of rejecting God's ministry?

vs:58 ***And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.***

Lack of faith! Lack of power! Lack of miracles! Lack of God's presence! Lack!

Don't be surprised if the very people you hope and expect the most from will, in fact, be the very ones who reject you! If it happened to Jesus, it will happen to you, too!

This clearly indicates that some places will experience more miracles than other places. It also clearly explains why some places do not experience many miracles. The reason; preconceived ideas of who Jesus is, which are inaccurate or outdated and which promote knowledge of Jesus, but not faith in Jesus.

Reading books about Jesus promote knowledge, but reading the books of Jesus promote faith. Only in the books of Jesus (the Bible) can you receive direct revelation of Jesus by the Holy Spirit which cause a man to grow in faith. Other books filter out the revelation power, but may give good insight that the Holy Spirit can later use in revealing Himself to you. But men's books will also have an element of human-ness that pollutes the pure revelation and weakens faith.

Matthew 14

vs:1 ***At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus,***

What reports are people hearing about you? Does your testimony have such power that it reaches the ears of the authorities over you?

vs:2 ***and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him."***

The men in authority will draw conclusions about Jesus and can be completely wrong in their conclusion. Just because someone has a highly respected position of authority doesn't mean they are right and that their word is to be accepted as final truth.

Herod's conclusions about Jesus were very wrong. He was basing his opinion on experiences, not on fact. They were born out of guilt and fear, not out of innocence and a repentant heart.

If you harbor unrepented sin in your heart, your opinions about Jesus will not be accurate. Thus you cannot have faith that results in active power.

Is there any sin or compromised areas in your life that hinder your faith in Jesus?

vs:3-12

Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,

for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her."

Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much

that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist."

The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted

and had John beheaded in the prison.

His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother.

John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

John the Baptist had done the will of God in his ministry. In fact, according to Jesus, "There was none greater than John the Baptist"; *Matthew 11:11*. Yet despite John's faithfulness, anointing, and effectiveness, his life ends in apparent defeat, isolation, and misery.

John's obedience to his calling from God ultimately resulted in his death - the first of many who would die for their loyalty to God.

John introduced God's Kingdom on the earth. This kingdom has been on a collisions course with the worldly governments, systems, politicians, ideas, and lifestyles ever since. But even a greater battle goes on between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world in the hearts of every man, woman, and child as it collides with selfishness, rebellion, and sin. John was destroyed physically for his loyalty to God's commission, but because of his obedience the world has been forever changed.

John was killed because of the 'truth'. Truth cuts deep in the human heart. It cuts into every person no matter what position of authority they hold.

King Herod was willing to accept the truth, but his wife considered truth too high of a price to afford. Truth was destroying their marriage. Truth was shaking the whole government. What power! Yet John seems to have

hardly even understood the impact of his words on the king. He simply demanded repentance!

Repentance is for every person. It is the only way! God's Kingdom cannot come in your life without repentance!

John valued God's Kingdom more than his own life. How much do you value God's Kingdom?

John had a worldwide vision. A vision that was establishing one person at a time into God's Kingdom. How big is your vision? Is it so big that it overlooks the individual people?

How discouraging it must have been for John's disciples to have been at the peak of attention, then to be surpassed by a new world leader, Jesus, and then suddenly find themselves off the scene with their leader in prison.

There are times in our lives for rising up and times for going down. God is in charge of all our 'times'. Can you accept the 'down times' from God as well as the 'up times'?

We must realize that it was very important that John 'pass the torch' to Jesus. As John had previously prophesied, "He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less"; *John 3:30*. Likewise this should be at the very heart of any valid ministry! An attitude of dying to self-glorification in order that Jesus' name and His Kingdom might be glorified only! There is a price to be paid for this to happen and only those who are willing to die to their 'rights' can see God's Kingdom in power. Are you willing to pay that price in order to glorify and expand Jesus' name and God's Kingdom? Are you using Jesus' name and God's Kingdom to glorify your own name and kingdom (ministry)?

This series of events in the beginning verses of Chapter 14 are a clear indication of the ferocity and tremendous conflict God's Kingdom impacts on the kingdom of this world's systems under Satan's reign of deception, sin, and darkness. Our choices are simple and few! Either we live in and under the systems of this world and Satan, with the promise of eternal death and fiery punishment, or we live in God's Kingdom with all its benefits and privileges of eternal life - enduring the harassment and deadly assault of Satan's anger while serving God during our season of time on planet earth. That's it! These are your **ONLY CHOICES!**

vs:13

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.

What went through Jesus' mind when He learned of John's execution? Now He knew for sure that 'death' was part of God's plan. The 'torch' had been fully passed to Him now. He would be fully responsible to establish God's Kingdom on earth in the prepared hearts of repentant people. Instead of rushing to the platform of world attention that He had just inherited, He

withdrew into solitude. He didn't need to 'make anything happen'. It was all in God's hands and no matter how He approached His ministry, God would cause it to 'work out'.

Kingdom Lesson: When you have been called to ministry and are in the attitude and place of 'full' submission to God's will, your calling will come into reality - no matter where or what you do. But there is a condition that requires you to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit whenever He speaks and remain free from sin.

Instead of running to the crowds, Jesus tries to escape them. Yet they persist in following Jesus! Why? What did He have? He alone held the secret keys to unlock the mysteries of God's Kingdom! The people wanted to know! Why? Because in God's Kingdom is "righteousness, peace, and joy"; *Romans 14:17*. And in God's Kingdom is deliverance, healing, blessing, assurance of eternal life, God's love and kindness, etc.

It was so important to these crowds of people that they didn't even care about food or any physical thing. They just wanted in! How about you?

vs:14

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Despite Jesus desire to be alone, He put His feelings and personal needs aside in order to meet the needs of the crowds.

"...He had compassion on them..." These were people who had ruined His plan for a quiet holiday. They were nameless people. People with problems, sickness, selfish, religious, proud. Yet when Jesus saw them, He had compassion on them. And that compassion was a greater force in Jesus than His own plans, feelings, or needs.

compassion = It's a choice, and once you allow it to take root in your life, it produces very powerful action.

How did Jesus' disciples feel when their holiday was ruined? How would you feel? Actually, Jesus had gone off to be alone because He had much to think about. John had been executed and now Jesus had the full load. He thought that He needed time to think and sort out His emotions. But God had a better solution. Get busy doing what He had called Jesus to do. Obedience to God solves many problems!

Some people spend countless hours giving or receiving counsel and analysis when the real solution is to get involved in meeting the real needs of other peoples lives.

* The solution for self-pity is compassion.

vs:15

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

To the natural eye, it was obvious that a crisis was developing. There were thousands of people far out in a wilderness area with no food. The obvious solution is to send them away before they get too hungry to move. But Jesus was caught away in ministry. He was moving in compassion and in power. He was keenly aware of God's presence and what concerned the disciples was far from where His concern was.

The disciples were seeing one kind of need. Jesus was focusing on another.

We can easily see needs around us. They are obvious. But what are the needs right around us that Jesus is focusing on? These are His priorities and He does nothing to meet the needs that the disciples are so concerned about.

We need to be motivated by real compassion, not just an analytical eye to see the practical needs and obvious easy solutions. We need to focus on the root causes of the needs. The empty hearts, hopeless, unmentionable situations people are overwhelmed with everywhere around us.

Food? God fed a few million people in the waterless desert for 40 years. So food is not the real problem!

vs:16 ***Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."***

There is a saying (not in the Bible), "God helps those who help themselves". This is what the disciples were hoping for the crowd. An easy solution. But Jesus challenges the disciples with, "God helps those who help others"! This is one of the secrets of God's Kingdom! Get a hold of this one and live it!

"...You give them something to eat..."! Impossible! Yet Jesus commands it just the same! He commands it to 'normal' people who have huge needs and no resources!

vs:17 ***"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.***

After evaluation, the disciples manage to come up with just a tiny fraction of what is needed to solve the problem.

The first step in meeting the need is to receive the challenge from Jesus yourself! Take the burden on yourself - not push it on to someone else or back to Jesus.

The second step is to look at what you have instead of focusing on what you don't have!

vs:18 ***"Bring them here to me," he said.***

The third step is to take what you have and what you don't have and give it to Jesus. Release it completely.

That food could have at least been the meal for a few of the disciples. But the disciples had to put themselves in the place of need along with all the others. Giving up whatever they could have had.

vs:19 ***And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.***

Step 4; Relax! And get ready to receive.

Step 5; "Look up to heaven..." You can't do that really until you are relaxed. Focus on the miracle sources. Let faith grow in your heart.

Step 6; "give thanks..." In the middle of your great need! Be thankful for what you have and who has it in their hands. Be thankful that God can do anything, with anything.

Step 7; Allow what you had to be broken by Jesus! Your vision, resources, reputation, life itself...

Jesus had declared himself to be the 'bread of life' and only after He had allowed Himself to be broken could His life, the bread, be multiplied to meet the needs of the whole world.

Step 8; Jesus returns the broken remains back to the disciples. They thought they had shrugged their problem off on Jesus' hands! But now it comes back to them in broken pieces!

How embarrassing! In front of thousands of people, the disciples are put on the spot! They could have just eaten that little piece of bread, but that would have looked very selfish! I think they passed it out, out of sheer embarrassment! But when they did, when they obeyed Jesus' instructions regardless of 'feelings', the miracle happened! What a miracle it was!

Step 9; Out of your own need - give! Certainly the disciples felt hungry, too! Certainly they thought that of all the people present, they were the ones who deserved to eat that little bit of food. But instead - they gave it away.

vs:20 ***They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.***

In giving, they all received and had abundance left over.

Will this Kingdom principle only work in America where there are masses of 'hidden' resources? Or will it work as well - or even better - in impoverished nations? Places where there are literally massive crowds of hungry, sick, problem possessed people where the resources are so limited? Can we expect the same miracles to meet the needs?

The normal methods of meeting third world needs are to go to where the resources are, America, the wealthy, the powerful. But Jesus has just shown us that there is even a better way!

- Compassion and selflessness
- Seeing the real needs
- Giving 100% of our own resources

- Prayer and thanksgiving
- Faith and action
- Breaking and surrender
- Giving and giving and giving...

They were all full and satisfied! Jesus satisfies! Are you satisfied? Am I satisfied?

vs:21 ***The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.***

Just in case you think the crowds consisted of only a few people, for the record, the crowd was enormous! There were 5000 men, plus women, plus children. Total: 15,000? Maybe!

What was done with all of the left over bread? *Malachi 3:10!*

This miracle would have certainly stirred the hearts of the Israelites, especially because of the implications of it when compared with God's provision of manna in the wilderness. Strong evidences that Jesus is the Messiah!

No doubt the crowd of people were ready to stay in the wilderness indefinitely now that they had a secure food source. Finding food consumes a major part of a person's life!

Jesus had taught earlier (*Matthew 6:25-27*) that we are not to worry about food. Obviously that can apply to the needs of those around us as well. Do you worry about food for yourself or family? What about spiritual food?

When we observe the large number of people around us and the very small amount of our knowledge of God's Word (spiritual food), we can feel very inadequate! But the powerful message in this miracle is that if we take what God has given us and begin sharing it with those whose hearts are empty, God will multiply the revealed truth in His Word to us and we will never run out of the spiritual manna. There is always more! It doesn't matter how large the crowd or how hungry they are. When you give, you receive!

Do you ever hold back from meeting other peoples needs because you are looking at your own need first? Instead of seeing what you don't have, begin taking stock of what you do have and then give it all to Jesus. Let him multiply and give away. The end results might be an over abundance of God's provision in your own life according to His plans and purposes.

vs:22 ***Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.***

What an exciting day that the disciples had just experienced. Their hands had been touched by God's hands in a way that seemed impossible. They had been like gods themselves as they had walked among the masses of people - food miraculously appearing in their empty hands. What couldn't they do?

Jesus knew that they needed to get 'cooled down' a bit, so He sends them on a journey - alone - without Him. It should have been something they could handle without His help. Many of the disciples were professional fishermen and some of the best sailors in the region. What could go wrong that they couldn't handle.

Because of the pride of the disciples after the miracles of that day, they ignore the fact that when they are apart from Jesus, they are as helpless as anyone else. They allowed their eyes to turn away from Jesus in a moment of pride and self-reliance.

Jesus let it happen. In fact, He made it happen like this to teach them a lesson about their need for humility and total dependence on him.

vs:23 ***After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,***

Though Jesus loved His disciples, He is in no rush to be with them. This is their hour of testing and training. Plus, Jesus needed to spend some quiet time with His Father. He needed to pray. This was the source of Jesus' power and vision.

Where do you get your power, vision, and authority? From your relationship with God your Father? Or is it dependent on your relationships with people and organizations? Is it dependent on money, professionalism, or business strategies? Where is Jesus in all this? Or is your source rooted in your relationship with the Lordship Jesus in your life and every

situation? Is Jesus in the boat with you? or are you trusting in your own abilities and experience to reach your destination?

Jesus goes up on a mountain for prayer. It is a place of perspective. A place where you are in relationship to the environment around you. This is what prayer can do, too. Through prayer you can receive accurate perspective, God's perspective, of life's situations and how you should fit in.

vs:24

but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

It doesn't take long at all to get away from Jesus presence! And it doesn't take long until the disciples were suddenly in very serious trouble. They were far from the safety of land, but more seriously, they were far from the safety of the presence of the Lord.

Have you ever been there? Suddenly you realize that you're not as secure in Jesus as you thought you were. Even in the simplest things the Lord asks you to do, you need Jesus! Even the things that you know you can handle by yourself, you need Jesus!

"...buffeted by waves because the wind was against them..." When the 'winds' turn against you, when the presence of Jesus is not evident in your life, you are wide open for the opposing wind of Satan's 'buffeting'. You cannot make progress. Your experience and knowledge are useless. Only the master of the wind and waves can release you to make any progress.

The disciples had one option that they didn't use! They could have let that 'opposing' wind take them back to Jesus!

It's one thing to have vision or an assignment from the Lord. It's another thing to have the 'release and power' to progress towards reality. "Without God, we can do nothing".

vs:25

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

"During the fourth watch of the night..." Jesus knew for a long time that the disciples were in difficulty; *Mark 6:48*. Yet Jesus chose to let them continue in their struggle. 'Struggle' is humiliating. It makes you keenly aware of your need of the Lord. Jesus wanted them to learn something and so He didn't run to their rescue immediately.

Sometimes Jesus lets us face the 'winds of opposition'. There is a purpose in this, a lesson to learn. I think that the disciples were totally exhausted from their struggle to 'obey' Jesus' order to cross to the other side. Pride kept them struggling.

Had the disciples given up in the struggle, the wind would have blown them back to where Jesus was, and that wouldn't have been too bad!

"...During the fourth watch of the night..." The darkest hour of the night. The time of greatest hopelessness, confusion, and distress.

"...Jesus went to them..." Never give up hope! Jesus always knows what you are going through and how you are thinking. He won't abandon you - no matter what!

"...Walking on the lake..." The real problem for the disciples is that they were on the lake. If they were on the land, their problems and danger would have been greatly reduced. But for Jesus, being on the lake is just as

secure as being on the land. What brings trouble and danger, opposition and frustration in our own lives is 'nothing' to Jesus. Being on the water which was the greater danger to the disciples, brought to them the greater miracle of Jesus coming to them on the water.

He comes to us, walking over our troubles, in the thick of the storm, darkness, confusion, and hopelessness.

vs:26

When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

It seems that the disciples were in total distress. Their thinking was wholly negative, dark, fearful, and hopeless. How at the point of their hopelessness the situation gets even more complicated by an apparition of a ghost approaching them. They most likely thought it was a demon or a death angel. They thought that the end had come for them.

How desperately they must have longed for the presence of Jesus. How embarrassing that they couldn't even row across the lake. Professional fishermen! And even this simple task was impossible without Him. They were failures and must have felt guilt ridden about it as they came to realize how arrogant they had been earlier in the afternoon as they grew bread and fish in the palms of their hands.

'Jesus must be so angry with us' they might have been thinking. Now He is releasing us from His protection.

- Can you see how confused a person's thinking can become when they are separated from Jesus?
- We cannot face life's challenges and approach them with accurate understanding without Jesus. We need His perspective! Like the perspective Jesus had from His prayer 'hide-away' on the mountainside!

When the disciples finally see Jesus approaching their boat, they totally fail to recognize Him at first!

- Sometimes Jesus comes to us in the way we fear the most. The very one we are crying out for gives us the worst fright when He arrives!

The storm of fear, struggle, distress, pride, guilt, all cause a distortion of the truth. The disciples knew Jesus better than anyone else, yet they could not recognize Him at the time they needed Him the most. They may have thought that Jesus would be subject to the same forces of the storm and therefore could not possibly come to their rescue.

Have you ever felt that your situation was so difficult and hopeless that even Jesus would be unable to rescue you?

What are the storms that you are facing today?

Traveling with Jesus, though exciting at times, may also mean confusion, fear, and taking big risks. And when those times come, don't be disappointed because of wrong concepts of what you expected from your journey with Jesus. Rather, be happy! This is your growing time! There is purpose in it if your situation is a result from your obedience to the Lord.

vs:27

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Jesus is not the author of fear. Not being in His presence brings fear though! And the confusion of trying to function apart from Him causes us to get wrong concepts and perspective. That is what causes fear!

Don't be surprised when Jesus shows up in your situation in the most unexpected ways. He's not bound to operate according to our expectations or what we've been taught for generations.

No matter how bad your situation, no matter how hopeless it is, no matter how hard you have struggled to overcome it in your own strength... "Take courage! Don't be afraid!" Jesus is here, too!

vs:28 ***"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."***

Peter knows the secret! To be with Jesus, no matter what, is the most important thing in life.

Peter was still uncertain if what he was seeing was actually Jesus and not a real ghost. He knew also that whatever Jesus did, He always would include His disciples. In this way he could know the true nature of the 'ghost'.

vs:29 ***"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.***

Peter gets out of the boat. This was his only security. His whole life depended on it. Yet he climbs out of the boat and lowers himself into the very thing he fears the most! Why? Because he made a choice. He chose to put his trust no longer in the security of the boat, but rather in the security of Jesus' command... "Come". One word! But it was the word of God! "Come!" 'Come' to play on the water? 'Come' to show off in front of his friends? 'Come' to prove how spiritual Peter was? No! 'Come' simply because everything you need in life is found along side Jesus. Security, joy, love, peace, hope, etc. And in coming to Jesus, Peter had to leave behind his former security - the boat, his companions, and his pride.

We all encounter storms in this life. There is only one place - one place alone - where we are truly safe and secure. And getting to that place may require great risk! That place is with Jesus. There is a big difference in traveling towards the vision the Lord has put before you using men's methods (the boat) and Jesus methods.

Men's methods require tried and proven techniques, organization, and human knowledge. Jesus methods - - well, He can do anything He wants because He is God and the power of His word created everything. Everything is in His command including your ability to reach the goal He has directed you to reach.

Peter walked on the water! He rose above all his fears! He walked towards Jesus. What a powerful testimony - to be like Jesus and walk with him through the storms of this life!

vs:30 ***But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"***

There is a condition required to be able to walking over the storms with Jesus. You must keep your eyes on Him! Never wavering! Like Elisha focused on Elijah; *II Kings 2:9-13*. No matter how big the waves get, no matter how ridiculous your methods may look to those around you, no matter how strange Jesus appears at the moment - keep your eyes on Him and you'll be safe. But take your eyes off of Him for just one moment, just

a glance to try to understand what and how you are doing - and your faith will falter, your fears overwhelm and you'll be submerged in the midst of the very thing you fear the most and which should have been your transport to Jesus.

What are you looking at? The impossibilities? Are you hearing the advice of the people who are in the same boat as you are in who are motivated by fear and distress? Or are you established in the 'impossible' through the simple word of God?

Now Peter is in real trouble! The end is certain! No boat. No miracles. Death has opened its jaws and is swallowing him up. He could not make it to Jesus on his own strength, nor in his own faith! Yet one hope remained. The hope that Jesus would have compassion. The hope of Jesus saving love!

Peter screams out, "Lord, save me!" Total humility. Total surrender. Total dependence.

Jesus certainly was some distance away from Peter when he began to sink. Otherwise, like a drowning man, Peter would have grabbed Jesus!

vs:31

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

"Immediately..." When we call on Jesus out of the depths of our heart (not out of a religious incantation), Jesus steps in! His saving power can really save! His saving grace covers any and every situation, no matter why or how we got into it in the first place.

"...Jesus reached out his hand and caught him..." How wonderful Peter felt as the strength of Jesus pulled him up out of his fear, distress, and death struggle.

"...Little faith."... "Little faith."... "Little faith."...

Little faith = faith mixed with doubt!

What makes us doubt? Jesus asks Peter, "Why?"

If Peter, having little faith, walked on the stormy water, what could be accomplished with 'big' faith? So why don't we have big faith?

Kingdom lesson: If we want to walk with Jesus through every situation, it requires 'faith'. This is a fact. Faith in Jesus is the key necessary for unlocking the gate to the garden of God's Kingdom.

How can you get faith? *Romans 10:17*; Faith comes by hearing God's Word and believing it. Faith is worthless though, unless it is verified by 'action'; *James 2:17*.

Therefore, if partaking of the blessings of God's Kingdom requires faith, then a person must also be active (actions based on faith according to God's Word and in obedience to God's Word) in God's Kingdom - carrying out the commands of God's Word and living in His promises by faith.

Our greatest enemy in God's Kingdom is 'DOUBT'. What is the source of doubt? Satan! Why? Because he knows our potential in God's Kingdom and therefore makes his greatest effort to cause us to doubt. 'Doubt' what?

Doubt:

1. That Jesus really loves us.
2. That He really forgives us in spite of our most recent sins.
3. That God's Word is really true for us personally.
4. By sidetracking us from focusing on knowing Jesus and His will.
5. By confusing our understanding of Jesus with religious traditions.
6. Fear of being different from the world or religious peers.
7. Love of 'things'.
8. Worry.
9. Laziness.
10. Sin and self-centeredness.

Find out what causes you to doubt and then overcome it! This is vital for a life of active faith with Jesus.

vs:32-33 ***And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.***

Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

When Jesus comes into your situation and into the 'boat' of your life, the storms subside and you are left without your fear in the presence of Almighty God, the author of peace. What is left to do, but 'worship'!

If Jesus is in your life, are you worshipping Him? Or do you take Him for granted, ignoring the fact that He is holding back the storms of life? If Jesus were to leave your life, can you imagine the storms and troubles that would sweep over you? Remember that Jesus with you keeps you safe from the storms. Worship Him! Don't take Him for granted!

Worship = to acknowledge to God through various means who Jesus is, the Son of God, and to live according to His will and in right attitude according to what we've acknowledged.

vs:34 ***When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret.***

Altogether, they crossed over to their destination. This is the only way you can fulfill the purposes of Jesus in your life... with Him.

vs:35 ***And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him***

When the people saw Jesus... word of His presence spread. No advertising needed! Why? Because Jesus had what the people needed, without charge! We must do the same!

Can people see Jesus in your life? What is Jesus doing, giving, through you?

vs:36 ***and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.***

Jesus did nothing except to be there! It was the faith of those around that brought the miracles. When they touched Him! Not when Jesus touched them! In fact the people didn't even touch Jesus, they only touched His clothing!

Matthew 15

vs:1 ***Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked,***

Jesus' ministry has rocketed ahead in power and in fame. His name has become a household word. It seems that the Kingdom of God is about to explode into existence, the answer to the cry of the human heart. Then the religious leaders, the ones who have claimed to understand everything there is to know about God, His relationship and plans for humanity, come to 'chat' with Jesus.

They came to Jesus! That is what Jesus message has been - "Come unto me"! But there is a big difference in the motive of these leaders in coming Jesus. They want to either bring Jesus down or bring Him under their control.

vs:2 ***"Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"***

"Why don't you do things the way we always do things? Why don't you respect the 'truth' we have had handed down from those who have known God? Why do you teach others to 'be different'?"

"The traditions of the elders" are more than the rules for governing the Jewish nation. "The traditions of the elders" refers to a system built on human knowledge that confines God and all His power and wisdom into a neat little package that can be manipulated to accommodate the sin and hypocrisy of the world.

"Traditions" are like a magic potion that enslave the religious society to fear and respect the men who have exalted themselves with research and thus claim to understand God. Traditions limit the mind, limit mans relationship to God, limit God's power, and hold men in a death grip of fear!

The Jewish leaders were jealous because Jesus was not under their spell of fear and Jesus was also leading the nation away from those fears of failing to honor the traditions. Remember there is a big difference between fear of men and respectful fear of God and His Word.

When you follow Jesus you must be prepared to break from the fear and traditions of religious men. There will be confrontation! But you cannot follow Jesus and continue to hold to traditions of men that contradict the Word and Spirit of Truth.

vs:3 ***Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?"***

Jesus frequently answers the questions that are designed to undermine Him with a question of His own. Jesus could do this because He knew His own authority from God and the pretense of authority offered by the guardians of the traditions.

"Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your traditions?"

Can you distinguish the difference between men's traditions of religion and the Word of God? Traditions can actually keep you from right relationship with God! Traditions keep you in fear and under the spell of religious manipulation.

We must keep the subject of traditions in proper perspective. Traditions themselves are not bad. It is in keeping of wrong traditions based on fear that is wrong.

Religious traditions may be based on God's Word, but are twisted to benefit men's authority or organization. True religious traditions are based on the commandments of God and lead a man to righteous relationship with God, love, and respect of the Christian family.

It is a serious business to hold or enforce traditions above God's commands or in a distortion of God's Word.

I must ask again, "What do you hold as God's Word that are only man-made religious traditions which have gone beyond the commands of God? (Remember, don't throw out the good traditions along with the bad ones!)

vs:4 ***For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'***

Jesus isn't just speaking with abstract comments. He has a case in point. He begins His argument on the solid foundation of God's Word. Jesus starts out with, "God says..."

vs:5 - 6 ***But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father]' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.***

But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,'

Then He continues by repeating what the religious traditions are saying, "You say..." This is the real issue about traditions; God's Word against men's word.

Religious traditions twist the truth to benefit man's sinful heart! In this case, greed and love of money. Why? Because these religious leaders know that the 'gift' they are giving in 'devotion' to God', will ultimately go back into their own pocket! They have used God's Word, twisting it to benefit themselves, rather than honoring God and His Word, or their parents (for that matter) who were often left in desperate situations.

The bottom line on the subject of religious traditions: You cancel the power and blessing of God's Kingdom in your life in exchange for a self-serving system that manipulates people under a pretense of representing God. You cannot have both! You cannot receive the benefits of God's Kingdom and be a religious manipulator or one who is bound by fear to a system of religious traditions.

vs:7 ***You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:***

Jesus goes a step further! He identifies publicly the truth of the men who propagate religious traditions.

"Hypocrites" = (Webster's dictionary) a pretender, a person who pretends to be what he is not; one who pretends to be better than he really is, or to be pious, virtuous etc., without really being so.

Again Jesus backs up His statement with God's Word, the very word the leaders pretend to honor is the very word that speaks against them.

vs:8-9 ***"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."***

Jesus might have said it like this:

"They act like they love me. They sing so nicely and say all the right platitudes ...on Sunday! But they do this with alternative motives. They don't really love me. They speak and sing for the attention they can get from other people. They act like they love and worship me. But because of the condition of their heart, we can have no relationship. I cannot give them the blessings of My Kingdom. So what do they have left? Self-centered hearts caught in a system of religious 'play acting'."

vs:10 ***Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand."***

"Listen and understand..." Very important message that requires a response. In fact, all of God's Word needs to be heard and understood by you.

Are there parts of God's Word that you don't understand? What are they? Are there parts of God's Word you would rather not even hear?

vs:11 ***What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'"***

Unclean = unholy, unfit for acceptance by God.

The Jewish tradition had certain things that, if eaten, made a person 'unclean'. Thus peoples lives were focused on what they ate and bound by fear of accidentally eating the wrong thing.

But Jesus pointed out that God doesn't care what a person eats, that this is not what makes them 'unclean'. Rather, what makes a person unclean is already inside a person, in their heart, and it's revealed by listening to what they speak about. Your words confirm the 'uncleanness' of your heart.

vs:12 ***Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"***

The disciples respond, not by examining their own hearts, but by examining the hearts of the Pharisees and Jesus' heart! They certainly failed to 'listen and understand'.

Instead they accused Jesus of offending the religious leaders. They accuse Jesus of being critical and hard on the religious leaders. But at the same time, if we look closely, we can see exactly what is in the hearts of the disciples by the words they have just spoken.

We can see that they are more concerned about 'saving face', not offending the people who have authority over them. The disciples are ruled by 'fear of men'. They have not yet learned that God's Word is a higher authority than men's traditions. It even seems that they do not remember that Jesus is God's son and that He is Truth. They want to teach the 'Teacher'! They want to manipulate Jesus to fit their concept of what they think Jesus should be.

vs:13 ***He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots."***

But Jesus does not apologize for 'offending' the leaders. In fact, Jesus takes His accusations a step further! He makes it clear that the authority,

teachings, traditions and systems of the organized religion of that time was non-other than a product of men, not of God!

In other words, if you want to understand God, know Him, and be a part of His kingdom. It will not have anything to do with the 'organized religion' built on men's methods and traditions.

Furthermore, Jesus declares that God was going to totally destroy the very heart of the Jewish religious and social system by cutting it off from its 'life source'. Traditions are 'death'! Men's methods to contact God are 'death'! They are like a dry, lifeless bramble bush blowing about in a dry, lifeless desert.

vs:14 ***Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."***

"Leave them"! Stop trying to honor the religious traditions. Stop trying to please the religious leaders! Have nothing to do with them! They don't know where they are going, though they like to act as if they are clear on where they are going. If you follow them, they won't lead you to God! They will only lead you blindly on to the place of total entrapment within the system of fear that they themselves are caught in. Get away while you can!

vs:15 ***Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."***

Very simply Peter asks Jesus to explain the meaning of the story He had just told. Peter knew that he should have been able to understand, but the truth is, he didn't understand and he wanted to know hidden truth.

Do you want to just hear the story or do you really want to understand? Ask!

vs:16 ***"Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them.***

Peter must take a rebuke for having spoken up, but at least Jesus then explains.

We also would not be able to understand the meanings of Jesus' stories except for the revealing of God's Word through the Holy Spirit; *John 14:26*.

vs:17-20 ***"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?"***

But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man `unclean.'

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

These are what make a man `unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him `unclean.'"

What you eat will not affect your spirit. What affects your spirit is what is secretly harbored in the heart. Ultimately that secret is revealed by the words we speak and finally erupts into ungodly actions.

God is Spirit and we touch God by the Spirit that lives in us. If our spirit is unclean, how can we be united with a pure and Holy God Spirit?

What makes our spirit unclean? The inbred 'seed of sin'. The influences of the world around us. The weakness of our will to enforce a Godly and Holy Spirit discipline within us.

How can we change our spirit from unclean and unacceptable to one that is righteous and acceptable? Act like we're good? No! We must be overcome, filled, baptized in a spirit of holiness by the Holy Spirit Himself.

vs:21 ***Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.***

Jesus withdrew. There comes a time when we need to get out of sight. Don't worry about what other people think or how it will affect your support.

Withdrawing = change of ministry

vs:22 ***A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."***

Canaanites = people who were ungodly, unclean, unacceptable for God's blessings.

Crying out = desperate, unashamed, unconcerned about her own unworthiness

"Mercy" was this woman's only hope. She was unworthy to get anything from God, yet she 'hoped' that mercy would override the law.

She wanted mercy for herself because of the effects of a demon-possessed daughter on her life. Not only did her daughter suffer terribly because of demon possession, but so did the rest of the family.

Demon possession = terrible suffering!

By the way, where was the father? Did his absence from this family open the door for demon-possession of his child? Actually, we are not given the answer.

vs:23 ***Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."***

Jesus is silent. Of course He heard the woman's cries of distress, but He chose to not answer. Jesus' disciples interpreted Jesus silence to mean that He rejected the woman and they wanted to get rid of her. She was spoiling their nice retreat.

Though Jesus remains silent and all the "Christians" are against her, she keeps 'hoping - with action'. She continues to cry out, to press her case before Jesus.

Kingdom Lesson: Don't give up just because nothing happens the first time you present your case to the Lord! Just because you 'feel' unworthy to receive anything from the Lord, 'hope' remains. Don't give up. Put action to your faith! Don't let the opinions of religious people destroy your faith! Keep pressing in to the Lord with it.

vs:24 ***He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."***

Jesus declares the boundaries of His ministry that appeared to exclude the Canaanite women.

* Do you know what your mission is - and - do you know what your mission is not?

"Lost sheep of Israel" = The chosen people of God who have lost their identity, purpose, and contact with God. People trying to hold to a course, but with no intention of ever arriving! Are there any Christians who don't know what their purpose is in this life of what God has promised them? Any confused Christians? Are you one of them? Do you need to be 'found' and set on the right path again? Who can do this?

vs:25 ***The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.***

This unworthy woman is persistent. She knew all was hopeless except what hope she could find in Jesus. She knelt in submission and faith. As long as Jesus is there, there is hope, regardless of what has been said by Jesus or the disciples.

"Lord, help me..." Go ahead! That thing that has held you in hopelessness and helplessness - surrender! Not the thing or situation! But yourself!
"Lord, help me"! No conditions. No expectations. No suggestions of how you want Him to help you.

vs:26 ***He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."***

Jesus tells her why He shouldn't help her! (Normally we'd expect that of the devil - not Jesus!) Jesus refers to her as a "Dog"! The woman is already broken and fully surrendered to Jesus' Lordship. Why subject her to this?

vs:27 ***"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."***

In essence, the woman agrees with Jesus. "Yes, I'm a dog, but even dogs get something!

Jesus has tested her. Was she truly broken and humble? Would she accept whatever 'truth' Jesus spoke concerning her? Yes, she understands her unworthiness, but she also understands the power of mercy.

Mercy can have no limits! And the woman lays all her hopes on that limitless mercy that rules and reigns in the very deepest part of Jesus' nature.

That mercy breaks and destroys the legalistic boundaries of Jesus' ministry!

Mercy is more powerful than the law! So let mercy rule. Hope in mercy!
But live within the law of God's Word.

vs:28 ***Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.***

It was a battle for this woman to get what she needed. She reasoned with God and moved His hand! Why? She had faith that was confirmed by her actions. Actions of humility and confidence in the character of God's mercy. Nothing could stop her faith - not even an insult from the very one she hoped in.

Most people would have crumbled in disappointment at Jesus' rebuff, but this woman pressed on and overcame even the limits of Jesus' ministry!

Nothing is impossible with God!

Nothing!

"Your request is granted!" never, never, never give up! There is always hope no matter how unworthy you may think you are.

"The daughter was healed that very hour." It was the daughter that was really in trouble! She was not even around or able to ask anything of Jesus. Yet we can see that we can intervene on behalf of someone else until the victory comes.

vs:29 ***Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down.***

Jesus' destination: a mountain. His plan: sit down! God would do the rest.

vs:30 ***Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.***

It would not have been very easy for many or most of the diseased people to get to Jesus. Would it not have been better for Jesus to go to a more accessible area?

Jesus came part of the way. Those in need must also come part of the way. What are your needs? How serious are you in getting to Jesus for His help? This is the test!

No matter what the case, Jesus healed them as they were placed at His feet.

Are you helping others get up that mountain of discouragement, doubt, and hopelessness to where Jesus is? People in distress need help from you to get to Jesus' feet, and from Jesus they will receive help to eliminate their source of distress. Our job is to help those in distress and need to come to a place of hope in Jesus' power.

vs:31 ***The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.***

The end result of any ministry must be focusing attention on Jesus and realizing who He is - to bring glory and praise to God.

Too many ministers or ministries draw attention on themselves, even naming their 'ministry' after their own name!

vs:32 ***Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."***

This is real spiritual hunger. So hungry for God, His power, truth etc. that they ignore the need for physical food. For three days Jesus' ministry had held them captive

Jesus' concerns were always for the needs of the people. He could have focused on the results of His ministry, successes, personal popularity etc., but for Jesus this was meaningless. His only concern was to meet the needs of the people and to demonstrate to them the love and power of God and the arrival of His kingdom.

This is still Jesus' character. He is very concerned about your needs. What are you hungry for? Spiritual or physical food? Jesus is concerned about your need for both kinds.

vs:33 ***His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"***

The disciples first evaluate the situation from a logical point of view. They come up with a very negative response. It seems that they completely forgot about the recent miracles of feeding the 5000 men and families in the wilderness.

They forgot that in the presence of God all things are possible. Circumstances are unimportant. When there is a need, Jesus has the provision to meet it ...no matter what it is.

When did Jesus ever say, "I can't help you because I lack..." Only our sin and unbelief hinder us.

vs:34 ***"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish."***

Jesus refuses to focus on the negatives, the impossibilities, the lacks, and our perceived limitations. But rather, Jesus demands us to take stock of what we do have.

In your mind you may think of much that you don't have. You can't do ministry because you lack training, or finances, or a clear process to fulfill your vision. But when Jesus is with you, what more do you need? You need compassion!!

Kingdom Lesson:

- Compassion gives birth to vision.
- Vision gives birth to strategy.
- Strategy gives birth to knowledge of your inabilities.
- Your inabilities bring you to Jesus.
- Coming to Jesus gives birth to faith.
- Faith gives birth to God's miraculous power.
- God's power brings glory to His name!
- And that is why we are here!

The disciples didn't have to look very long before they responded. Seven loaves of bread and a few fish. Not much for 4000 famished tummies!

vs:35 ***He told the crowd to sit down on the ground.***

Relax! Jesus is now in charge. You have finally stopped looking at what you don't have and have offered what little you do have.

vs:36 ***Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people.***

Jesus takes the little we have (if we give it to Him), and gives thanks to God (for compassion, vision, and provisions). Then Jesus takes what was once ours and breaks it up to share among the disciples. Probably now each disciple has an equal share of the bread and fish - just enough to satisfy their own need. They must now choose to pass on to the other people or keep for themselves what was already once their own (and they had need for food, too).

They had to give away the little they have - twice! Once to Jesus and once to the people in need!

vs:37 ***They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.***

The miracle:

1. They caught Jesus' vision.
2. They stopped focusing on the impossibilities and lack, and evaluate what they had.
3. In spite of their own need, they gave everything they had to Jesus.
4. Now that they had nothing (literally) Jesus meets their need, but does it according to His plan. Despite their own desperate need, the disciples continue to treasure Jesus' vision and in obedience to Jesus they give away what they have - again!
5. Then, after all of these 'foundation miracles', the big one comes. The food grows, multiplies and satisfies everybody's hunger! And in the end the disciples are not just provided for their immediate need, but they are smothered with abundance!

vs:38 ***The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children.***

Four thousand men - plus women - plus children = an immeasurable number of people.

vs:39 ***After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.***

Jesus does not allow the crowd to establish a church around the experience. He sends them away and God's name will be glorified wherever they go!

Matthew 16

vs:1 ***The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.***

The religious leaders come to Jesus! Good news? No! They came to test Jesus. They didn't come in faith to receive, but they came in disbelief to challenge Jesus to change His thinking.

People 'come to Jesus' with a variety of motives. They are the ones who need to be tested, not Jesus!

It is not unusual for a 'believer' in a season of doubt, to want to see a sign that will encourage and give direction.

vs:2 ***He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,'***

Jesus answers by building His response on what they already know.

vs:3 ***and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.***

Jesus points out that there are signs all around that people are able to easily understand. But the sign the unbelieving religious leaders are looking for cannot be understood by them. Why?

vs:4 ***A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.***

The reason: Unbelief! Every sign that they ever needed to prove whom Jesus was had already been given to them. But because of their unbelief, there was no revelation from the Holy Spirit.

People who need signs are "wicked and adulterous"! Miracle chasers, rather than disciples, followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "And these signs will accompany those who believe!" *Mark 16:17*

Signs come for those who believe. They are not for proof to the unbeliever.

The sign of Jonah: Jesus is pointing towards this as a parallel and prophecy that He would soon fulfill. Jonah was three days in a whale's belly before bringing repentance to Ninevah. Jesus would be three days in the tomb before salvation would be completed for the world.

Jesus makes it very clear that we are not to chase after miracles or unusual experiences for the purpose of proving something. Rather His challenge remains the same to 'follow me'.

We are to believe in who Jesus is - by faith. And faith comes, not from what our eyes see, but what our ears hear. That is, hearing with spiritual ears, the Word of God; *Romans 10:17*. ...Then the miracles and signs will come.

vs:5 **When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread.**

Like most of us, the disciples were sometimes forgetful. Amazingly, out of 12 grown men, not one could remember the essentials. In their spiritual laziness they just assumed that one of the others would see to the details of their needs.

vs:6 ***"Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."***

Jesus makes a comment based on this situation. He warns them about the 'yeast' of the religious leaders. Yeast is a small, but powerful ingredient in bread that causes it to grow in size - to 'puff up'.

vs:7 ***They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread."***

Jesus' comment goes over the heads of the disciples. But they thought Jesus might be scolding them for forgetting to bring along food (which they rightly deserved).

Instead of asking Jesus what He meant, they tried to figure it out for themselves. Were they too proud or embarrassed to ask?

* How much time and energy is spent by churches discussing 'issues'.

How much more appropriate for churches to spend that time in prayer.

In order to get the accurate meaning of God's Word we need revelation from the One who speaks the word. Discussion of God's Word based on humanistic interpretation will result in error.

vs:8 ***Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?"***

'Discussions' are often a result of 'little faith'.

Why did Jesus say they had 'little faith'?

- vs:9-10 ***Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?***
Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?
 It is because they did not understand the meaning of His illustration; they did not have the faith to receive the revelation of God's Word.
 Don't you remember...? We need to consider the long-range implications of God's work in our lives. The Holy Spirit in us will help us to remember; *John 14:26.*
- vs:11 ***How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."***
 When Jesus speaks, He speaks to our spirit, not to our intellect. The words He uses often are only representative of a spiritual parallel. Thus the word 'yeast' is used to describe something that takes place in a person's spirit. More specifically, Jesus warns about something that affects a person's spirit that comes from people bound by religious and traditional thinking.
- vs:12 ***Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.***
 Now the disciples understand! The yeast is the effect of the teachings of the religious leaders on their lives. It seems like something small that won't have any affect or make any difference in their lives. But according to Jesus, a little religious thinking will saturate the pure Word of God and completely alter the effects of God's Kingdom!
 Be on guard against people who teach God's Word, but do not live in God's Kingdom truths. Stay away! Be aware of books and teaching tapes that glorify a person's interpretation of God's Word above the author of God's Word!
 A little compromise will not go away without affecting or infecting your whole ministry!
 Jesus is against teaching that doesn't reflect the true nature of God. Are we against that kind of teaching, too? Can you tell the difference?
- vs:13 ***When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"***
 What people think and say, the popular opinion, and what may sound nice, right, and good, may actually be very far from the truth.
 Truth is not based on common belief regardless of what current philosophies and society may propagate.
- vs:14 ***They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."***
 Is your opinion about Jesus based on a concept of someone who has affected your life or whom you admire? That is no reason to hold it as truth!
- vs:15 ***"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"***
 Who do you say Jesus is? What do you think? Do you even have an opinion, or do you just accept what is the popular opinion of your peers?
- vs:16 ***Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."***

It's one thing to 'believe' the right thing. It's another thing to have that belief affect your actions, opinions, and nature as we'll see happened to Peter shortly.

vs:17 ***Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.***

What a blessing to have this great revelation! It can only come because of God's power working in a person's heart. What a wonderful miracle! Have you experienced it?

We cannot force someone to believe. We can only pressure a person to pretend to believe. This was what (in part) irritated Jesus so much about the religious leaders. They were forcing people to pretend to love God. That definitely is not the way to enter God's Kingdom!

vs:18 ***And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.***

The revelation of Jesus' true identity is so powerful that it completely changes a person's life. They have a new nature so unlike their former nature that you really need a new name! No longer are they on a search, now they are on a quest! Questions are answered, the issue of 'destiny' resolved.

Rock = believing Jesus is the Son of God

'I will build' = Jesus has a vision. He is building something using lives of believers. This is ultimate purpose and fulfillment for a Christian!

'My church' = a temple truly worthy of God's presence! It's Jesus church! It's His project! He is the one building it, not me! He is the one with the 'blueprint' and time schedule.

The church that Jesus is constructing will be the target of Satan's greatest attack! It's war! But if we let Jesus build the church, it will be so well constructed and protected that even Satan's strongest assault cannot make a dent in it.

Whose church do you belong to? The church Jesus is building or a church built by men's opinions, religious systems, and for their institutions of self-glory?

vs:19 ***I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."***

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...". It will happen in the future. 'Believing' Jesus is the Son of God is the first step to receiving those 'keys'. The disciples did not begin operating in the power of the Kingdom of Heaven with real authority until after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit!

"Whatever you bind on earth...". This will be in reference to the church in general as well as on the personal, individual level.

What is bound that needs to be loosened? What is loose that needs to be bound? Keys are used for locking and unlocking.

* The 'Kingdom of God' = locking and unlocking, loosening and binding (at our command) forces that are somehow connected to the heavenly realm.

What kind of responsibility is this? What kind of power is this? Do we have any idea of what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven?

How did Peter 'loosen and bind' later, after Jesus had ascended to heaven? The 'Book of Acts' is an account of the believers living and serving in the 'Kingdom of Heaven' while living on 'earth'.

Keys = power through the name of Jesus, power of the Holy Spirit, power of God's promised Word, power by 'faith'; *Revelation 1:18*.

vs:20 ***Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.***

vs:21 ***From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.***

Jesus only reveals truth as we are able to handle it. Up to this point in time, Jesus hadn't clearly shared His long-range purpose to the disciples. If He had, they most likely would have left Him.

Jesus was very clear about His destiny.

He must 'go' and 'suffer'

He must 'die' and 'be resurrected'

This does not sound like successful Christianity at all! Yet, we also need to commit to make this same journey if the Lord would require it; *Matthew 16:24-25*.

This is a 'faith journey'! Anybody could, with enough determination and purpose, 'go, suffer, and die'. But to claim 'resurrection' is maximum faith!

vs:22 ***Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"***

Peter, one moment basking in the joy of revealed truth, has no faith to accept the full truth. He had other plans for Jesus. He 'believed' Jesus was the Son of God, yet thought he knew the truth better than Jesus. Now he must receive another revelation!

What preconceived ideas do you have about Jesus? Do you have set in your mind an idea of how Jesus is going to be expressed in you and through you? Are you willing to accept something very different? Can you say, "Not my will, but Your will be done in my life?"

vs:23 ***Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."***

Peter had found so great a treasure in Jesus. What else would you do with a treasure then to protect it. Yet when Peter vows to protect Jesus, he is severely rebuked!

The 'Kingdom principle' Peter missed was that Jesus, the 'Anointed One', is not a treasure for us to possess, use, or protect. Jesus is a treasure we surrender to, to be possessed, used, and protected by Him. What is your relationship with Jesus like? Is He there to be used by you or are you there to be used by Him? Having a correct relationship with Him is very essential!

Jesus immediately clarifies that if we think we can use Jesus to accomplish our own goals then we are actually, clearly being used by Jesus' enemy, Satan! Yet Peter thought he was doing what was right.

Jesus' vision and plan must be our vision and plan. If not, we cannot expect Jesus' blessing. You cannot share in His victory!

What is in your mind? Your own plans? Or are you committed to simply follow Jesus - no matter where He might lead you and no matter what it might cost?

What do you normally think about? What does God think about? Are your minds together?

vs:24 ***Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.***

Jesus clarifies what it means to follow Him. It's more than just tagging along. It means that we must choose to become 'one', united with Jesus in His purpose and in His submission to Father God.

You cannot follow Jesus and remain attached to the things behind you or in your past. You must deny your rights of attachment and make a clean break. The cost is going to be very high! But the gain is eternal. It is life! It is fullness of purpose! It is to know the will and mind of God for your life!

The process of 'Following Jesus':

1. You must want to follow Jesus.
2. You must surrender your personal rights, ambitions, possessions, goals...
3. You must commit yourself to Jesus' vision.
 - You must be willing to sacrifice your own life in obedience to the will of God through Jesus.
 - You must commit to Jesus' specific plan that He has for your life, regardless of what your peers might be called to do.
 - You must shoulder your own responsibility regardless of how humiliating or painful.
4. You must commit to go where Jesus goes, do what Jesus does, say what Jesus says...
 - You must commit to accurately represent Jesus Christ on the earth.

vs:25 ***For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.***

The people who think they can find happiness, purpose, and success in their life by their self-centered strategies and resources - will completely fail! But if you are willing to lay aside your right of self-centeredness in exchange for taking up the goals and vision of Jesus, you will indeed find fullness of happiness, purpose, and success!

Instead of being left wasted and drained from a life of struggle and stress, you can be energized by the living Spirit of God because of your willingness to empty yourself of selfishness, thus creating an openness for God's presence.

vs:26 ***What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?***

We must never forget that man is an eternal being. His soul will forever live in either heaven or hell. So why strain in selfish ambition to gain a pretense of success on earth when it will cost you an eternity apart from God?

If you are unclear about the definition of success, a successful person is the one who searches for and finally enters into the realities God's Kingdom both here on earth and in heaven. That is the Wendell Martin definition of SUCCESS!

What is a person's soul worth? How long is eternity? What could you possibly give or pay that would buy your way out of an eternity in hell?

vs:27 ***For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.***

There will come a time of discovery, a time when the truth of every human hearts' motives and deeds will be exposed! You may think that you can hide your self-centeredness behind religious activities. But it won't work! Jesus and all the angels of heaven will come to evaluate YOU and reward you accordingly for whatever you have done.

What kind of rewards do you hope to receive? What are you doing with your life that God will find worthy of reward? Are you carrying the same commitment, vision, and sacrifice of Jesus?

vs:28 ***I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."***

The truth is that some people will see Jesus in the power of His Kingdom before they die!

(There are several possible ways in understanding this statement):

1. Some would not die until they physically saw the power of God's Kingdom operating on earth. In fact, only Judas Iscariot was dead before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in power on the Day of Pentecost.
2. Death may have represented a spiritual or physical death and 'seeing God's Kingdom' as a revelation of the truth of the return of Jesus Christ as experienced by John in the 'Book of Revelation'.

Jesus had prayed, "Thy kingdom come...". Now He declares that it will arrive! This prophesy is fulfilled when Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, comes in full power on the Day of Pentecost and establishes God's Kingdom, His church, in the hearts of the disciples.

Matthew 17

vs:1 ***After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.***

One week after Peter declares Jesus to be the Son of God, Jesus calls him and two other disciples for a special revelation which seals Peter's confession. Of the 12 disciples, Jesus lets only three of the disciples be a

part of this very special event. Peter, James, and John seem to have a closer relationship with Jesus than the other disciples. This results in greater revelation and involvement with Jesus.

Going up a mountain is not easy. It's hard work and all you see is the ground rising up in front of you. There is little, if any, perspective and it is difficult to determine where the top is. This is like life's situations that Jesus leads us into from time to time. Not everyone can understand what it is you're experiencing either. They are happily resting in the valley.

Jesus leads us to these places. We don't need to feel that we are there without him.

vs:2 ***There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.***

Once you arrive at the top you have a wonderful experience. You have perspective! You can see where you have been and how the situation relates to the region around you.

'Mountain top' experiences with Jesus don't just happen! You need to leave the comforts of the 'valley' and break away from the routines and norm of the accepted systems. You need to persist in pressing, with deliberation, in Jesus' footsteps despite the discomforts of the journey.

When they arrive at their destination, not before or after, the disciples suddenly get a revelation of who Jesus really is. Unexpected! They saw Jesus in a new way. He was so much more than they had ever realized. He really was God! Suddenly the struggle of the journey was forgotten. All eyes were fully focused on Jesus.

They see Jesus in His glory, not as another tired leader like themselves, but full of glory and power.

vs:3 ***Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.***

Moses = Old Testament; law, humanities sinfulness

Elijah = New Testament; grace, power of the Holy Spirit

The three disciples must have felt very insignificant. They suddenly realized that they were caught in a grand plan from heaven of which their own little ambitions and opinions were of very little consequence.

How important are your plans? Do you really think what you do is so grand and important that God's Kingdom can't function without you?

vs:4 ***Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."***

A wonderful experience! Let's hang on to it. Let's keep Jesus with us, alone, on our mountain top experience.

This event did not happen for the sake of experience or feeling good. It happened because Jesus had business to do and in the course of events He let the three disciples get a glimpse of His affairs.

vs:5 ***While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"***

Peter tries to take control of the situation. He sticks his nose into God's business with his own ideas of how to run God's Kingdom! And while he

is still speaking, God shuts him up. His presence in the form of a bright cloud envelops them and God speaks to the disciples! God audibly declares who Jesus is. (How could Peter ever have denied Jesus later?) Then God declares His relationship to Jesus... "My son whom I love." (In the days to come it would be difficult to understand this love!)

God declares His satisfaction in the way Jesus has been conducting His ministry, life, relationships, etc. ... "I am very happy with Jesus."

Who could ever doubt or complain about Jesus after this? He had the full approval and love of God!

Then God speaks very clearly about what He wants the disciples to do. Very simply... "Listen to Him (Jesus)."

Do you know Jesus in this way? Have you understood how much God loves Him and approves of the way He conducts His business in your life? Have you ever thanked Jesus? Do you ever try to tell Jesus how you want Him to deal with you or surrounding situations? How well are your ears tuned in to Him? Is He 'God' in your life?

vs:6 ***When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.***

If we truly understand who Jesus is, you will respond as the disciples did, in deep reverence and righteous fear.

vs:7 ***But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."***

But along with this attitude, Jesus wants us to not live in terror with our heads buried in the ground. Rather than remain immobilized in fear of God's wrath, Jesus wants us to know the love He offers and the acceptance He extends despite our unworthiness. He loves us! He loves you! Now get up and live in that love. Don't take advantage of it, but let the revelation and Jesus' love motivate the activities of your life towards the purposes of Jesus and His Kingdom. Get up! Are you? *Acts 2:24*. Don't be immobilized by fear of failure.

vs:8 ***When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.***

We could not live in the terror of God's presence with our natural sinful bodies. Jesus restores the surreal situation back to the normal realities that the disciples can survive in and for which, no doubt, the disciples were grateful.

We need a mediator between God and man! We could not survive without a mediator. We would not be able to ever live in the awesome presence of God except that Jesus, God in the form of man, reveals God to us on our own level.

vs:9 ***As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."***

The revelation that the three disciples had received could not be shared with the others. Why? Because the purpose of the revelation wasn't to have an experience, an event, that would draw attention to the ones receiving and to the drama itself. Rather, Jesus knew that the revelation would create a radical change in the attitude and character of the ones who received it. They would be set apart. They would step into a new level of commitment and sincerity. That is what needed to rub off on the remaining nine disciples. The three disciples were moving forward as the natural leaders of

the twelve. For that reason, in order to bring the character of Christ to all, the leaders first needed radical character-changing revelation.

After Jesus raised from the dead, all the disciples would be able to handle the previous mountain top experience of the three. All would have had a similar revelation after witnessing the resurrection of Jesus.

vs:10 ***The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"***

The experience raises new questions. How could the three disciples compare or relate this experience to what they had been taught as truth?

vs:11 ***Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.***

This was not a matter of duplicity. Jesus verifies that what they had been taught was accurate.

vs:12 ***But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."***

The problem was that the disciples had not had the needed revelation of God's Word from their teachers. Therefore the accurate interpretation of God's Word had not been fully taught.

The truth is that the disciples had already experienced a fulfillment of the prophetic Word of God and had actually missed it because they had been taught by traditions, not by the Holy Spirit.

What things might be happening around us that God is doing and we are not able to recognize? Could it be that because of our ignorance or rather stubborn selfishness, we are working against God's plan and doing what we 'wish'?

vs:13 ***Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.***

With Jesus explanation, suddenly God's Word makes sense! The same is true for us today. With the Holy Spirit teaching us, suddenly God's Word makes sense!

vs:14 ***When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him.***

Back to the 'real world'! It is necessary to release your mountain top experiences and apply that new-found wisdom to real-life situations.

Jesus leads His disciples to the 'down side' of their 'mountain top' experience.

vs:15 ***"Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water.***

A man intercedes for his son. The son was unable or helpless to come to Jesus for help himself, so someone (his father) comes on his behalf seeking 'mercy' for his son.

More than likely the father was actually most concerned about getting out of the misery and humiliation that this boy was creating in their family.

- The problem of the boy was affecting many other people.
- The problem: Demon possession!

- The effects created by this demon:

1. Seizures
2. Great suffering
3. Falling
4. Suicidal

vs:16 ***I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him."***

Apart from Jesus, we are helpless in dealing with the real world!

It's not enough to just be a disciple of Jesus! Why couldn't the disciples drive out the demon? Jesus said, "Because you have so little faith."

Loyalty to Jesus is not faith. Friendship with Jesus is not faith. Dying to self-centeredness is not faith.

It's not enough to have large crowds attending your meetings! You need to have 'power' to meet the needs represented! That power can only be rooted in deep conviction of the truth of the promises of God's Word and God's directed action resulting from those convictions.

vs:17 ***"O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me."***

Jesus addresses the problems of the disciples as well as the crowd directly.

1. Unbelief
2. Disobedience to what is right

Has anything changed in our generation?

Jesus wanted to get away from these attitudes and people. Of course He loved them, but He had so much better prepared for them and Himself if they would just believe and obey!

How long has Jesus been 'putting up' with you?

In light of the failures of his disciples, Jesus takes over the job.

Most certainly Jesus wanted His own disciples to have handled this case. But because of their failure to believe and obey, Jesus had to intervene

vs:18 ***Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.***

At the rebuking words of Jesus addressed to the demon, the boy was immediately delivered and healed.

vs:19 ***Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"***

The disciples were discouraged at their failures. They did the right thing though... they asked Jesus how to solve their personal problem.

In America we frequently ask the similar question, " Why don't we experience miracles like others do over seas?" We often excuse our failure to operate in the power of God by reasoning that we don't need God's power when we have so much knowledge and teaching. That's no excuse! If anybody had knowledge and teaching, Jesus' disciples did. Yet when the real world came to them for real solutions to real problems, their knowledge about Jesus could accomplish nothing other than disgrace to the name of Jesus. We are no different!

vs:20 ***He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.***

Though we have knowledge, though we are disciplined in our adherence to the teachings of Jesus, though we sacrifice much for the cause of Christ, if we don't have faith, we fail!

How well does your 'faith' prove your knowledge? Are you a disciple with no power?

Kingdom Lesson: It's a matter of how much faith you have when confronting the giants of our lives, and of that it's a matter of 'any amount of faith' vs. 'no faith at all'. Even with the tiniest amount of faith, great feats can be accomplished even to the point that nothing will be impossible for ...YOU!

vs:21 ***But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*** (Verse 21 is omitted from some manuscripts.)

Jesus also indicates that there are different types of demonic powers that require different methods for deliverance. For this particular demon Jesus taught that it would take a special focus of prayer and fasting. Apparently the reason the disciples were powerless and faithless is because they had neglected the discipline of prayer and fasting. In other words, faith can be increased through the discipline of prayer and fasting.

Are you disciplined in prayer and fasting?

Are you ready when Jesus leads you to do 'power' ministry?

What is 'impossible' for you if you have faith? If nothing is impossible, then logically the most valuable resources, commodity, or treasure a person on this earth could possibly possess would be, at the least, an amount of faith the size of a mustard seed!!

People put their faith in many things; their abilities, relationships, money, religion, social system, government, etc. But faith in these things always leads to a limit in possibilities. And there are unpleasant surprises along the way!

Why is it so much easier for people to put their trust in unreliable securities when God, the one who created people, offers fail proof promises? People find it easier to trust in whatever is popular and easily understood. They would rather put faith in what is known to fail than put faith in what is unpopular and not understandable.

So what is true faith anyway? *Hebrews 11:1*; It is believing God's promises with confidence that which has not been proven by human standards and systems.

What can build our ability to believe the unbelievable? Choice!
Awareness! Encouragement! Results!

vs:22-23 ***When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.***

They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." And the disciples were filled with grief.

Jesus challenges the disciples now to believe by faith the most impossible of impossibilities. He, God, the author of life itself, would be completely

destroyed by one who claimed to believe and have faith in Him. And then, after the highest power in the universe lay lifeless for three days, He would return to life and to an even higher position of power.

What a risk! It did not fit into the concept of 'God' that the disciples had been taught and understood. Logically, the only possible result was disaster! If true, then every hope and love of the disciples was to be not only destroyed, but also enshrined with defeat, embarrassment, and humiliation.

To follow Jesus means RISK! Can you take it? Can you afford it?

vs:24 ***After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?"***

Do you pay your taxes? This question is aimed at entrapping Jesus and towards planting suspicion among the disciples. Instead of asking the question to Jesus, the question for Jesus is directed to His followers, which actually suggests that Jesus is guilty of tax evasion.

vs:25 ***"Yes, he does," he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes--from their own sons or from others?"***

Peter is quick to defend Jesus and put the issue to rest. Then Jesus pursues Peter with a question about the legalities of taxes and who pays whom.

Jesus makes it clear that it is the kings who are the ones who receive the taxes.

* Jesus is King of all the earth!

Does the King of all the earth receive taxes from His sons and daughters or from those outside the royal family?

vs:26 ***"From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him.***

Peter answers, "not from the children, but from the others outside the family."

Jesus then makes it very clear in stating that the children of God in His Kingdom do not pay for the costs of running the government.

This presents quite an interesting question. Why then do God's children pay for the expenses of God's Kingdom, the cost for evangelism, missions, printing, etc.? Doesn't Jesus say that the costs are to be paid for by those other than the royal family, who are outside, but benefit from God's Kingdom? If so, then do we, who are the managers and officiators of God's Kingdom, receive this 'tax'? How unreasonable it would be for U.S. government officials to pay or raise support to finance the expenses and projects of their office! Yet, we as Christians do exactly that! This is not right! How can God's Kingdom ever prosper like this?

vs:27 ***"But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."***

Jesus makes it clear that actually He, as the King of the universe, does not need to pay tax. Yet in order to keep peace and not draw suspicion to His

ministry, Jesus insists on paying the tax, not only for Himself, but for Peter as well. And to answer the question about how to receive the tax money from those outside the royal family, Jesus had the animals to provide for it! Miraculously Peter receives the tax from the mouth of a fish!

Fishing! Doing what Peter did best! Yet with very dramatic and successful results.

Jesus doesn't seem concerned about 'saving God money'!

Matthew 18

vs:1 ***At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"***

It is within the heart of man to be 'someone' great! Everyone needs the assurance that 'they are important'. God gives that to each of us in that He considers us worthy and important enough to send His Son to us.

Satan says, "You are worthless".

God says, "You are priceless".

vs:2-3 ***He called a little child and had him stand among them.***

And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

In God's Kingdom, to be great is to be like a little child! In fact, Jesus wants us to stop acting like we're so mature and important, to stop concerning ourselves about maintaining impressions of importance, and throw away the 'face' we have created to cover up our real personality. Become the person you really are, not the person society, religion, or price demands.

Relax! Be real. Be honest - in love. Who are you? Does pride prevent you from exposing the 'real you'?

Children live in the 'present'.
Children don't worry about 'things'.
Children must obey.
Children must honor.
Children speak from the heart.
Children are free to make mistakes.
Children are teachable.
Children are humble.
Children need a leader.
Children are always 'looking up'.
Children expect provision and care.

Unless you change, become like a child, you will never find the reality of God's Kingdom in your life.

vs:4 ***Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.***

So, who is the greatest in God's Kingdom? The person who chooses to become as a little child and who humbles himself. This kind of a person is the greatest in God's Kingdom!

vs:5 ***"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.***

And it's not enough to become like a little child. You must welcome others who are humble and childlike as well. Why? Because in opening yourself to these kinds of people, you open yourself to becoming like Jesus and His kingdom.

vs:6 ***But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.***

But if you reject the respect due to one of these little children and cause one who trusts in Jesus to sin, you're in big trouble with God! It would be better if you just died right now, rather than live your earthly life in God's anger.

vs:7 ***"Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!"***

And speaking of causing God's children to fail because of sin, this would be definitely in big trouble because of the 'things' it produces which cause people to sin. It's going to have to be like this in the world - temptation to sin because of the things men produce. But the promoters of these sinful things will not escape the anger of God.

What are some of the things in this world right now that cause God's people to sin? Do they tempt you? What can you do to escape the influences of the temptations?

vs:8-9 ***If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.***

And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

In fact, whatever it is in your life that causes you to sin, get rid of it! Even if it means cutting off your own hand or removing an eye, it's not worth embracing the sin and its source of temptation when compared to the pains of the eternal fires of hell.

Habitual sin or the source of temptation to sin may be as dear and closely attached to a person's personality as their own hand or eye. They may feel that it is vital to their own nature and survival. Yet no matter how closely attached a person is, no matter how justifiable that sin or temptation may be, whatever measures must be taken, no matter how extreme or painful or how costly, the ungodly thing must be removed from the person's life. Cut off. Completely! And discarded forever.

Jesus' teaching is not to be taken as a literal challenge to remove offensive parts of our bodies, but rather that we can see what great measures must be taken if a person is to truly destroy a sinful influence on his or her life.

We must note here that Jesus believed in an eternal damnation in the very real fires of hell. It is to be greatly feared! Do anything necessary to avoid ending up there!

vs:10-11 ***"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."***

The Son of Man came to save what was lost. (Verse 11 is omitted by some manuscripts.)

It is your responsibility to make sure that you never exalt yourself above any of even the most simple and humble of God's children. You dare not do this! Why? Because the angel assigned to each of God's children regularly stands in God's presence, face to face with God himself, and that angel will 'report' about you! In fact, you must never be responsible for causing or promoting anyone, Christian or non-Christian, to sin.

vs:12 ***"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?"***

Here is a story to give you an example of how God cares so much about His little children.

"A man has 100 sheep and one of them gets distracted and wanders off from the main group. Now, if the man really cares for his lost sheep, certainly he will go out to search for it.

Sheep = believers; disciples (church)

Man = Jesus; (pastor)

One sheep = distracted from following its leader and isolated from the main group; isolated from the teachings of the truth; fallen into sin.

Wander = tempted; distracted; deceived

vs:13 ***And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.***

God will go 'all out' to restore the lost sheep. He is compelled by His great love for each one. And what rejoicing when a 'backslidden' Christian is restored!

vs:14 ***In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.***

In the same way that the shepherd cares for the lost sheep and goes to great lengths to restore it, so too is God's great love and compassion for a Christian who has been drawn away from righteousness.

What is your attitude towards one of God's lost sheep? How much do you care to restore that person? What action are you taking now? Or are you neglecting your responsibility to restore him by an attitude of 'He deserves what he has coming to him', or 'Let him learn from the school of hard knocks'...?

Kingdom Lesson: From time to time the believers or disciples will fail. Rather than rejecting them, in love they must be searched for and rescued back into the loving care of the church, not banished unless that person proves to be unrepentant and unteachable.

vs:15 ***"If your brother sins against you, [13] go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.***

Have you ever experienced a Christian that commits a sin or injustice against you? What do you do? What do you 'feel' like doing?

Don't ignore or pretend it didn't happen. Don't try to 'save his face' by avoiding the risk of offensive confrontation. Rather, you must go to him

(don't wait till he comes to you) and confidentially, just between the two of you (so that you don't publicly degrade him) discuss what has happened.

If that brother humbly receives your reproof, you have succeeded in maintaining the unity of the Spirit and kept him from being diverted from God's plan to Satan's plans

Be sure that in this situation you go to that brother in real love and concern for him and his well being and for the unity of the church.

vs:16 ***But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that `every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'***

But what do you do if that brother refuses to receive your reproof? What if his heart is hard and he is committed to defend his error or sin?

Then after you have privately admonished him and have been rejected, you must go to him again. This time with one or two other brothers who are committed to God's righteousness and who are in agreement with you. In this way nothing remains secret. It's open for careful examination, and those with you will confirm your righteousness both in attitude and in obedience to God's Word.

vs:17 ***If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.***

If this does not convince the offender of his wrongdoing and he remains hardhearted, committed to his sin and pride, then the matter must be made public before the entire church. With no place to hide, he will most likely either repent or run away. But if he refuses to repent, and he continues to remain in the church or community, then (and only then) is the church required to treat him at a non-Christian, a heathen, a person despised.

Is this love? Yes! Ultimately the church must resort to 'tough love', allowing the person to reap the harvest of their unrighteousness in order that they might clearly learn and be convinced of their error and sin and return in repentance to the truth and brotherhood.

Kingdom Lesson: Unrepentance leads to ever increasing offense; from first just one person to ultimately the entire church. An even greater offense takes place against God Himself if the church fails to deal with individual offense and sin. And the whole process is hinged on each individual Christian holding one another accountable, responsible, and faithful to the principals of God's Kingdom and Word of Truth.

vs:18 ***"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.***

Christians (the church) have tremendous authority! As we exercise our authority on earth, our actions commands a re-action in heaven. We are given authority to restrain or bind authorities and powers (Satan and his influences, sin, demonic oppression / possession / activity), which are at work against the Kingdom of God.

We are also given authority to release or loose on earth powers and forces to strengthen God's Kingdom and assault Satan's kingdom.

The purpose of our authority is for one purpose only, that is, to promote righteousness in God's Kingdom! You cannot expect God to enforce your authority if you are motivated by self-gratifying motives. Rather your motives must be those of love and righteousness and truth.

Do you, as a Christian, know your authority? Are you a defensive or offensive Christian? Are you building God's Kingdom or simply riding along for the benefits? Are you in spiritual bondage and in need of being 'loosened'? Are you aware of your link to the heavenly powers and authorities? What are you going to do about it?

vs:19-20 *"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.*

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Kingdom Lesson: If two brothers agree on anything that you are asking God, it will move God's hand in response. Why? (vs:15) Because you have made God's Kingdom your highest priority in life, above relationships, and good impressions.

So when your highest concern is the advancement of God Kingdom and you are submitted to the mind and will of the indwelling Holy Spirit, then what you agree and ask for, "shall be done"! And when two or three of you who are united in mind and vision for God's Kingdom, you can be certain that Jesus will be there meeting with you by the Holy Spirit.

'A business meeting with God'! Meeting together to get something accomplished.

Too often churches have prayer meetings and focus only on maintaining or advancing their own church or organization rather than advancing God's Kingdom on earth.

'Agreeing' = establishing God's vision and righteousness; hearing from God as a church, in unity and agreeing to obey; unified hearts and minds committed to do God's will by faith and action. A process of Kingdom advancement built by planting seed faith that is activated first by prayer and the righteous purpose to glorify Jesus' name.

vs:21 *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"*

Peter was still thinking about Jesus' lesson about how a Christian must deal with a brother who commits a sin or offense against him. Peter is thinking that there may be a situation where someone may sin, then repent, then sin-repent-sin-repent again and again. If this situation should happen, how long do you let it go on? How much forgiveness is expected of someone? Certainly there must be a limit!

vs:22 *Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*

But Jesus says there are no limits to forgiveness! Jesus wants us to be like him - Jesus main purpose of coming to earth was to bring unlimited forgiveness to the world.

Not only does Jesus forgive the most ungodly offenses and sins, but He also forgives unendingly the most frequent repeat offenders and sinners.

* Do you ever feel that you have used up your 'quota' of forgiveness coupons?

* Have you ever felt you could forgive everyone's offenses against you except your own?

vs:23-34 *"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.*

As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.

Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'

The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.

Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Kingdom Lesson: This is a lesson about God's nature and what He expects from us in our treatment and attitude towards those who have offended us or sinned against us.

vs:23 King = Father God

His servants = (not children) those who are obligated to God

Settle accounts = God has a record of our indebtedness to Him. What do we owe God? Righteousness, obedience, love, honor...

* God requires full repayment for what our disobedience, rebellion and sin has cost Him!

vs:25 Who can ever repay God for the cost of our sin against Him? We can never repay Him!

vs:26 Our only hope is in God's character, that is, that He might be merciful!

vs:27 God's character: merciful, forgiving, compassionate, and an example of what He expects in His servants behavioral characteristics, too!

vs:28-31 Now we see another side of God's character when we commit the offense against Him of showing disrespect towards the forgiveness He's given us by being unforgiving towards those who offend us.

God expects us to give according to what we've received. He wants us to become as He is. So it is very important to remember what God has and is doing for us. Indeed, we have been forgiven of the greatest atrocities that resulted in the murder of God's only Son. The forgiveness God has granted

us is limitless. We can and must fulfill God's request that we forgive as He has forgiven us - without limit.

vs:32-34 We cannot hide our attitudes from God. He knows what is concealed in our hearts. Is there any unforgiveness? God cannot tolerate unforgiveness within the life of one He has forgiven. God is just and demands righteousness. You cannot expect to be unforgiving and yet remain in God's blessing. No, there will be consequences! Quite serious consequences!

By harboring unforgiveness in our heart, we in turn reject God's forgiveness to us. And to live in unforgiveness is to live in indebtedness. And to be indebted to God is to be in hopelessness! Who can ever repay God for the life of His Son?

Be careful! Forgive no matter how undeserving the offender!

vs:35 ***"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."***

Also, be careful that the forgiveness is genuine. Don't just say you forgive and then continue to hold an attitude of lordship over the offender. To forgive is to sacrifice and strive for full restoration of right relationship with no remembrance of the offense. This is how the Christians are to treat each other's shortcomings.

Kingdom Lesson: The difference between the Kingdom of God and 'Christian religion' is a matter of the heart. Religion is mostly concerned about pleasing people (looking like they love and obey God in order to build an organization, following, or ministry). But in God's Kingdom, there is only the need to love and obey God from the heart. And when you do, He, God will lift you up in the eyes of the people.

Religious politics = not God's Kingdom and not a substitute for compassion.

Matthew 19

vs:1 ***When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan.***

Jesus is on the move. If you want to be with Jesus, you will need to move, too! You can't hold on to an experience or revelation forever and expect the Holy Spirit to continually meet you there.

vs:2 ***Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.***

Large crowds of people followed Jesus, including the sick. Jesus made them make an effort to get their healing. He didn't meet their need right where they were at, but instead required them to travel with Him awhile.

How intent are you in your desire to receive something from Jesus? Will you continue to follow Him even if He (seemingly) ignores you for a season and even requires you to suffer more in order to 'follow him', or will you just give up and say, "It wasn't God's will to heal me", and stay back to pamper yourself with an attitude that - since Jesus didn't heal me right away, I am justified in 'giving up'.

vs:3 ***Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"***

Don't be too excited about the important people who come to investigate your ministry. Though they may appear sincere, beware of the heart motive!

These religious leaders ask a question that has and is being debated even today within organized religion; "What does God think about divorce." Or rather more accurately, "Despite how God thinks, how can we get away with our own conclusions on this issue."

vs:4 ***"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator `made them male and female,'***

Jesus bypasses the question and goes straight to the heart of the religious pride and rebellion. Rather than answering their question, Jesus redirects the question to point to the real problem of the heart, "Haven't you read!" Haven't you religious leaders ever read your Bibles? Of course they had! But they had read them with closed hearts! If they had read their Bible with a humble and open heart, they would have seen God's very clear answer to their tricky question. So this leaves only one reality, that though the religious leaders read and studied God's Word, they have chosen to ignore God's will and standards in exchange for their own will and standard.

If this is what organized religion is (exchanging God's will and standards for their own), then organized religion is guilty of making war with God and exalting itself above God. Therefore, beware of men's opinions that compromise the clearly expressed word of God!

vs:5 ***and said, `For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ?***

It was God's full intention that for a man and woman to be complete, they must be united. Each is an extension of each other and completes each other's limitations. When the physical unity is complete, offspring result. When a husband and wife are united in spiritual unity of righteousness, love, and obedience to God there should result an offspring of spiritual children as well.

God fully intends for children to separate from their parents and become united, one, in marriage. Therefore, parents must bless their children by releasing them from their authority and care in order to fulfill God's requirements.

vs:6 ***So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."***

A husband and wife are no longer able or permitted to live to satisfy their own self-interests. They must give up self-interest when they are married. You have been miraculously joined together at marriage. To reject this truth, to live for 'self' within a marriage, is to deny God's power and miraculous gift at the wedding vows. So, if God miraculously unites a man and woman into one unit, no man has the right or authority to destroy, put to death, this miraculous union.

What causes divorce then? It starts with selfishness and ignorance of what a marriage is in God's eyes.

vs:7 ***"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"***

The religious leaders, hoping to trap Jesus in a compromise in His teachings of God's Word, ask him to explain why Moses, the greatest Israelite leader who was renowned for his communication with God, permitted divorce.

vs:8 ***Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.***

Jesus explains very clearly that it is not God's will for husbands and wives to divorce. Period! But just as God will allow people to do whatever their selfish hearts desire, He also allows people the freedom to commit the sin of divorce. He won't force you to experience the blessings and joy of the miracle of unity. We choose!! And why do people choose to live in the sin of divorce? It starts and ends with hard-heartedness. Lack of compassion, love, mercy, towards first, God Himself, then the spouse, by either or both of the partners.

God never planned for marriages to be broken!

vs:9 ***I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."***

In fact, anyone who divorces his wife for any reason except that she has been proven unfaithful, an adulteress, and marries another woman, that man is also guilty of the sin of adultery (physical union outside the bond of spiritual union).

vs:10 ***The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."***

The disciples then get in on the discussion and reveal their own self-centeredness by saying that it would be better to totally avoid the heartache of a troubled marriage by simply remaining single. They failed to recognize that marriage, the miracle of spiritual and physical unity, is God's wonderful plan for humanity. They only focused on the negative and selfish dark risks of a failed marriage. Those very attitudes are the seeds that begin the slide towards marriage failure and misery.

vs:11 ***Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.***

Jesus then explains to the disciples in His teaching, that marriage is a wonderful, righteous, Godly intention for man, but cannot be received by everyone. Rather you need a revelation from God about His good intentions for marriage.

vs:12 ***For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."***

Furthermore, some people are designed by God for other purposes other than to live within the limitations that marriage imposes. Some people chose to be physically unable to fulfill the requirements of physical union, others are born that way. Then there are men and women who are so caught up in building God's Kingdom or desire so greatly to sacrifice all in order to remain fully free and flexible to serve the Lord, that they sacrifice their right to ever marry. Anyone who can offer this 'sacrifice of marriage' should do so if God has given them this heart and vision.

vs:13 ***Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them.***

Having just spoken about the issue of marriage and divorce, little children, the result and blessing of marriage, were brought in to Jesus to receive prayer and His blessing.

It seems that people now understood God's intention for marriage is to pass on His blessings to the offspring of a God blessed union. When people realized that they had failed to fulfill this purpose of God in their families, they brought their children to Jesus for restoration. Furthermore, they realized that God's desire is to bless families!

Amazingly the disciples try to prevent the parents from bringing their children to Jesus for His blessing. Maybe they wanted to protect Jesus from the 'simplicity' and 'triviality' that children enjoy. Maybe the disciples thought that since the children were too young to understand what it meant when Jesus "laid his hands on them and blessed them", that His blessing would have no effect. Maybe they just didn't like noisy, bothersome kids! Again selfish!

vs:14 ***Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."***

But Jesus rebukes the disciples for their efforts to protect Him. Jesus saw something in the children that the disciples didn't see. And what Jesus saw was the very foundation every person needs in their life if they are going to be part of God's Kingdom. What are some things that Jesus saw in the children?

1. Trustfulness
2. Worry-free
3. Humble
4. Teachable
5. Content
6. Always looking ahead
7. Lovable
8. Innocent
9. Followers
10. Curious
11. Sensitive to peoples needs and concerns
12. Sensitive to right and wrong
13. Forgiving / forgivable

This kind of a person (character) is a wide-open vessel through which God's Kingdom can effectively operate. Of course there also needs to be repentance and turning towards God wholeheartedly.

We were all born with the heart and character of a child. What has caused people to loose this heart?

- Worldliness
- Rebellion

Hard-heartedness

Pride

Sin!

We choose to sacrifice our 'childishness' (which God requires for Kingdom benefits) as we 'mature' into the world's standards of 'maturity'. Jesus requires us to choose to return to a 'child's heart'.

Kingdom Lesson: In order to benefit from the principles of God's Kingdom, we must be a worthy recipient. Jesus requires, among other things, that we are to be like a child! It's our choice! We must repent of worldly character that has bound us as we've aged and as we've surrendered to worldly standards and burdens.

vs:15 ***When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.***

Jesus didn't move on until He had blessed all the children who had been brought to Him. Have you, as a parent, brought your children to Jesus seeking His blessing on their lives?

vs:16 ***Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"***

This man has addressed the most important question a person can ask. Aware that man is an eternal soul, he inquires about how he can ensure the security of his eternal destiny.

Man has often pondered his earthly destiny, and the reality is that there are many unforeseen factors that affect his plans; sickness, accidents, and the hand of God. But the destiny of man's eternal soul can be secure and certain. Yet how few ever consider this!

The 'inquirer' has, first of all, come to the right person to find the answers he is looking for. But, secondly, he has assumed that eternal life can be purchased by some sort of good activity. He is right in his opinion, yet wrong in thinking that there is one simple heroic act that will seal his destiny with God's good favor.

vs:17 ***"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."***

Jesus side-steps his question and responds with a question of His own which is designed to establish His authority to give the man the disappointing answer He is about to deliver.

He begins by addressing the man about who has the authority to determine what is good. "There is only One person who is truly good; that is to say, you will therefore never attain 'goodness'. And that One who is truly good has given us His commands which, if obeyed, will reproduce that goodness within man's heart and ensure eternal life.

vs:18 ***"Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony,***

This man seems to recognize that there are some commands that may not have any value towards eternal life. There were the commands from God as recorded in His Word, and then there were the other commands, commands established by the religious leaders that were based on an assumption of what they thought God might desire.

The man is beginning to get worried that all his zeal in striving to obey the 'commands for goodness' are not enough. Where is he on the scale between 'evil and righteous'? Which commands has he not obeyed and is it something that will be easy or difficult to accomplish?

Jesus responds by giving a list of just a few of the commands required for eternal life. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give false testimony.

Maybe you have never committed physical adultery, but what about spiritual adultery? Ever stolen from God? What about time, money, or making Him first place in your life? What about your testimony? What do people see reflected from your life? Do they see that God is faithful, or do they see that God is simply convenient?

vs:19 ***honor your father and mother,' and `love your neighbor as yourself.' "***

Honor your father and mother and love your neighbor like yourself. What about your spiritual parents? Neighbors?

vs:20 ***"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"***

The man has obviously tried to do his best. He has sincerely done his best to obey, at least legalistically, the commands. What more must be done?

vs:21 ***Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."***

Jesus touches on the very heart of how we move from an observation and understanding of God's Kingdom, to stepping into the reality of God's Kingdom! In order to grab a hold of God's Kingdom, you must fully release grasp of your own kingdom! You must release everything that 'possesses you that you possess' and including (especially) your will, your freedom, your rights, your life. But when you do, God will reimburse you with the eternal and real treasures of heaven itself!

Kingdom Lesson: to enter God's Kingdom:

1. You need to 'want' to be perfect (want to be righteous).
2. Take action towards investing what you own into the lives of less fortunate people (stop thinking about your own concerns and needs and take on the concerns and needs of others).
3. Invest in the lives of others, and as you do, God will cause you to become rich in 'Kingdom' wealth.
4. Once committed to this Kingdom 'command' and established in obedience to it, then, come to Jesus and day by day 'follow Him'!

You cannot follow Jesus when you are attached to the things and attitudes of worldly society and standards. You CANNOT! You cannot hear Jesus' voice when your heart and mind are possessed by the concerns of maintaining and building your own 'self kingdom'. There is no dual citizenship! You cannot be a member of God's Kingdom and 'Self's' kingdom.

vs:22 ***When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.***

Well, sad to say, the young man who was seeking eternal life was not happy with Jesus' answer. In fact, he was very sad! What was being advertised as 'Good News' was really sounding a lot like 'bad news'. There was no easy answer or single rule that he could conveniently add to his own kingdom' that would make him worthy. No, Jesus required 'all'! 100%! And this man's 100% was vast.

Kingdom Lesson: Whatever it is that prevents you from releasing 'all', is the very thing that Jesus requires of you. For each person it may be different depending on what dominates your life. Money, power, possessions, status, traditions, relationships, goals, responsibilities, habits, etc. Jesus requires complete abandon before you 'take up the cross of following him'. He doesn't have room to accommodate divided interests in His disciples. When you give him 100%, He gives you 100%. This is the key to joyful, purposeful living!

vs:23 ***Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.***

Jesus clearly shows us that something's have a tighter grip on a person's life than other things. At the top of the list of most difficult things to break free of is 'money'! Or rather 'being in control of too much money'.

Money is the foundation of the kingdom of this world. Jesus says we must abandon even the very foundations of this world's system in order to build our lives on the principles of God's Kingdom. Thus the deep drive in man's heart for the security of wealth is the very thing that prevents a person from easily attaining God's Kingdom. Worldly wealth and God's Kingdom seem to be on opposite ends of the two governing systems.

vs:24 ***Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."***

In fact, Jesus says that once you've been intoxicated by the effects of wealth, it's almost impossible to break its addicting hold on your life in order to embrace God's Word and freely follow Jesus.

vs:25 ***When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"***

This is a revolutionary teaching! The disciples couldn't believe their ears. How can you have a successful government without an economic foundation. In order for any government to function there must be a flow of dollars! In fact, in order for simple survival there must be a flow of money. So if that is the case, how can anyone ever enter the Kingdom of God? It would mean a slow death!

vs:26 ***Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."***

But Jesus calls their attention to an even higher economic foundation! In God's Kingdom you don't need money to prosper. Rather, God Himself, the creator and sustainer of all, will be your constant provider of ANYTHING He requires of you in His Kingdom! Nothing is impossible for Him to do or create. His kingdom is not limited to the economic conditions and availability of resources. Rather, there are no limits in God's Kingdom! No matter what He calls you to do, you can do it because God can! And when you build with faith in this foundational principle, it's hard to conceive that anyone would not gladly forsake all, even the greatest

wealth in order to follow Jesus. And it is those who do forsake the world's system who will enjoy the privilege of joining Jesus in God's Kingdom on earth and in heaven!

How often do you evaluate your financial situation? How often do you evaluate your situation in the resources of God? Which kingdom is your trust established on? Where is your heart - really?

vs:27 ***Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"***

It is true that Peter had left everything to follow Jesus. Yet he did so expecting something in return. After this long time of following Jesus, Peter still had little to show for it!

Peter is getting to the heart of what is motivating him. Yet he has taken a big risk in not being assured of the results of his life investment with Jesus. Now Peter dares to even consider that what he had assumed would become his own (a government position and salary) may not happen after all.

What are your expectations and personal sacrifices in following Jesus?

vs:28 ***Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."***

Jesus knows what Peter wants to hear and tells him exactly that! But Peter does not yet understand that in the 'renewal of all things' the kind of thrones and government Jesus would establish would not be like those kinds of 'thrones and governments' of this world. Peter's mind at this time would be unable to understand Jesus' concept of a spiritual throne!

What kind of concepts do you have concerning Jesus' promises? Especially about His promises to bless us, prosper us, make us rich, healthy, etc. Could it be that our understanding of these promises are wrong because we are basing them on our worldly concept of blessing, prosperity, wealth, health, etc.?

vs:29 ***And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.***

When did Peter ever sit on a throne? When did Peter or the other 11 judge over Israel?

Answer: Only in a spiritual sense as they ruled as leaders of the church.

When did the disciples acquire an extended family (like Solomon) and lands?

Answer: Again, when they became the fathers of a spiritual nation. And through their spiritual family, they had vast resources available to meet the needs of representing Jesus on the earth. Not a bad deal! And on top of that, they are assured of an eternal inheritance of 'life' - the very thing the rich young man was seeking!

vs:30 ***But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.***

Jesus begins to explain what it really means to have authority in His Kingdom. This reflects back to the event of the young man who was 'first' by the standards of this world yet was going to be one of the 'last' into the Kingdom of God, that is, if he ever did actually make it. And those who are

poor, the least according to this world's standards, would be first, or most important, in God's Kingdom.

Jesus had required that the rich man deliberately make himself poor before he could enter the Kingdom of God.

It's not enough to simply leave behind the things of this world. People might abandon their possessions for many worthy causes. But in order to tap into the Kingdom of God, the cause of Jesus Christ must be our sole motivation. There is no room for self-centeredness and self-glorification. Our motive must be to exalt, promote, and glorify Jesus Christ and His purposes on earth.

What is the cause of Jesus? Is it your highest cause? Or are you hoping for some personal benefits? It's not wrong to rejoice in the rewards of serving Jesus, but it is wrong to serve Jesus just for what you can hopefully get out of it!

Those who think they are so important in God's Kingdom may find out that in God's opinion they are very unimportant! The very fact that they were arrogant enough to give themselves a high rating is the cause of their poor standing with God. God hates self-glorification when, in fact, all glory, honor, power, and authority belongs to Him alone. Who and what we are is due to His grace and generosity alone.

Matthew 20

vs:1 *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard.*

Kingdom Lesson: We dare not serve in God's Kingdom hoping to gain greater reward or promotion. God doesn't reward us according to the amount of work we do. He rewards us because we are under His care and He will provide for us according to our needs, not according to our service in relationship to others in His service.

Therefore we dare not 'rate' ourselves in God's Kingdom or 'rate' others because of how much they accomplish or fail to accomplish. What matters is if their heart is committed to the lordship of Jesus and their attitude towards their willingness to do 'anything' required.

The story of the 'workers in the vineyard' gives great perspective to us of how God views His Kingdom. It will do all Christians a lot of good to grasp this perspective and relate humbly to God and His Kingdom accordingly.

Landowner = God, Holy Spirit

Men = disciples, men committed to obey and follow Jesus.

To work = advance the purposes of Jesus; not entertainment! Exert energy, submit to the vision of the employer.

His vineyard = God's Kingdom; where good fruit is produced, for making wine (wine is symbolic of the Holy Spirit and the blood of Jesus, i.e. love, grace, mercy). The vineyard must be tended or it will become ruins. Jesus uses people to maintain what He has begun, what belongs to Him.

If you want to serve the Lord, make yourself available. If you are available and want to work, Jesus will be ready to put you to work.

vs:2 ***He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.***

Not only do we have the privilege of serving in God's Kingdom, but Jesus also has agreed to reward His workers at the end of the day.

The workers are hired and sent. They don't just go out on their own initiative. Too often people who are over enthusiastic or lack direction rush into the 'vineyard' without clear instruction, tools, or 'calling' and create more problems than solutions.

We need to make ourselves available, unattached to our own plans, waiting and ready for the moment the call to service comes. Then, under the direction of the Master of the vineyard, we enter His service.

vs:3 ***"About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.***

Later in the day (as God's Kingdom has grown and developed) the Lord went to find more workers. He found men who were still unemployed, doing nothing.

vs:4 ***He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.'***

Jesus is looking for workers. He doesn't want to see people standing around doing nothing with their lives - no vision, no ability to progress.

Spiritually, many, many believers are 'doing nothing', standing around in the place where people are successful (in the market place) dreaming, wishing, yet having no way to go. Jesus is looking for you! He has a plan for you!

The Lord does not inform this group of workers about how much He will pay, but He does assure them that He will pay them whatever is 'right'.

We need not concern ourselves about the necessities of life 'IF' we are under the employment of the Lord.

There is a difference between being in the service of the Lord and being hired to work in a religious institution. You will be rewarded according to whom you are serving.

Some people are employed by religious organizations, thinking that they are serving the Lord. In reality though, they are only building a religious business institution.

vs:5-6 ***So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing.***

About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

They went! They left their dreams of business success and went to work in the vineyard.

Jesus is always looking for available workers!

"Why have you been standing around? There's work to be done. Why are you wasting time"?

vs:7 ***" `Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, `You also go and work in my vineyard.'***

"Go to work". There's plenty of work to be done in God's Kingdom. No payment is negotiated or even mentioned.

There are three kinds of employment and arrangements:

1. Workers who work for a set dollar amount. They work for what they are guaranteed to get.
2. Workers who take a gamble that their returns will be good. God is good and just, so serving Him is a good investment.
3. Workers who simply want to work, to be useful. They aren't thinking about what they can 'get' out of it. They are just happy to be needed, useful, and involved in what is righteous and eternal.

vs:8 ***"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, `Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'***

Evening = the end of time; end of the world.

Foreman = Jesus

This points to the time of the 'Rapture' when Jesus returns to earth and the believers are taken to heaven. At this time rewards (wages) will be given; *Matthew 5:12*.

There is a day coming when our work here will be completed. There is a nighttime coming and upon its arrival God will declare the workers have had enough.

vs:9 ***"The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius.***

Amazingly, the workers who put in the least amount of hours were the first ones to receive their pay. And even more amazing, the ones who worked the least receive the same amount of pay as those who worked all day!

Kingdom Lesson: We cannot use the value system of this world in God's Kingdom. In God's Kingdom, the value of working, the privilege of being in the service of the Lord and a part of an eternal and righteous Kingdom, is where the real satisfaction comes from in this life. We should be delighted for the honor of actively serving Jesus. The 'reward' is a secondary reason to serve the Lord. Yet, many, if not most people 'serve' the Lord for the benefit they can get for themselves, not for the joy of building God's Kingdom.

Why do you serve the Lord? Could you serve Him with as much zeal just because you love Him and not for the blessings promised?

vs:10 ***So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.***

When the workers who had put in a full day came to receive their pay, they thought that certainly they would get a big bonus. But it didn't happen. Clearly, by this world's standard, these workers would feel cheated - that their boss was being unfair.

vs:11 ***When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.***

And in fact, this is exactly what happened! They began to complain and murmur against the one who had blessed them!

Do you determine your value to Jesus by comparing your blessings (rewards) with other 'workers'? Do you ever feel that Jesus has been unfair to you? Do you feel Jesus must love you less because someone else seems more blessed? Do you think that in order to increase your 'wages', you need to work harder or act more spiritual?

vs:12 ***'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'***

The world's standard is to rank each other according to worthiness. We think that the energy we possess is our own and therefore, depending on how much energy we exert on someone else's behalf warrants a comparative reward. We fail to remember that the very energy we possess comes only from the Lord as a gift to us!

vs:13 ***"But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?"***

The Lord responds to reassure the workers and reminds them of the original agreement. "You agreed to work for this set amount and that was your own free choice. Don't rate your worthiness or my love to you based on the reward. That has nothing to do with the value I place on each of you. I love you all equally. Furthermore, I am the one in charge. I own the vineyard. I own the 'rewards'".

vs:14-15 ***Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you.***

Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

"So take your pay, since that is all you're concerned about, and go. What I do is my business and I won't be controlled by your jealousy or worldly value system".

Jesus is the Lord! He can do what He wants. He will not be manipulated by our opinions!

Kingdom Lesson: In God's Kingdom there is equality among all the people based on how much God loves each individual. If we value ourselves by the world system, we will find that we are at the opposite end of the spectrum when we see our value as God sees us.

vs:16 ***"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."***

When the world exalts us, in God's eyes, we are really a weak, helpless, and sinful person in need of great grace and mercy. When the world scorns us, in God's eyes, we are worthy of His great love, compassion, and protection.

vs:17 ***Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them,***

The true disciples of Jesus get 'inside' information, revelation that other 'followers' do not get in on.

vs:18-19 ***"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death***

and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

The disciples must have felt very special when Jesus took them aside for a planning session. Yet sometimes the message He gives is not the one we hope to hear. The disciples must have been so shocked by what Jesus told them that they just refused to accept it at face value. "His words of betrayal and death must certainly be symbolic of something else", especially when He spoke of 'being raised back to life on the third day'. It must have seemed like another parable.

vs:20 ***Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.***

Zebedee was the father of James and John. The mother of James and John has been chatting with her sons and now comes to Jesus with her sons for a favor. She uses her sons' relationship to Jesus as a lever to get her request answered.

vs:21 ***"What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."***

How often we come to Jesus thinking our situation is special and that we have 'rights'. Jesus knows what's going on and He still patiently receives her request. "What is it you want"? He cares! He's willing to try - if our request is in line with His plans.

If Jesus were to ask you right now, "What is it you want", could you give Him your hearts request? What is it that you really need?

The mother is testing Jesus. She is concerned about her sons and the way they have been 'hooked in' by Jesus. "He says He's a King, now prove it"! What kind of a throne will you have?

If her sons were competing with 10 other men for position in Jesus government, why not use her motherly influence to bring advantage to her sons. Who could resist a nice sweet old woman?

vs:22 ***"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.***

Now we see the truth! Actually James and John had put their mother up to this. They didn't want to create contention among the other disciples by asking the question, so they got their mother to ask for them. This is pure politics!

What is the 'cup' Jesus had to drink from?

Cup = giving of your life for the kingdom of God; Matthew 26:27-28

Jesus requires that we too partake of this cup of 'giving', of laying down our lives for the purposes of God.

James and John were so focused on the possibility of power, wealth, fame, etc., they didn't even consider what Jesus meant by 'drinking from his cup'. They simply said whatever they thought Jesus and their mother wanted to hear!

How often we as 'Christians' do the same as James and John. We sing our songs of undying commitment... "I surrender all"... with no thought as to what that really means as we go on living as we choose.

vs:23 ***Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."***

Jesus takes James and John's words at face value; "You said it, so now you must accept it"! They spoke carelessly like Esau spoke to Jacob when he traded his birthright for a bowl of soup.

Jesus says, "You assumed that I would do anything for you if you 'promise' to do anything for Me! But you must remember that I only do what God my Father tells Me to do and it's in His power alone to determine who gets honor and position. But in any case, He'll honor your promise to Me and make sure you keep your word"!

James and John must have felt cheated. Yet they had tried to greedily manipulate Jesus and must now pay the price!

Kingdom Lesson: You cannot use God's Kingdom to promote self-gain.

Question: Can you, will you, also drink from the 'cup'? What does it mean to partake of the 'communion' cup then?

vs:24 ***When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.***

The road to a church split! The first shall be last"; *Matthew 20:16*

vs:25 ***Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.***

James and John had made the common mistake of applying world values and methods to God's Kingdom. They had wanted to gain respect and position as the world recognizes it. But Jesus' Kingdom is very different!

vs:26-27 ***Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,***

and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--

If you are a part of God's Kingdom, then you are going to have to throw out entirely your concept of how to gain respect and authority.

Respect and authority, in the kingdom of this world, comes from much study, money, relationships, wits, politics, power, etc.

Respect and authority, in God's Kingdom, comes (must come from) from serving the needs of others. When you see a job that needs to be done and God clears the way for you, go, do it, by faith and in God's power. Though you are weak, ignorant, disadvantaged; by faith, serve that need and God's name will be glorified as He is seen strong in your weakness.

Our goal is not to make our own name great or be established in positions of power and authority, but rather, through our surrender and giving of our lives by faith (drinking the cup), live so that God's name will be glorified.

vs:28 ***just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

Jesus has set the example. How well are we in doing and in patterning our lives, our churches, after Him?

vs:29 ***As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.***

Jesus is on the move. When Jesus moves - we can choose to follow, or not to follow. You can 'follow' Jesus and still not be a disciple. Why do you follow Jesus? Curiosity? Boredom? Expectations? Needs? Love...?

vs:30 ***Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"***

Sometimes there are people who are unable to follow or come to Jesus. Blindness (spiritual blindness) can prevent a person from coming to Jesus. But the truth is, they aren't entirely helpless. The blind men seize the moment when Jesus was passing by and call out for 'mercy'.

What a picture of our blind and lost world. How helpless humanity is. They have no hope except for the mercy of Jesus.

Today was their day of possibilities! Jesus was within voice range.

Don't miss your moment! It may never come again!

vs:31 ***The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"***

To make matters worse for these two blind men, as they were crying out, those who were 'following Jesus' ordered them to not disturb their nice religious party. The 'followers' were so religious that they completely missed Jesus' purpose for being there. They thought Jesus belonged to them and they didn't want to share Jesus with anybody who wouldn't be able to follow Jesus like they did.

Sometimes the followers of Jesus can be the biggest hindrance to Jesus ministry!

Fortunately, the blind men continued to call out to Jesus. They had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

* Don't let religious people keep you from Jesus!!

vs:32 ***Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.***

Their cries for mercy were heard! Imagine! God has heard even though they were so handicapped and helpless.

Don't give up! Keep calling! *Jeremiah 33:3*

Jesus calls back to the blind men. "What do you want me to do for you"? Jesus is so concerned about our 'real' needs.

Jesus can meet every need. What do you need? What is your 'real' need? Mercy?!

vs:33 ***"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."***

"Lord" = a surrender to His will

"We want our sight"! (Lord, I want revelation of the truth. I want to see You and Your Kingdom. Have mercy on me).

vs:34 ***Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.***

Compassion = to put yourself in the other person's situation. Feel what they feel. Understand how they see things from their perspective and environment.

We need to be the people who express the compassion of Jesus.

The blind men needed to see. The followers needed to see also! The 'followers' needed to see through the eyes of compassion. Jesus' followers were as much in need of a healing as the blind men!

How is your 'eyesight'?

The healing was immediate and their response was immediate also. They followed Jesus. They 'really followed' Him!

Matthew 21

vs:1 ***As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,***

Jesus continues towards His destination. Jerusalem; betrayal, death sentence, mockery, whipping, death by crucifixion, and ...Resurrection!
Matthew 20:18-19.

The disciples must certainly have been on edge. Something big was about to happen. But what? It didn't seem like a good thing!

When we follow Jesus, there is no guarantee that our personal circumstances and destiny will be desirable. We may not understand, as Jesus seems to lead us right into the devil's hands. Will you still follow?

vs:2-3 ***saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.***

If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

An unusual mission! A very strange assignment, yet very specific. "Go get a donkey"!

The laws of God's Kingdom superseded the laws of society in order to fulfill the purposes of God. God had put the donkey there for this very purpose and no law or claim of ownership could prevent God's purposes from coming to pass.

vs:4-5 ***This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:***

"Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' "

Prophecy must be fulfilled! Jesus uses His disciples to help fulfill prophecy.

vs:6 ***The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.***

Obedience! Though the two disciples must have felt awkward!

vs:7-8 ***They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them.***

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Jesus begins His ascent to the throne! How embarrassing to make this journey on a baby donkey instead of on a white stallion!

The disciples and crowds took off their cloaks and Jesus sat on them, and rode the donkey over them.

Cloak = Our outward covering. The image people see that covers up who we really are inside.

Donkey = symbol of humility, a commoner

Kingdom Lesson: Jesus wants to enter the throne room of your heart. Don't expect an unapproachable elitist. He's humble and accessible. The way to welcome Him is to throw off your 'outward', public, nature and let Him enter the 'real' you. He can easily identify with your weakness and flaws.

The donkey colt is not trained to carry a rider, yet for Jesus it is obedient. Under Jesus the 'untamed, uncontrollable' things in our lives can be made obedient and useful.

vs:9-11

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

The crowds were large, excited, and filled with great expectation. In the eyes of the people, Jesus was at His most glorious moment. He was coming to take His rightful throne, so they thought. But their timing was not God's timing.

When Jesus comes to take His rightful throne in our lives, He is to be surrounded with praise! He is worthy, not according to the standards of this world, but because He is 'The Standard'!

Is Jesus surrounded by praise in your life?

The praise draws the attention of the whole city! Public praise! Audible praise! Not religious praise, but praise from the heart to the coming King!

And because of the praise, the people ask, "Who is this one you are praising"?

vs:12

Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

"Jesus entered the temple". What happens from this point completely destroys the high expectations of the crowds and turns their expectations to bitter disappointment. They thought Jesus would enter Herod's palace to bring order. And they probably thought that Jesus was going to the temple to rally His forces and declare His intentions of overthrowing the Roman government. But - just the opposite happened! Jesus declared war on the Jewish religious government! In the heart of their government offices! In their most important place! Jesus turns the place upside down!

Jesus didn't hate the Jews, but He knew that if He was going to build a Kingdom that would war against the 'world systems', what replaced the 'world system' had to be solid in righteousness and in full obedience to its Commander!

How about yourself? Has Jesus been allowed to enter the 'temple' of your heart to throw down sin and unrighteousness and rebuild you into a person with God's heart? Or are you a person like the Jewish temple that uses Christianity to make personal gain?

Before Jesus can use you in building His Kingdom, His Kingdom must be built within your own heart first. What happened when you invited Jesus 'in'? Sure, He brought you the joy of His presence and the excitement of 'belonging'. But He also has in His hand a whip to shape you into a person of righteousness. Exposing areas of sin and rebellion. Changing, changing, and more changing of your thoughts, motives, desires, concepts of Him, and bringing you into full selfless submission.

Are you willing to go that far with Jesus? If so, then He can also build His kingdom inside of you and make you into a useful soldier in this war against the kingdom of 'worldliness'.

vs:13 ***"It is written," he said to them, " `My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a `den of robbers.' "***

As the crowds stood observing Jesus in astonishment at His angry outburst, He clarifies His purpose and His authority by pointing the people to the heart of their error and sin... "God has said". The Word of God is a powerful weapon, more powerful by far than the whip Jesus held.

The sin #1: Taking what is holy and belongs to God to use for personal gain and gratification.

The sin #2: Using the throne (relationships between God and man; communication, oneness, truth and honesty, fellowship) of God's Kingdom to build and promote the systems of the world.

vs:14 ***The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.***

In the midst of the stunned crowds who now began to understand Jesus' intentions, Jesus continues to see the needs of the 'little people'. He continues to minister to their needs - in the temple - where it should have always taken place. The temple, is the place where God had been longing to meet with His people and show them His love and to help them. But had been prevented due to the greed and selfishness that had overtaken the place.

vs:15 ***But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.***

Only the children, not the adults, continue to shout praises to Jesus! They are too young and ignorant to get caught up in the politics and hypocrisy of the temple.

The war is on! The religious leaders, with rock-hardened hearts, despising the love and kindness of Jesus, deplore and reject His call to restoration of God's will. They hate Jesus and God's Kingdom, all the while using their position of representing God's Kingdom to build up their own kingdom.

vs:16 ***"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, " `From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise' ?"***

This may be the only time the religious leaders had ever paid attention to what the little children said. Not concerned about politics and backlashes, only sensitive and receptive to what brings joy and life; *Matthew 18:4*.

What did the children say? Is praise what is in your heart or pious religious indignation?

The religious leaders were already hopping mad and then Jesus throws 'gasoline' on the fire... "Haven't you ever read...?" Of course they had read the scripture, but had translated it into their own religious contexts in order to promote and justify their own worldly goals.

God ordains 'Praise'. Have you allowed the 'spirit' of praise to rise up in your heart freely or are you quenching it because of religious politics, fearing loss of face, or lack of love for the One who loves you?

Is there something you need to change?

Kingdom Lesson: Like the events of this story, we welcome Jesus joyfully into our lives. He comes gently and innocently as we allow Him to strip us of our exterior pretenses. He is King! Our hopes are miraculously realized! Joy unspeakable! But wait...! Once He enters those innermost chambers of our heart, those secret places of hidden motives and selfish ambitions - Jesus becomes a forceful, demanding assailant! He has come to lay claim to His temple and put things in order. Now where is the joy? Where is the humble King?

Accept it! Don't reject it. Let the change be made. Why? Because Jesus can't use you in His Kingdom to your fullest potential until His Kingdom has first been established within you. Kingdom principles in active reality, not just mental or verbalized theories.

Let the changes continue throughout your whole life. Maintain a soft, praise filled heart and then 'go' and represent Jesus and build His Kingdom for His glory and praise.

vs:17 ***And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.***

Reject Jesus and He'll leave!

vs:18 ***Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry.***

Getting to His destination was far more important than breakfast. Jesus' 'long range vision' was more important than 'short range needs'.

vs:19 ***Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.***

Fig tree = Israel; the traditional Jewish, Christians

It was the time when fig trees were supposed to bear fruit. Like 'fig trees', we as Christians should also bear fruit; the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.), the fruit of spiritual offspring (new believer's and disciples), and the fruit of 'faith (obedience) in action'.

Jesus is hungering to find fruit in our lives!

Jesus had come to His people, Israel, and within its leadership had been found no fruit of truth or righteousness. The religious 'tree' was there and looked beautiful. From a distance it appeared to be well established, but

upon closer inspection the fruit Jesus was looking for, God's Kingdom, was non-existent.

How about your own life? Are you like this fig tree; Nice to look at and claiming to offer the fruit of truth and righteousness to the passing hungry souls? What do people find upon closer inspection of your life? Is there anything there that can feed their hearts?

Jesus speaks to the tree! And, It obeys! Jesus' Word is indeed a command to all things!

No fruit = no life!

What good are you in God's Kingdom if your Christian life lacks fruit? Jesus won't tolerate it! You can't just sit in church year after year taking up space and casting long shadows! The flow of life will be cut off. You will die spiritually and maybe even physically if you fail to produce fruit!

Jesus came to bring life... so that you can bear the fruit that gives life. Jesus can also take away that life if you choose to ignore your duty and only put on a religious appearance.

vs:20 ***When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked.***

When God speaks, nature jumps to obey! How about you?

vs:21 ***Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done.***

"How can something like this happen so quickly"? With man's ability or the world's systems or religion, it cannot. But in God's Kingdom, when God's Word goes forth, even nature must obey its creator.

How quickly death came. And just how quickly 'life' can come to you when Jesus speaks His Word to you. How can you receive Jesus' 'life-giving' Word? Keep reading your Bible! And, receive it in your heart.

These next words of Jesus must have staggered the imagination of the disciples. "If you have faith, you too can have God's power working through you as you speak"!

Imagine! You! Doing the things like Jesus did. Yes, you can do it, too! How? There are clearly some conditions:

1. Be a disciple of Jesus (not a disciple of a great Bible teacher, church, or tradition). Consider carefully what a disciple of Jesus really is and how he lives. Consider the examples in the book of Acts where the disciples followed 'invisible' Jesus.
2. You must have 'faith'... in Jesus. Not in your ability to act religious, nor in a religious system or tradition. Faith, confidence, boldness. Simply faith in Jesus!

Where does 'faith' in Jesus come from? From familiarity with Jesus. DISCIPLESHIP! And from familiarity with God's Word; *Romans 10:17*. "Faith comes by hearing God's Word". Not just listening to it, but doing it! Obeying it; *James 1:22-24*! In other words, hearing God's Word is not simply listening to Bible tapes. It's a way of living! And out of that lifestyle comes bold, confident, powerful 'faith'!

3. 'You!' You must take the risk of losing face. You must be the one to bear the responsibility just in case the 'thing' doesn't happen according to your actions of faith. If that is your concern, then you need to go back to learning and living 'discipleship and Word' lifestyle. Then try again!

The source of this power is not in your ability to reach a certain standard set forth by Jesus. The power comes from God alone and being caught up in a unified, day by day life with Him. God then demonstrates His power through us as we obey His directives and fulfill His objectives in this misguided and sinful world.

vs:22

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

"If" ...you (not the other guy. You are the one!) believe ('believe' can only mean a lifestyle and action).

4. We must 'ask'. We must have a purpose. We must be in communication with the living God.
5. Pray. Do you pray? How do you pray? Go back to *Matthew 6:5-15*. Learn it. Live it.

Jesus statement is incredible! "...Whatever you ask for..."! Whatever?! Good grief! "Just give me a million dollars and I'll never bother you again"! Is this what Jesus meant? Certainly not! That selfish attitude is not the attitude of Jesus and shouldn't be found in His disciples either.

'Whatever' cannot mean an unlimited magic 'give me' list. Jesus use of the word 'whatever' has boundaries. What are those boundaries?

We can see clearly from Jesus' life example that He only asked God for things that would promote His kingdom. Much of what we would ask for (money, security, etc.) was automatically provided to Him as He wholeheartedly pursued the building of God's Kingdom; *Matthew 6:25-34*.

- * Money, clothes, food, etc. are an automatic provision when we sell out 100% to God for the sake of love and obedience to Him and His will.

Jesus made a request to God. He could have received what He requested, but He placed God's will ahead of His own self-will; *Matthew 14:36*. Therefore, before we ask for 'whatever', we need to know if our request is in line with God's will and purposes. God will not give us something that will work against His Kingdom on earth or against the work already accomplished in our lives.

Can we know God's will? Yes! But even from Jesus' example, He prayed three times in the garden of Gethsemany for a change of God's destiny for Him and yet, He certainly must have known the finality of God's will for Him to go to the cross. Jesus was so much like us! He knew God's will, yet His flesh pleaded for an alternative. He prayed for an alternative and His request was not granted! But actually Jesus prayed for an alternative plan for Him. And He also prayed that God wouldn't let His love for Him defeat His overall plan and love for the salvation of the world. "...Not my will, but your will be done"!

Kingdom Lesson: We have a tremendous resource and power at our fingertips. "...Whatever you ask..."! But there are conditions:

1. Discipleship (selflessness)

2. Asking (praying) to God ...alone
3. Ask in faith, believing
4. Ask in faith with action and love
5. Ask in faith with action - according to God's will and purposes and in selfless love and obedience to God's overall will.

Kingdom Lesson: How can we learn God's will? Ask! Ask about many things. The things God answers and provides will establish a pattern and knowledge of God's will. With that insight, future requests will be more in line with God's will and more frequently granted.

The temple has become a place of great conflict. One faction of the temple crowd loves and rejoices in Jesus while another faction, the men originally in charge of the temple affairs, hate Jesus and His invasion of the place they 'claim' as their own (actually, the temple never belonged to the religious leaders and likewise their authority).

The temple is like the human heart. Our hearts are, in truth, the center of God's dwelling place on earth. Yet our 'self', our inborn character of sin, has laid claims to the heart and is using what belongs to God as a resource for self-centered gain. On the other hand, our spirit has found emptiness within the self-ruled heart and great emptiness and frustration is the fruit of a self-centered heart.

When Jesus arrives in our heart, when our spirit stands up against the authority of 'self' and throws open the gate to our heart, turmoil breaks out. As our spirit freely rejoices at the presence of Jesus, truth, and life, our 'self' screams out for restoration of its waning power and authority. Jesus holds truth, righteousness, and life in one hand and a whip of discipline and authority in the other hand; *Matthew 3:11-12*.

Do you feel the conflict in your own heart? The choice is yours in determining how long and how violent the conflict will be. As Jesus exposes new areas of self-rule, give it up! Quickly! Repent! And let the joy of Jesus' love fill you with shouts of praise!

vs:23

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

The challenge comes between the authority of the religious leaders (self) and Jesus Christ (righteousness, truth, God).

"By what authority are you doing these things"? What was Jesus doing? We can ask ourselves these same questions. "By what authority are we doing the things that we are doing"? What are you doing? Does anyone care? Are you doing anything?

The religious leaders knew that the source of authority comes from a higher source. But the authority of self is self-applied. There is no higher authority to 'self'. Therefore, 'self' doesn't have to answer to anyone else. But the one who has given authority from above, must also be in submission to the One from above who has lifted them up into their position of authority.

vs:24

Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

Jesus refuses to surrender to the self-proclaimed authority of the Jewish leaders. He answers with a question that fully exposes the corruptness and double standard politics of the temple. He exposes the lack of respect these men have towards the One whose authority they should have been representing. Instead, these wicked men were using the 'position of authority' (not the power of authority) given to them by God, to pursue their self-interests. Does this attitude ever creep into today's modern Christianity and churches?

vs:25-26 ***John's baptism--where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'***

But if we say, 'From men'- we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

Jesus exposes the heart of the authority issue. We get our authority from one of two sources; either from men and this world's system, or from God. Period!

The men were cornered! Their evil scheming hearts had been exposed! The fact was that these religious politicians had no authority at all! They were pretending to be under God's authority, but rather, were controlled by the masses and by fear! Have you ever felt cornered by Jesus?

vs:27 ***So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.***

Jesus proves that He has no obligation to the false authority of religion. He simply doesn't communicate and proves that He has no obligation to do so!

Do you ever feel like God refuses to speak to you? Are you playing a religious political game with Him? Try total surrender to the authority of God and see if He won't then raise you up with real authority and power to represent His name. (vs:21-27)

As a child of God, we too have available incredible authority. This is not the same as power. Power and authority are two different things, but must operate in unison to be properly effective.

Here is an example:

A policeman gets his authority because of the uniform and badge he wears. When we see a policeman we immediately are aware of his authority and become subject to him.

But what good is a policeman's authority if he doesn't have the power to enforce his authority? A policeman is empowered to enforce his authority with an array of tools, training, techniques, communication abilities, and backup.

Or imagine a policeman who is fully equipped with the necessary tools and methods to enforce his authority, but is out of uniform and lacking any visible symbol of his authority. Instead of respecting him, we may be terrorized by him and become aggressive against him for our own protection.

How can a policeman lose his authority? By undisciplined use of his authority!

In *Matthew 10:1-42* we have an example of how Jesus young disciples were given power and authority, which they used very successfully. But

later the disciples seem to have lost their power and authority or misused it when attempting to deliver a boy from demonic power; *Matthew 17:19-21*. What went wrong? Is it possible to have authority and power and not even know it?

vs:28 ***"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'***

Jesus asks you, "What do you think"? What do I think?! You mean God cares about my opinion? He wants me to use my head? Just because we're to follow Jesus doesn't mean we don't need to think!

This is a story about our response to authority. Especially about our struggle with subjecting the false authority of 'self' to the authority of God in obedience.

Like the man in the story, we as children of God are asked by our Father to serve Him in some way.

vs:29 ***" 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.***

Obviously the son didn't like the assignment the father gave him! We also may not like the task our Father gives us to do. But the choice remains to either obey or disobey. No excuses can be given.

The son said "no", but his actions spoke louder than his words. He reconsidered his choice and finally obeyed.

vs:30 ***"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.***

The same assignment was given to the second son who readily agreed to go in obedience. His words were louder than his actions though. He appeared to be a good obedient son in submission to his father's authority, but 'self' was the real authority on the throne of his heart and by his actions, proved the truth of his rebellion.

vs:31 ***"Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.***

Now, who was the obedient son? Can you figure it out? Of course you can. It is obvious. Actions speak much louder than words!

Now here is a very important truth to 'think' about! People who act religious, acting like they love and obey God, but who secretly live in disobedience, are not going to find their way into God's Kingdom very successfully! Most likely they'll never find their way in. But on the other hand, non-religious people who simply obey God, love and show compassion in daily obedience, are quick to enter God's Kingdom!

So does this mean that it's acceptable to live in a similar fashion of the greedy people of the world? Absolutely not! Because the first thing they will be required by God to do is to repent! And it is because of their quick obedience to repent that they easily enter God's Kingdom.

vs:32 ***For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.***

This story told by Jesus is clearly directed to people who 'act' religious. In this story, Jesus reveals the very simple door by which we enter into His

Kingdom. Clearly the 'religious' people are not passing through this doorway successfully.

The religious people are like the second son in the story. They put on a performance of doing what looks right, but in reality are disobedient.

There is no place in God's Kingdom for pretenders! Either you are obedient to God or you are not. No matter how much you dress up your outward appearance, it will in no way affect your ability to enter the Kingdom. Rather it is how your heart looks in the eyes of the only One who can look into that secret place. Repent and believe! This is the only way!

Repent of ...what? Ask God to reveal it to you. It's not just a singular act of repentance, but along with that, it is a life long attitude of tenderness and surrender to the righteousness of God's will.

Believe ...what? That God means what He says! And that Jesus is the living proof of the truth of God's Word, commands, and promises, and that He will fulfill them for those who obey Him both in action and in spirit.

vs:33

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey.

Land owner = God

Vineyard = promise land for chosen people

Wall = safety for those who stay within its boundaries

(wall = God's Word which provides safety and blessings for those who stay within the boundaries of God's commands and teachings).

Planted = established for the purposes of growth and bearing fruit; caused to prosper.

Wine press = a place where fruit is surrendered for refinement and processing. A place of crushing, breaking, and change.

Dug = low point, especially in comparison to having been originally attached to a beautiful vine.

Fruit of the vine = grapes; contribution or benefit of God's chosen people invested into or offered to God for His purposes.

Watchtower = A place where the manager can see everything and ensure good growth and production.

The job of a pastor is to manage the people under his care from the watchtower of God's Word.

Rented = not given! It still belongs totally to the owner, but is offered to be a benefit to others as well.

Went away on a journey = God has fully entrusted his estate to other for a season.

vs:34

When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

Harvest time = in everyone's life there comes seasons of planting.

Prospering, and growth. But then there comes a season of surrender, separation, of what the vine may claim for its own - to be taken, crushed, 'lost', without giving recognition to the contributing vine!

His fruit = Not ours! The purpose of the fruit is to give recognition and glory to the owner, not to each contributing vine.

vs:35 ***"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.***

Tenants = men appointed by God to oversee the vineyard (God's people, God's Kingdom); in Jesus time it was the priests, religious leaders (hypocrites).

Servants = prophets; people obedient to the will of God.

vs:36 ***Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.***

The conflict between self appointed religious leaders (men who used God's Kingdom for selfish gain) and God appointed representatives has been ongoing throughout history even to this day. 'Self' striving to hold on to illegally gotten gain, warring against the Spirit whose authority and power seeks restoration of rightful ownership.

How are you doing in your struggle to place into God's hands the things 'self' has laid claim to?

What are some of the things that the world teaches that are 'self' rights? You have the right to _____? To be a success you need to _____? To appear successful you must _____?

Does God teach these things? No. God teaches that success comes from obedience to His Word. Success comes from total, not partial, submission and obedience to His Lordship. God wants to plant us, nurture us, to bring forth fruit in our lives (success by God's terms) which we surrender to Him. God wants the fruit of our lives. Fruit which, like grapes, He may crush and takes away from us for His own purposes.

vs:37 ***Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.***

Son = Jesus; Holy Spirit

God wants and expects us to 'respect' His son, not use Him to further our own selfish plans.

vs:38-39 ***"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.'***

So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

The analogy here points to Jesus own death at the hands of the ones God appointed to manage what was His own. We know the story. The religious priests took the Son of God and literally had Him killed just like this story predicted.

This story is more than just a history and prediction analogy of Jewish tradition and God's Kingdom. It also points directly to our own present generation.

The purpose of our lives in Christ is to bear fruit (Good works, obedience, and faith, especially adding souls to God's Kingdom). How often we want to lay claim to the 'fruit' of our (the Holy Spirit working through us) work and make something of it to glorify our own name. But the 'fruit' is not ours! God may allow us to enjoy the fruit for a season, but it belongs to

Him and we must be willing to surrender it to Him ...even if it means having to watch Him 'crush' all our hard work in front of our eyes.

And ...at the times when the Holy Spirit comes bringing revival and when we see so much ripe fruit, don't get selfish and try to hold on to the excitement of the moment. It all belongs to Him! And don't be surprised that upon following a 'revival' there comes a time of 'crushing' in your own life as well as in the lives of those who have enjoyed God's presence with you.

The 'crushing' must come! Surrender to it! Why? If you insist on holding on to the fruit, it will rot! Very simple! Let it go, because there will be a new season coming!

vs:40 ***"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"***

It seems that these tenants completely forgot or disregarded the fact that they had to answer to their boss.

We also must give an answer as to how we conduct our lives and handle the responsibilities God has entrusted us with. Though we can't see Him now, one day we will stand before Him to give an account.

Will He find you to be obedient and faithful or will He find you to be rebellious and selfish, one who used the works of the Holy Spirit for selfish gain?

vs:41 ***"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."***

People know in their hearts exactly what justice demands. The answer is simple. You cannot find 'success' by using God's Kingdom as a platform for your own kingdom. You will lose! And what you dreamed for will be given to others who continually hold up the fruit of their lives to God with open hands. Do you have open hands? Both of them?

vs:42 ***Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: " `The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes' ?***

"Have you never read the scripture...!" Jesus was speaking to the Jews! Of course they had this verse memorized. Yet it's one thing to read something and another thing to accurately understand the meaning of the words.

Have you never read your Bible? Or do you just observe the words without getting the revelation from the Author, the Holy Spirit who is the Professor of the school of the Word?

vs:43 ***"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."***

Because it was written ...therefore, now the fulfillment is upon you! This was literally fulfilled as the Jewish legalistic and traditional system was declared 'rotten' and a new season of growth was brought upon a new generation of people who were humble and obedient to the will of God.

This is where the Old Testament (Jewish legal system) is transferred to the New Testament (system of grace, mercy, and forgiveness).

Did you know that you can lose your position and claim to the Kingdom of God? Having a 'possessive' spirit rather than a 'giving' spirit, having a 'lazy' spirit instead of a 'productive' spirit, makes the difference.

What kind of 'fruit' is being produced in your life? Eternal fruit (souls)?

vs:44 ***He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."***

Stone = Jesus

If you fall on Jesus, He will cause your 'selfish' nature to be broken and defeated. Falling on Jesus will cause you to be humble and dependent on the 'cornerstone' for your foundation of life in Christ. But if Jesus must force you out of His Kingdom because you refuse to allow him to break your 'self', you will be crushed, immobilized, unable to produce anything worthwhile. Defeated. You will think that the Kingdom promises are anything, but reality.

vs:45 ***When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them.***

The meaning of the parable was clear and the religious leaders knew the truth about themselves was being exposed. Now they had to choose how they would respond to this truth. How does the 'truth' about yourself make you react? What should your reaction be?

vs:46 ***They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.***

The truth finally had a head-on collision with hypocrisy. Who would win?

* Truth is motivated by love.

* Hypocrisy is motivated by fear.

- Fear is a very powerful force that promotes 'self', hypocrisy, and deception.
- Love is a more powerful force that is received from God and promotes God and truth. It has no reason to hide.

Which is stronger in your life? Love or fear?

Never offer insincere love. Love must be genuine or else it is hypocrisy! Search for the Giver of the source of the 'power and authority' of love. Practice love with as much as is in you.

Matthew 22

vs:1 **Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying:**

The parable of the wedding banquet.

vs:2-3 **"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.**

He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like this...

King = God

Wedding banquet =

- a) Jesus coming to Israel to demonstrate God's love.
- b) Jesus coming to the world to have intimate, Spirit to spirit relationships with people.
- c) A literal wedding banquet at the marriage of Jesus and the Church.

Servants =

- a) Prophets of Israel
- b) The Holy Spirit calling on men's hearts to come to God for truth and right relationship.

Those invited =

- a) Israel (especially the Priests)
- b) All people whom God calls to repentance.

We are all 'invited', not forced, to share in the celebration of Jesus and His church coming into unity. Have you heard the call?

vs:4 ***"Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.***

Those invited = the Jewish people

What would have happened if the Jewish leaders had received Jesus as their Messiah at this time? Obviously, there is no way for us to know the answers. But God did know and plan accordingly before hand that Jesus invitation would be rejected and God's great plan of salvation would be enacted.

There is no reason to delay Jesus' invitation. Everything is ready. Jesus is eagerly waiting for your response.

vs:5 ***But they paid no attention and went off--one to his field, another to his business.***

Amazingly, the nation seems to be in full rebellion to this generous King. In the same way the vast majority of humanity is in rebellion to acknowledgment of even the very existence of Jesus Christ. Why? They are caught up in their own self-interest, visions, and possessions.

vs:6 ***The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.***

Not only do the people reject the King's invitation, they actively attempt to stop the wedding by abusing, and killing his servants.

This may sound a little far fetched and not a reasonable illustration. But in fact, this story has been lived out in reality repeatedly throughout history and to this very day.

The hearts of men are hard to the plans of God to bless them. Why? It doesn't seem reasonable to reject the good favor of a good, compassionate King.

One reason is that people feel that 'time' is their own possession. They don't want to allow anyone else interfering with their time. And for selfish people, who are possessed by the 'things' they've worshipped, 'time' suddenly becomes a rare and very valuable thing, which makes them feel threatened when outside demands are required of their 'time'.

Do you have time for the King? The people felt so threatened by the invitation of the King that they actually killed his servants!

vs:7 ***The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.***

And how does the King (God) respond to blatant rejection? Anger!

You reject God after you've received His invitation - and He will reject you!

vs:8 ***"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.'***

"...Those I invited..." = The people of the Jewish nation at Jesus time.

vs:9 ***Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.'***

Street corner = general public; open invitation

"Go to the street corners...". This is our assignment as servants of the King. "Go" into all the world, to the general public, and invite everyone to share in the "wedding banquet" of Jesus (eternity in heaven; intimate Spirit to spirit relationship; blessings of the King).

vs:10 ***So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.***

God wants people! Without people, there is no honor for His Son. As God's people, we need to focus on bringing honor and glory to Jesus.

As God's servant, are you doing your job in 'gathering' both the good and bad people?

vs:11 ***"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.***

God is watching over those who have accepted His 'wedding invitation'. He notices you!

Wedding clothes = an outer covering necessary for the occasion;

Revelation 19:8. They covered the status of 'goodness or badness' among the guests so that there was no distinction among them.

Spiritually speaking, 'clothes of righteousness' permit sinful man into the presence of a Holy God. Likewise, there should be no distinction of status among Christians except that we are either covered or we are not covered.

Our wedding clothes of righteousness have been provided for us by trusting in the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. We cannot purchase or manufacture a 'righteousness' of our own that makes us presentable in God's presence. Only the gift of forgiveness through Jesus can cover us appropriately.

What are you wearing to the banquet?

vs:12 ***'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless.***

God doesn't despise this inappropriate guest. He calls him 'friend'. But God has His standards and there are no 'back doors' into His Kingdom. NONE! You cannot claim friendship with God and remain unrighteous in God's Kingdom.

The same must be true in the local church. People can act like such good friends of God and yet live in ungodliness thinking that the 'church' won't notice. But the fact is this, though the church may get fooled - God is noticing. And God won't be tricked, even by sincere friendship with Him.

vs:13 ***"Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'***

Attendants = angels

"Tie him" = religious bondage; Jewish priests bound by fear of people and truth, entrapped in the lies and traditions they created in a pretense of friendship with God.

Many 'Christians' are in religious bondage even right now. How about you?

"Throw him out" = outside the Kingdom of God; no blessings or power; no relationship with God; no spiritual food; rejection; defeat; loneliness; etc.

vs:14 ***"For many are invited, but few are chosen."***

God invites all into His Kingdom, but only a few choose to be chosen. Are you?

Kingdom Lesson: The key to entering into the blessings and relationships of God's Kingdom are based on our choice of priorities in this life. Everything 'self' searches for and desires to gain in this life by its own efforts can be found when we 'choose' to cancel our self-plans and surrender to the will of our King.

You determine if you are chosen!

vs:15 ***Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.***

The religious leaders have been trapped by the truth of Jesus words. Now the religious leaders are infuriated to the point of action. They make plans to trap Jesus in His words before they are publicly exposed, humiliated, and destroyed.

Can you be trapped by your words? If you speak with double meaning or with any hypocritical deception, a trap waits for you!

vs:16 ***They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.***

It's not enough to be a 'disciple'. There are many disciples and many masters. Some people are disciples of their church denominations, or pastor, or seminary, or doctrine. Some people are disciples of a past movement or experience. But we are to be disciples only of Jesus Christ.

And in making disciples, we must make certain that the one being 'discipled' is being directed to follow Jesus, not ourselves.

To properly 'disciple', the teacher is to point the student to Jesus. "Behold the Lamb"; *John 1:29*.

Beware of religious people when they try to honor you with flattery! They were treating Jesus the same way they treated each other. They were appealing to the passions of 'self'.

They said, "You are respected as 'teacher', renown for your integrity. You have your 'act' together. You've raised yourself up in everyone's eyes and answer to no one". These are the ambitions of 'self'. Beware when men speak of you in these ways!

vs:17 ***Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"***

The approach is very innocent, but there is death on every word. These religious people could care less about taxes and Caesar. What they wanted was a reason to bring accusation of Jesus before the authorities who could pass a death sentence on Him.

Beware when people are looking for 'your opinion'. They have no real interest in truth!

vs:18 ***But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?"***

Jesus didn't let 'self' have even one second of glory, but the spirit of the comments revealed the true spirit in the hearts of the religious leaders.

The name of the spirit was 'Hypocrite'!

Jesus didn't play any of the religious games. He quickly exposed their evil intent. He had no fear of confrontation.

Kingdom Lesson: To love and live in truth you cannot be ruled by fear of men. You must embrace confrontation between righteousness and evil, and never, never fear the outcome.

vs:19 ***Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius,***

If Jesus had any money of His own, He didn't flash it in front of anyone.

vs:20 ***and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"***

Jesus gives these 'great' religious leaders a very humiliating elementary lesson.

vs:21 ***"Caesar's," they replied.***

Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

Jesus drives the truth home! He never touches on the heart of the religious leaders question. Their real question was, "How much money can 'self' have?" Jesus states that money simply either belongs to your government or to God. No mention is made about how much we get to keep for ourselves. Why? Because in God's Kingdom all money that is in our care belongs to God and is to be used to promote His purposes and His Kingdom on earth through His people. We have no 'savings'!

vs:22 ***When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.***

Truth knocks the wind out of hypocrisy! The leaders are exposed and humiliated.

vs:23 ***That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.***

The Sadducees and Pharisees are deeply opposed to each other over the issue of 'life after death'. Yet, their fear of Jesus and truth cause them to unify in their efforts to destroy Him.

vs:23-28 *"Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother.*

The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh.

Finally, the woman died.

Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

"Teacher"...? When had they received Jesus teaching? Actually, they are pretending to submit to Jesus' authority in order to gain evidence of error.

Beware when religious people pretend to desire to learn from you.

They give Jesus a silly story to explain. It only reveals the shallowness of these leaders minds.

vs:29 *Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.*

Jesus never acknowledges the question they ask! He simply states the fact that the Sadducees are in error! Why?

1. They don't know the scriptures
2. They don't know the power of God

As a Christian, if you don't know God's Word and His power, you have nothing!

The Sadducees were a liberal group who believed the Word of God, but avoided the many traditions of the Pharisees.

Do you believe the Word of God? If yes, why? How do you know it is true? Do you know the power of God? How has His power affected you?

- Many Christians read their Bibles diligently, yet never know the power of God.
- Without the power of God, the Bible is simply a legal document.
- With the power of God, the Bible is a living revelation poured into a person's heart, mind, and spirit that fill them with the very life and power of God.
- Some Christians only know God by past experiences with His power.
- Without God's Word, these people are like uncontrolled electricity, needing to be directed and contained by the disciplines of God's Word and daily discipleship.

Kingdom Lesson: Without the knowledge of God's Word and knowledge of God's power, ...you are in error! And if you have knowledge of God's Word and His power, but are disobedient and / or if you are inactive, you are in serious error and sin. The only road left for you is the road of the 'religious leaders', of hypocrisy and fear and deception. You will ultimately work against God's Kingdom and defile God's name while thinking that

you are actually obeying God. Watch out! Live as one who knows God's Word and power. It's the way of Kingdom life.

vs:30 ***At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.***

Jesus makes it very clear that 'people' will be resurrected. They will have eternal life. And in their resurrected condition, people will no longer be subjected to the passions and desires of the human body. Rather, like the angels, we will be filled with the passion and desire to serve God.

What are angels like?

Angels:

- They are ministers to serve God; *Hebrews 1:14*
- Have an awesome body; *Daniel 10:4*
- They are messengers; *Daniel 10:11*
- They are warriors; *Daniel 10:13*
- They are worshippers; *Revelations 5:11*
- They are deliverers and have great supernatural abilities; *Acts 12:1*

vs:31-32 ***But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you,***

I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' ? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Jesus cut through the hypocrisy of the trap laid for Him and goes straight to the heart of the Sadducees problem. They were hypocrites because they did not believe all of God's Word. Now Jesus, 'The Cornerstone' falls on them and crushes the root of their error; *Matthew 21:44*.

What God do you worship? A historical deity who is powerless apart from sound moral and philosophical standards accredited to His name? Or do you worship a God who is living and breathing this very moment from within the very center of your being, the temple and Holy of Holies of the heart, and Who loves you and works through you in mysterious and powerful ways that He may be glorified in you before the whole world?

vs:33 ***When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.***

Don't try to trick God! He knows you in every way and can 'bring you down' in a moment.

Whose teaching do you believe in? Who are you listening to? Jesus or.....?

vs:34 ***Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.***

The Pharisees didn't have enough humiliation yet!

vs:35 ***One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:***

They go to Jesus again trying to catch Him in His words. This time one of the experts of Jewish law and tradition comes to 'test' Jesus

Do you know that you are being tested all the time? People are watching you. What do they see? Do they see God's Kingdom at work in you or just a cloak of religious expressions and rituals? They can tell the difference better than the 'actor' can.

- vs:36 ***"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"***
Which is the greatest commandment? Actually, every command is great and needs to be considered and obeyed as equally important.
- vs:37 ***Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."***
But Jesus gives him the answer that clearly requires equal obedience to every command. Because, if you truly love God, (not traditions or organizations or activities, etc.) you will eagerly obey every other command with equal enthusiasm.
Love...
Who? God! Not anything in substitution or in representation.
How? With all your heart. With your highest passion. With all your mind. All your thoughts, plans ambitions etc. are focused on expressing your love to God through service and obedience.
- vs:38 ***This is the first and greatest commandment.***
This is the greatest command. You must make it life's highest priority! It is the key to God's heart!
- vs:39 ***And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.'***
Loving God is not enough. We can't see Him or touch Him. But we can show our love by expressing our love for God to our neighbors. Actually, can't obey the first commandment without obeying the second commandment.
How is your relationship with the people around you (not including the church people)? Can you deal with their attitudes, needs, language, habits, etc. and express true love to them? You must!
- vs:40 ***All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."***
And if you make these two commands the focus of your life, you will satisfy all else that is required of you by God. Of course that will mean that everything Jesus taught will lead us to accurately fulfill the requirements of these two laws.
Therefore... 'follow Jesus' with all your heart, soul, and mind! It's a command! And Jesus will lead you to love God and your neighbor.
- vs:41 ***While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,***
Jesus meets the religious leaders on their own ground since they love to deal in questions with answers that must be distorted from the truth in order to keep their 'organization' afloat
- vs:42 ***"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?"***
"The son of David," they replied.
What do you think about Jesus? Whose son is He? If he is God's son, should we not treat Him with highest respect and obedience? Worship? Devotion?
The Jewish law stated that the Messiah would be a man born from the ancestry of David. The Pharisees answered correctly.

vs:43-45 *He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says,*

*" 'The Lord said to my Lord:
"Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet." ' "*

If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"

But now Jesus takes their answer to new dimensions by proving that though the Messiah is born physically from the lineage of David, He in fact, is the Lord or God of David. Jesus points this out by using the same verses from the Word of God that also point to David's grandson.

vs:46 *No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.*

The power of God's Word can close the mouths of the 'lion'. It can close the voice of Satan who whispers in our mind as well.

Now the religious leaders are on the defensive and Jesus goes on the offense.

Matthew 23

vs:1 *Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:*

Jesus addresses all the people on the subject of 'hypocrisy'. Hypocrisy is the sin of all sins that offends God and His Kingdom! No other sin is addressed with such diligence.

"Woe" = great sorrow, grief, misery. A cause of sorrow, affliction, trouble.
A curse.

vs:2 *"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.*

Whose seat do you sit in? What was Moses seat; *Exodus 18:13* and (especially) *15 & 16*?

Moses job was to guide the people towards God so that God could lead them to the promise land. The religious leaders confronting Jesus though are not willing for the people under their spell to follow the leading of the Lord. Rather they want the devotion and obedience of the people for themselves.

vs:3 *So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.*

Why must the people obey the teachers of the law and the Pharisees? Because they claimed to tell the people what God's will is.

Jesus definition then of a hypocrite is someone who uses the power of their position or authority to represent the 'will of God', yet who denies its power and effectiveness in their own life by not obeying their own advice.

What do you preach? Does it work for you? What prevented the religious leaders from taking their own advice?

- vs:4 ***They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.***
Heavy loads = rules, regulations, standards above and beyond what God had said.
Put on men's shoulders = to oppress and keep the people under their control.
Not willing... to move them = the religious leaders want the people to stay where they are, not joyfully 'hearing and obeying' the Lord freely, but in submission and quietly financing their 'religious kingdom'.
The great sin of the 'Christian religion', (different from pure Christianity) is that it prevents, entraps, people from following the Lord Jesus. Jesus says, "Follow me". Religion says, "Don't move, stay put, and submit to the leadership of the church".
- vs:5 ***"Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;***
The bottom line is that the religious leaders, hypocrites, are more concerned about their outward appearances in the eyes of other men than how their hearts appear in God's eyes. Therefore, we can conclude that they have no fear or respect for God though they may have suppressed fear of judgment.
What motivates you? Looking religious or being righteous? The difference may have eternal effects!
- vs:6 ***they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;***
They love to look important. They love to be treated with respect and to have authority.
- vs:7 ***they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'***
They love to be 'given face' and titles.
- vs:8 ***"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.***
Does this sound like religious leaders today? This is an exact picture of the human heart today. Nothing has changed from the time of Jesus!
Jesus answered; there is only one Pastor, Reverend, Preacher, Rabbi, Priest, and His name is Lord! And we are all equal among each other. No Christian is more important than another regardless of the job assigned to him from the Lord. We are family, brothers.
Are you guilty of holding one Christian on a different level than another. How do you compare yourself with others?
- vs:9 ***And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.***
Don't get caught up in focusing on earthly 'connections'. Rather, focus on your 'connection' to your real Father, the Father of your soul. He is the connection that can influence your life above all else.

Don't call anybody in a religious position 'Father'. This is a direct command from Jesus! Do you know who your real Father is? What effects has He had on you as His child? How is your relationship with Him today?

vs:10 ***Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ.***

There is only one Teacher. If you are submitted to some persons teaching or doctrine through which you are filtering the Word of God - STOP! Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, is the only Teacher you are to be listening to in God's Kingdom.

Now this doesn't mean that we do not have any persons who help us to understand the Word of God. God has appointed some people to do this job. But those people who pass on the teachings of Jesus should not get the respect and title of Teacher. They are only people who relay Jesus teachings to others. They are 'messengers'. Do you want to be a 'Bible teacher'? Only the Holy Spirit can do that. You can be a 'messenger of the Holy Spirit' in presenting the revealed truth taught you by the Holy Spirit. But not to be titled as a 'Teacher'!

vs:11 ***The greatest among you will be your servant.***

Titles do not make a person great. Rather it is your willingness and actions of 'giving' to others that makes you great. People with 'titles' demand respect. People with 'greatness' give to those in need even as a servant gives to his master.

vs:12 ***For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.***

In fact, if you demand people to respect you and the 'attached title', in time, because of your obvious pride, self-centeredness, and transparency, people will give only the token respect which is a mockery and humiliation. But if you exalt others by lowering yourself to serve them in humility, you will be respected and exalted.

We can see this truth from the example of Jesus life. How are you doing in following Jesus in humble service to the needs of those around you?

'Humbles himself' = it's our choice (made by the Spirit)

'Exalts himself' = it's our choice (the nature of our flesh)

vs:13 ***"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.***

Great sorrow is upon those who organize and systematize the truth of God to exalt themselves. You hypocrites! You must pay the price for self-exaltation through deceit and manipulation of others. You have prevented those whom God loves from entering into the plan and Kingdom He called them to. You have substituted God's Kingdom, which cannot receive hypocrites, for a fake religious kingdom where you receive the glory that is due to God Himself.

Hypocrite - a person who pretends to be what he is not; One who pretends to be better than he really is, or to be pious, virtuous, etc., without really being so (Webster's Dictionary).

- An actor

How do religious leaders shut "the kingdom of heaven in men's faces"? By not even showing men the real kingdom of heaven or by only holding forth their own 'religious' kingdom under the guise of being God's Kingdom.

vs:14 (See NIV footnote) ***Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You devour widow's houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Therefore you will be punished more severely.***

Great sorrow to you who only pretend to love God and represent Him. You pretend to care so much about the weak and oppressed while using those same people to make yourselves rich and famous. You pretend to love God so much by praying long prayers in public. These are not prayers, but rather a show of your ability to act like you are concerned for the needs of others. You're using God to bring glory to yourself. Therefore, the very One you are deceiving with feigned honor will punish you more than the other wicked people!

vs:15 ***"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.***

Great sorrow to you who pretend to love God and teach others to pretend to love him. You organize huge projects at huge expenses and act like you've made a great accomplishment when you 'get' someone to submit to your authority (under the pretense of submitting to God). And once he's under your control, you make him twice as skilled in the art of religious pretending and twice the tool of Satan, son of hell (or angel of light as was Judas Iscariot)!

vs:16 ***"Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'***

You are in very big trouble! You can't see where you are going and yet you lead others arrogantly towards your impending disaster. You think it doesn't really matter because the wrath of God hasn't fallen on you - yet. Because of this, you are giving no respect for what God says is 'holy'. You have taken it upon yourselves to decide what is right and wrong. God's righteous standards are of little value to you if they stand in the way or your carnal ambitions; *1 Corinthians 3:16*.

vs:17 ***You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?***

You're not only blind, you're fools! Which has more value? The things of God or the things of this world? You think it's the lavishness of your buildings and Sunday services that matters to God! You forget that it is the presence of God that 'alone' really matters.

vs:18 ***You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.'***

You think you actually know what God likes and doesn't like? You think you know what is holy to God? Who told you what is right or wrong; *Genesis 3:4-5*?

vs:19 ***You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?***

You are blind men! Leaders with no sight. Remember who you are! Only men! Dust - in the hands of an Awesome Creator!

You throw out the presence of God and glorify the good works of men. You idiots! Only the presence of God can make any kind of work or gift - good! All your 'good works' programs are a waste of time and an insult to God if not born out of the very heart and Spirit of God and established through your submission and obedience to Him.

vs:20 ***Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.***

So, no matter what you do, if it is offered in love and born out of right relationship with God and in obedience to God, it is sacred and acceptable to God.

vs:21 ***And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.***

Where is God's true temple today? *I Corinthians 3:16.* We are God's temple!

And what makes you the 'temple'? The presence of God dwelling in you.

If the presence of God doesn't actually dwell in you, what kind of a 'temple' are you? A pretender; a hypocrite, beautiful on the outside (good works, religious terminology, knowledge of doctrines, devout in traditions), but empty on the inside.

What kind of temple are you? Can a person be outwardly in ruins and still be a place where God dwells? If 'yes', then can we ever judge a person solely from outward appearances?

vs:22 ***And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.***

If you are a child of God, then not only is God all powerful and holy in us, but the gifts of obedience and good works offered with our bodies (which are the temple) are holy. So be careful of how you conduct your life, because God is in every aspect of you. In no area can you reserve any portion for 'self'.

vs:23 ***"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.***

You are in big, big trouble - you who hold the position of teachers of God's laws, you who claim to know so much about God and His Word. You hypocrites! You are so careful to calculate the exact minimum amount of what God requires of you and completely ignore the heart of what God is longing for from you; justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

If your giving is going to mean anything to God, it must be given from a heart that is dedicated to reflect God's heart of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Then your giving will be worthy and holy to God.

vs:24 ***You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.***

You know nothing of truth or God, yet you lead the nation into the arms of destruction, the destiny of those who run in the dark. You pick and focus

on trivia and miss the whole point of your existence. Worse yet, you force God's people to support your nonsense!

Are you focused clearly on God and His plans for you or are you distracted by some little detail or 'pet' doctrine?

vs:25 ***"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.***

Disaster is waiting with open arms to 'pretend Christians'! You make yourself look so 'spiritual' on the outside, but your hearts are full of sin and disobedience.

vs:26 ***Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.***

Understand! It isn't wrong to have an outwardly appearance of Godliness, but, what is shown outwardly must be born out of a Godly and righteous heart!

Get it right on the inside - then let it show on the outside! Go ahead and wear your Jesus T-shirts and raise your hands in church - as your heart is lead by the Lord, not so that you can look like your heart is being lead by the Lord.

vs:27 ***"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.***

You can't escape the curse that God puts on people who pretend to love Jesus, especially you Christian leaders! Your churches may be so beautiful and fancy. Your music and preaching may be very professionally presented. You may have such a smooth flowing and well-controlled organization, but the people inside are spiritually dead! Your 'church' is a tomb! That is all it is!

vs:28 ***In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.***

Your church promotes itself as a place of truth, hope, and righteousness, but God, who sees all truth, knows and declares that you're only playing games. Your motives are selfish and evil. You use the cover of the church to justify and hide all kinds of wickedness.

vs:29 ***"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.***

Get ready for your punishment, you traitors! You go to great lengths to honor the 'true' men of God ...once they are dead and silent! Actually, you are only honoring their death, not the message God sent to you through them.

vs:30 ***And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'***

You argue that you would never have ignored their message the way your ancestors did and that you would certainly never have shared in their murderous schemes. You point the finger at 'those hypocritical' pastors and church leaders around you and then say that you would never be like them! But - one question...

- vs:31 ***So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.***
 ...Who taught you the 'way of God'? Are you not educated and raised up by the very ones who you accuse? Hypocrite! Yes you!
- vs:32 ***Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!***
 The same spirit you are passing judgment against is the same spirit that lurks within your own soul! You're no different! In fact, the punishment destined for those you accuse is stored up and waiting to be poured out on you!
- vs:33 ***"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"***
 You are the offspring of Satan! How can you ever escape the punishment for those guilty of participating in Satan's evil assault on God's Kingdom?
- vs:34 ***Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.***
 How can you escape? By receiving the 'peace emissaries' that I am sending you (messengers of the Gospel). They will offer you the only hope of salvation. But I know you. You will not only reject them, you will abuse them and even murder them - all in the name of 'righteousness', doing it even in your own churches.
 There is more than one way to murder a person. A person can have his 'spirit' broken down and destroyed by constant indoctrination and abuse. Though this is not a physical murder, which is indeed part of what Jesus was predicting, but it is a spiritual murder where the person is left spiritually dead.
- vs:35 ***And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.***
 These are God's messengers you are torturing! And you think you can get away with it!? No way! God will not only punish you for the crimes you committed against Him in your lifetime, but He will punish you for all the crimes against Him throughout history for the murders and abuses against His messengers!
- vs:36 ***I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.***
 You can't escape it! Your stubborn, rebellious, treacherous hypocrisy cannot be overlooked any more. You must bear the consequences.
- vs:37 ***"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.***
 Jerusalem = 'Christian religion' (not to be mistaken for true Christianity, or Christ-likeness); the place where God calls home, yet the place where men, in the name of God, seek to destroy Him.
 Do you feel guilty of the great sin of hypocrisy? Jesus longs to restore you into right relationship with God. He loves you so much, but will never force you to receive His love and power to restore your heart. You must

come to Him of your own choice. And when you do, in Him you will find all the security, acceptance, and identity you ever hoped for. What will it cost you to break away from the cycle of a hypocritical lifestyle?

Jesus loves the traditional church very much. We need to love it, too. He longs to find a welcoming home there where His Lordship is embraced. Have you received Him as Lord of your life and of your 'Christianity'?

vs:38 ***Look, your house is left to you desolate.***

There is no future for organizations, governments, religious institutions or people who build on a foundation of pretense and deception. Open your eyes! What you have is lifeless, joyless, and in opposition to God's plan. Therefore it is all emptiness and Godlessness; *Ecclesiastes 1:2 and 12:13*. This is the result of hypocrisy!

vs:39 ***For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "***

Do you need to break free of hypocrisy? Make Jesus the center of everything. Glorify Him in all your attitudes, actions, and words. Seek His Kingdom and His righteousness and believe what He has taught. Learn to 'follow' Jesus by 'hearing and obeying' each and every day. Forget about your own desires and plans, and commit to serve Jesus in the simple things He requests of us. Then let Him get all the recognition for the good results. Bless Jesus by being a channel through whom He can continue His ministry to the world through you.

Matthew 24

vs:1 ***Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.***

Jesus left the temple. What a sad thing for Him. No doubt He longed to take up His rightful position there. Yet the sin of hypocrisy which ruled there would not allow Him.

Do you think Jesus has to walk away from some of His children and churches as well? What is His attitude going to be when He finds the temple of our hearts is chaos and compromise as He found the temple in Jerusalem?

His disciples had no idea of the pain Jesus felt. They were caught up in the very web of deceit, which had been spun by the religious institution in Jerusalem. How impressed they were of the beautiful buildings and outward appearances. They were not seeing what Jesus saw though. Jesus was looking into the hearts.

What impresses you about your church? Nice architecture? Good music? Charismatic preacher? Wealthy congregation? Good programs? ...Or the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit? Only the presence of Jesus is what matters in a church or a person's life. All the rest of the things may enhance, but most likely will distract the people from Jesus.

vs:2 ***"Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."***

Are you concentrating on the outward appearances? Things? A person's life or a church that is built on appearances only will be destroyed. Completely! Maybe not physically, but inwardly, it will die. It will become something other than a church; something other than what God intended it to be.

vs:3 ***As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"***

In the minds of Jesus' disciples they think that when Jesus said the temple would be destroyed, that He was referring to the time that He would establish His earthly Kingdom. They wanted to know when 'pay day' would come for their faithfulness to Jesus and His campaign to 'take over'.

vs:4 ***Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you.***

Jesus first comment about the subject of the 'end of the age' is a warning against deception to the 'followers of Jesus'.

In order to deceive people who live in the truth, deception must appear like familiar truths. The lies will probably be based on scriptures! They may come from well 'respected' church leaders!

How can one keep from being deceived? The only way is by familiarity with the truth, being familiar with the voice' of the shepherd; *John 10:1-18*, and by 'testing the spirits'; *1 John 4:1-6*.

vs:5 ***For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ, ' and will deceive many.***

There will be 'many' deceivers coming in the name of the Lord! These deceivers may not even know they have been deceived. But the things they were taught as truth are the deceptions they propagate as God's Word.

They will claim to be, "the true body of Christ, the true church" appointed and anointed by God, messenger of truth, source of all hope.

Why do they want to deceive YOU!?! To control you. To cause you to want to serve them. You will serve them because you will be deceived into thinking that in doing so, you are actually serving 'Christ'.

vs:6 ***You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.***

At the time of the 'end of the age' you will hear much discouraging information. But don't let the news reports control your life! Don't get upset because things aren't looking safe.

Remember, those news reports are a sign of something very wonderful. Let the news point you to our great hope of Jesus' soon return in glory.

Escalating violence is the result of empty hopes promised by false 'Messiahs'. It's the course of events that must take place. Just be sure you aren't sucked in to the great hypocrisy! "Many will be deceived"! vs:5

vs:7 ***Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.***

The 'spirit' of the world at the end times will be one of turmoil, conflict, division, pride, and struggles for power. Ideologies and religions will be propagated of a quest to control the hearts of men. And as this spiritual

shaking that takes place in the heavens, a parallel physical shaking of the earth will be seen. Likewise, the spiritual emptiness of men's hearts will parallel with physical famine and empty stomachs throughout the earth.

The more men struggle in their own deception to find the solid foundations for the hopes of all mankind, apart from the foundational hope we have in God through faith in Jesus Christ; the further the world will stumble in failure, while ever glorifying their outward, ever improving the beautiful shell they are creating to cover the realities of inward emptiness and disappointments.

vs:8 ***All these are the beginning of birth pains.***

The world at this time will be like a woman who is just beginning to experience labor pains. It's time to get ready! The arrival of Jesus is near!

vs:9 ***"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.***

"Then..." Yes, there is more and it doesn't look good for the children of God.

Are you one of God's children? If so, then here is something we should prepare our hearts for. This verse is for you!

"You" will be hated by everybody outside of God's Kingdom! You will be 'handed over' (arrested by Satan - He's the one behind it all) to be persecuted, to suffer (did Jesus experience this?), and ultimately you will be put to death.

Why? Because you are a Child of God. You follow and obey the teachings of Jesus. You believe God created everything instead of everything creating itself - that He is in all and all is in Him.

Where can you escape to? Another country? That might work for a while, but eventually 'all nations' will hate you.

vs:10 ***At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,***

Eternal security? That won't work! Once saved - always saved? No way!

To turn away from the faith, you first have to have been 'in' the faith. And not only will there be many Christians who turn away from Jesus and God's Word of truth, they will try to turn other Christians away from Jesus through trickery and force.

vs:11 ***and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.***

The, so-called, 'church' will become a force used by Satan to destroy anyone who follows Jesus! This 'church' will have prophets who will pretend to speak God's messages, and, sad to say, many believers will be deceived and leave the faith.

False prophets = May be very careful to speak words based on the scriptures, but the prophet himself is 'false'. It's more important to discern the spirit of the prophet, then to discern the contents of his message, though both are very important issues.

Just because the message is true, doesn't mean you are safe to 'follow' the prophet!

vs:12 ***Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,***

Wickedness will be everywhere and its effect on society is that they will be afraid to show love and compassion to others. Wickedness hardens the heart. Look at what happened to Lot after living in the cities of wickedness; *Genesis 19:12-16*.

How warm is your love towards your neighbor? You cannot follow Jesus with coldness in your heart towards the needs of others.

vs:13 ***but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.***

Jesus doesn't give us all this bad news without offering a door of hope. Here it is: If you stand firm - to the end - you will be saved.

"Stand firm...":

1. Don't be alarmed
2. Don't run from suffering for the cause of Jesus
3. Know the truth so well that a close counterfeit doesn't confuse you
4. Don't depend on others to carry you through
5. Continue following Jesus and obeying Him day by day

Remember that our days here on earth are just a flicker of time compared to eternity! You can make it!

vs:14 ***And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.***

We have a job to do. We can do it despite persecution and hypocrisy. Our job is to:

- #1. Preach the gospel of God's Kingdom to the whole world as a testimony.

How is your testimony? Do you even know what 'God's Kingdom' is? How does God's Kingdom compare to 'religion' (especially Christianity), or to a political government? You need to know this if you are to obey Jesus call. What does the world see when they look at your life? Are you living in the truth of God's Kingdom or are you only simply able to show some head knowledge of what you've heard about it?

You shouldn't preach what you aren't living!

- Do you worry about tomorrow?
- Are you laying up treasures on earth or in heaven?
- Do you love your neighbor as much as you love yourself?
- How close is your relationship to your Father God?
- Are you free from all sin and bondage?
- How is your attitude towards higher authorities?
- Are you afraid of anything?
- Are you daily laying down your 'will and desires' at Jesus' feet and taking up His cross, His will and His desires, and following Him?

We must get a hold of God's Kingdom! Discover its secrets! Seek for it with all urgency! Then live it by faith!

There is an end coming. The attacks against God and truth will come to a sudden end. This 'end' will come though only after we have fulfilled Jesus' declaration that the truth of the gospel would be 'preached' (and lived) throughout the entire world.

The time may be getting very, very close. It maybe depends on if the 'message' that is being preached around the world, and which has already reached nearly every nation, is indeed the 'gospel of the Kingdom of God'?! Or could it be that the message being preached is only a form of 'Christian religion' with an enticement of God's Kingdom? Maybe a lot of 'both'!
Matthew 23:15.

vs:15

"So when you see standing in the holy place `the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand--

Who will see the 'abomination'? *Verse 3*; the disciples of Jesus.

Where is the Holy Place? There are several possibilities:

1. *I Corinthians 6:19-20*; Your body, more specifically, the body of 'true disciples'
2. The reconstructed temple in Jerusalem
3. Israel as a nation
4. The 'Christian' church in general
5. The place of God's authority and power

Abomination = (Webster's dictionary) anything hateful and disgusting.

Desolation = (Webster's dictionary) laying waste, lonely grief, misery, a desolate place, a desolate condition.

Desolate = (Webster's dictionary) to leave alone, forsake, striped of inhabitants, uninhabitable, laid waste, in a ruinous state.

In the preceding chapters *Matthew 23:37-38*, Jesus uses the word 'desolate' to describe what religious hypocrisy did to His nation of Israel, especially to the Holy City and specifically the house (temple; *Matthew 21:12-13*, "my house").

The cause for the temple being desolate is because the very people, who claim God as their Lord, had used God's laws to build their own 'kingdom'. They had no use or interest in actually allowing God into His Holy Place. They had usurped God's place of power, authority, and glory, to establish their own foundation of power, authority, and glory. The abomination that drove God out of His rightful place was the sin of hypocrisy. God will not mingle with hypocrisy. He is truth. Hypocrisy is pretense and deception.

What kind of religion or church can you have without the living God?
Nothing more than idolatry!

Can we expect the spirit of hypocrisy to rise up in our generation under the pretense of New Testament church order? What about traditional church order? Why do so many people in America (the world's greatest 'Christian' nation) despise the gospel message? Answer: they can see through the pretense and find an empty 'temple' at the place where they've been told God would be found!

To sum it up, what infuriates God and causes Him to abandon His people is when people use the things of God (His promises, His authority to men, His generosity and love, His words of truth, His Kingdom) to gain benefit for themselves. Jesus spoke very clearly about this attitude in *Matthew 23* and I think that very little has changed since then.

John the Baptist summed up what is to be the correct and righteous attitude very clearly. He said, "...After me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry..."; *Matthew 3:11*.

In all that we do we should be an offering of service through which God might receive glory and praise and recognition as the One True God.

What did Daniel say that relates to hypocrisy? *Daniel 5*. To sum it up, King Nebuchadnezzar was using the articles of God's temple for personal use and self-exultation. They actually used the things of God in worship of idols!!

Hypocrisy? Yes! Mockery of Almighty God? Yes! And God couldn't stand it! God destroyed Babylon and made it 'desolate'.

Is this same thing happening today? Are people using the church or the authority of the Word of God for self-exultation and building for themselves a system of security that doesn't reflect the Kingdom of God except as a pretense?

While the 'abomination' I've referred to is an abomination of hypocrisy which men set up in the temple of their hearts, this may well be reflected in a physical way as a sign from God. Jesus has said, "Let the reader understand", (these words are spoken by Jesus, not an addition from Matthew the author). It seems that Jesus is saying that there needs to be a special revelation or sincerity in seeking the mystery of Daniel and the 'abomination'.

"...when you see...", seems to be linked to, "...let the reader understand...", or that when it is revealed to you that the 'abomination' is ruling in the place where God ought to be, then...

vs:16 ***then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.***

...then don't hold back on any radical or sudden evasive or protective action. Get out! Though the place where it has happened may be your 'home' (Judea, the place where God is supposed to be), ...GO! Break away!

Judea = homeland, home church, heart, the place where God's Kingdom ought to be evident.

vs:17-18 ***Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house.***

Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.

Make a clean break! Don't take along any of the former traditions or concepts.

Example:

When King Nebuchadnezzar brought out the temple articles for his foolish intentions, that's the time to leave the banquet. And not just leave the banquet, but get out of the country. Why? Because that same night the nation was overrun.

The 'handwriting' is already on the wall! Jesus has shown us in *Matthew 23 & 24*. Beware! Be alert! Satan is creeping in and Christians are blindly ignoring the signs of warning.

vs:19 ***How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!***

It won't be easy to break relationship and leave behind responsibilities or commitments to other people. But it is more important to build God's Kingdom rather than a pretense of God's Kingdom. So - get out!

vs:20 ***Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.***

This is how it will be in the end times. It's going to happen and may well already be happening all around us, so what can we do now? We can pray! Pray that when the time comes to 'flee' you will be spiritually strong, not in a 'winter' season of the soul. And pray that you will be free enough from religious traditions and bondage (Sabbath's) to not be held back.

vs:21 ***For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again.***

These days will be days of unparalleled distress. Lives, families, churches, ideas, concepts, traditions, goals, beliefs, investments, achievements, and much more will be tested. The world will become seemingly un-glued and without any solid foundation. Can you survive?

We are clearly entering or are already in these end-time distresses.

vs:22 ***If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.***

"if those days had not been cut short...", brought to an early climax, "...no one would survive", the annihilation of life, or the annihilation of true believers and 'holders' of the truth of God; *1 Kings 19:9-18*.

The days of distress will be brought to an early closure because of God's 'elect', those people who have been chosen by God and who have in turn, chosen God - to be His children in truth, obedient, holy, and committed to glorifying God's name on the earth and by allowing God to build His Kingdom, in His own way, through them.

vs:23 ***At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it.***

At that time (time of distress) there will be many people who seem to sincerely be looking for God. They will come up with a lot of ideas about where 'truth' can be found. But we already know where the 'truth' is. So don't be tempted by the 'drawing cards' of these people who claim the truth. Beware of their trickery! They are putting on an act! Don't believe them! Only trust what is firmly based and balanced on God's Word.

vs:24 ***For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible.***

There will be a lot of reasons to follow after these 'performers'! They will be very convincing! They will 'seem' to have the anointing of God on their lives. They will 'seem' to be hearing from God. They will have great performances, which will include very convincing signs and miracles! It's going to look very much like an 'on fire' church!! But the whole thing is a

show! Built on men's abilities and interwoven with the truth of God, but for the purpose of self-glorification rather than glorification of God.

God's 'elect' will be especially vulnerable to this! But don't fall for it. Don't let your feelings rule over Jesus' warning to us in these verses.

vs:25 ***See, I have told you ahead of time.***

Jesus knows what's in store for us and He has warned us. If you fall into the deception, it's not because Jesus didn't warn you. He has! So watch your steps and follow only Jesus.

vs:26 ***"So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.***

If someone tells you (or you read an advertisement) that you can certainly meet Jesus at 'such and such' a conference or at 'our' prayer meeting, don't believe it! Don't go chasing after 'Jesus' experiences. He has already chosen you. He lives in your heart. You can't get any closer to Him than you are right now except through repentance of sin and hypocrisy and a 'crucifixion' of selfishness. Sin is the only thing that keeps you from getting closer to Jesus.

vs:27 ***For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.***

Not only is Jesus instantly available and as close as possible to you by His indwelling Spirit, but He will also, one day, be physically among us. It will happen just as quickly in the physical as it does spiritually. As when you one day called on Jesus to save you and instantly, His Spirit and Truth rushed into your heart, so too it will be when Jesus rushes into this world to bring His great salvation.

vs:28 ***Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.***

In those days, humanity will be like the vultures, feasting on 'death'.

Where does the world tell us we can find satisfaction and life? Are you falling for this deception? Where is life? Where is the place where you can find the food God offers His children? Are you feeding your soul and spirit there?

'Vultures' are those who thrive on the destruction of others. Who do you suppose will be getting destroyed? This seems to point towards God's 'elect' who seem to be on the verge of annihilation; vs:22...:

Carcass = elect of God

Vultures = elect of Satan

This is not a clear verse to me, but it does point to a time in the world that is reflected in this example.

vs:29 ***"Immediately after the distress of those days***

***" `the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'***

"distress of those days' = a season with a beginning and an end.

Distress = (Webster's dictionary) implies mental or physical strain imposed by pain, trouble, worry, or the like and usually suggests a state or situation that can be relieved.

While verses 28 and 29 certainly point to the spiritual conditions of the world at the end times, it undoubtedly points to physical events as well.

Though the physical possibilities are unclear and may be very literal, it not necessary for us speculate on what they may be. But what we can learn from this is that when we see these prophecies beginning to happen, then know for certain that the progression of events are true and on course for the next event foretold.

In Noah's time it seemed scientifically impossible that the world could ever be totally covered with water. Rain was unheard of! Yet it happened; *Genesis 6-8*.

The signs and wonders demonstrated in Egypt to Pharaoh by Moses were likewise 'totally impossible' according to science and nature. Yet they happened; *Exodus 7-11*.

Why then would it be too difficult to believe the literal prophecies of Matthew 24:29? I believe it will happen exactly as it is written! But don't ask me how! Remember, "With God, all things are possible"; *Matthew 19:26, Exodus 10:22, Jeremiah 31:35-36*.

vs:30-31 ***"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.***

And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

This is it! The long awaited arrival of Jesus in all His power, glory, and splendor. Not a baby born in an obscure barn, but a King of all He created, above all laws of nature and science and the imagination of men.

First there will be a 'sign', the sign of the Son of Man which will appear in the sky. This sign will have some very significant meaning that is understood by all the nations of the world. When the sign is seen, it will cause a world wide 'morning'.

Mourning = (Webster's dictionary) to feel or express sorrow (for something regrettable). To grieve for (someone who has died).

Simultaneously or shortly after the 'sign', the Son of Man, Jesus, will be seen (by the nations) coming to earth 'on' the clouds in the sky. Not as a humble, wandering preacher, but in all His rightful power, authority, and glory!

The mode of Jesus' return will be the same as when He left the earth; *Acts 1:9-11*.

At this same time, Jesus will command His army of angels with the sound of a loud trumpet, to sweep across the earth and bring together all of His elect followers to be with Him - physically.

After laying out this end time itinerary, Jesus interjects a specific lesson we must learn, which relates to this end-time chain of events.

Since we have no fig trees in our part of the world, it's difficult to get the full meaning. Yet we can glean a lot from understood plant science.

Namely, that there is a chain of events in nature. One event follows the other, though as with growing plants, the changes are gradual, but certain.

Some theologians compare the fig tree to the 'nation of Israel'. If this is the case, then we can consider several possibilities:

1. When Israel is 'tender' or at its time of birth...
2. When Israel is 'tender' or softened for the gospel...
3. When 'spiritual' Israel; the Christian church becomes 'tender'...

...then you know the time of Jesus return is close!

vs:33 ***Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.***

Whatever this 'fig tree' lesson is about, we will be able to see the effects. And when you see them (either literally or spiritually, by revelation), you can know for certain that Jesus' soon arrival is very near. It is the next event on the spiritual calendar.

vs:34 ***I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.***

And we have this guarantee from Jesus that 'this generation' will not die until all Jesus has taught and foretold comes to pass.

'This generation'; there is much speculation on the meaning of this...

1. The generation of Jews living in Israel at the time of its 'rebirth' in 1948.
Generation = (Webster's dictionary) single succession in natural descent; people living at the same time.
2. The Nave's Topical Bible suggests that a 'generation' could be interpreted as a 'race'.
3. If everyone is given to speculating, then I'd like to put my 2¢ worth in by suggesting an equivalent span of time in a spiritual race of people who live in a spiritual nation of Israel. In other words, the generation of the 'elect' in which these events are fulfilled.

Having said this, the main issue to focus on is that in the end times, it is going to be tough to stay true to the Lord! Satan is going to launch an all out attack to destroy the 'elect', and as the elect, we must set our hearts and minds to stay true and endure every conceivable form of suffering ...to the end.

Our great hope and joy is this ...as God's elect, we are part of God's great eternal plan. There is a great, awesome, spectacular, grand revelation and victory ahead, but only worth solid commitment and hard-headed determination can we hope to endure and ride with Jesus, the angels, and His elect as He sweeps across the earth in all His glory and majesty.

The details of the final countdown are not clear - yet, but Jesus does let us know when the countdown is approaching its final stages.

Be alert! Be ready! And between now and then, we have a great job to do in preaching, baptizing, and discipling the new 'elect'. We don't have time to spend speculating on the details of Jesus' predictions. It's enough to know the promises of what is ahead that He has already revealed. When the

time for greater revelation comes, Jesus the Holy Spirit will show us. That is one of His jobs. Until then, so as the angels admonished the disciples at Jesus ascension, we should be admonished again... "Don't stand around staring into emptiness. Get busy with the work"!

vs:35 ***Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.***

Though these preceding verses may not make a lot of sense to you as to how it can all happen, be assured of this, it will happen! Every bit of it!

And what Jesus said in regard to these few verses applies as well to the entirety of God's Word. Every word in this book is true and believable, including Jesus' promise that the heavens and earth that you live on will one day be non-existent. Only the promises of God are eternal and completely trustworthy.

What promises of Jesus have you read in the book of Matthew so far? Are you building your life on them or on the promises of the 'word of this world'? Where is your security and faith? Will it be sure enough to withstand the distress of the end-times and passing away of the earth and heavens? Can you actually make it to Jesus' side?

vs:36 ***"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.***

People want to know! The return of Jesus Christ will be the most earth-shaking event in human history. Visitors from outer space - with the whole world watching! People want to know, when will it happen? How will it happen?

Jesus has given us enough information already. First, we know that it really will happen. Secondly, we know some of the events preceding it as well as events accompanying Jesus' return. But God has kept the answer to the next question as a secret, that He alone will reveal. Not even Jesus Himself knows the appointed time for His return.

So, if Jesus doesn't even know when He will return, by what right do we, as sinful humans have in trying to predict the timing of this even? Yet many Christians have been so bold in the face of God to make these predictions anyway.

Don't ever follow a person who declares that Jesus will come on 'such and such' a day. That is a proud, arrogant person who has no respect for God or His Word. He is in error and is out of step with God.

vs:37 ***As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.***

Though we won't know the exact date of Jesus' return, Jesus does reveal to us the season. And that season will be a very wicked season for humanity. Just like it was in the days of Noah...

vs:38 ***For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark;***

The people's only concern was to gratify their physical cravings. Obsession with their bodies, stomachs, sex, and money; *Luke 17:28*. Is anything different today? They are totally ignorant or choose to ignore the realities of the impending closure to their existence. They have no thought or concern about their own souls even though they have heard the warnings.

vs:39 ***and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.***

They thought anything beyond proven science was impossible and ignored any other possibilities that could happen. But when it was too late, truth proved science fallible and the world learned of their 'mistake' through hindsight.

Science has become the leading religion of our day. It takes as much faith or more to believe in the evolution of man and the 'big bang' theories, which are actually accepted as fact around the world.

What we believe is a choice. Scientific evidence can easily prove that a great flood covered the earth. Yet that concept is still unacceptable in the hardness of the human heart, because to accept this means that humanity must also accept the God who sent the flood and His reason for sending it, which is ...sin. Also, people hate to accept the idea that they are wrong or have to submit to a higher authority.

This is the 'climate' of the season of Jesus return.

vs:40 ***Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.***

It will happen quickly and resolutely. No time for reconsideration. Two men will be working side by side. One is taken and the other remains.

vs:41 ***Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.***

The same will be true with two women. One goes, the other one stays. Why?

We can see from verses 40 and 41 that Jesus fully expects believers to mingle with unbelievers. So I must ask you, do you have an intolerant attitude towards unbelievers? How many non-Christian people do you daily associate with?

Secondly, we can learn that we will still be living in a time when men and women are 'working'. Society will not have advanced to a point of carefree luxury. According to the pronounced punishment for sin, we will be working.

At Jesus' return there will be a literal, physical separating of Jesus' disciples from the rest of the people in the world. Imagine what it will be like on that day! How do your present plans relate to this event? Are you looking forward to Jesus' coming or are you so caught up in your own selfish ambitions that you have become like the non-believers, living for their bodies, stomachs, and sex? If you are like the latter person, Jesus says to you...]

vs:42 ***"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.***

"...Watch out"! Be alert. Be ready. Because you don't know when your Lord is coming back!

Here is a little clue we can see that tells us who Jesus is coming for. He is coming for those who are submitted to His Lordship. Are you? Who is your Lord? Events and circumstances? Fear? Your job? Your pastor? Your wife or husband, ...or children? How do we recognize a person who is

submitted to the Lord? By their voiced allegiance or by how they live their daily life?

vs:43 ***But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.***

We must be as alert for Jesus' return as we would be for a thief whom we knew was going to attempt to enter our home. That is "high alert"!

vs:44 ***So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.***

And this is the level of alertness that we are to be in regarding Jesus' return; "high alert". All other matters and situations are secondary. Be ready! What do you need to do right now to make yourself ready? If you were expecting an important guest to arrive to your home, what would you do in preparation? Or if you were an expectant mother what would you do or change in your life?

vs:45 ***"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?"***

Here is the answer Jesus gives us regarding our attitude and behavior in anticipation of His soon return. We are to be:

1. Faithful (full of faith)
2. Wise (*Deuteronomy 32:29*)
3. Obedient servant
4. Knowing and doing your assignment
5. Doing your assignment - at the proper time.

vs:46 ***It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.***

The person Jesus will have high regard for will be the one who is living according to the requirements Jesus gave in *verse 45*.

Not busy talking and pretending, but 'doing'.

vs:47 ***I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.***

That person, who takes on the responsibility Jesus has given to him now, will later be put in charge of all that Jesus owns! What does Jesus own?

vs:48 ***But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,'***

But on the contrary, if one of Jesus' servants is disobedient by reasoning that He has all the time in the world to get his life right with God...

vs:49 ***and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.***

...and in the process breaks down the spirit of other believers by holding for a worldly standard of Christianity, I've got news for you!

vs:50 ***The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.***

Jesus will show up one day when you least expect Him and He will catch you at your most embarrassing moment.

vs:51 ***He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

And when He does, forget about your doctrines and theology of eternal security! Jesus is going to cut you down and send you to the place where all hypocrites will be sent. That is ...hell; Matthew 23:33!

We are in the season of the end times. The signs are flashing all around. This is no time for church games. If you are playing with a dual lifestyle of Christianity and having a love affair with the things and standards attained by worshipping the religions of worldliness, you are in big, serious danger! There is only one possible solution for you. Repent and become a whole-hearted, 100%, seriously dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ and His teachings. Commit your life to learning to 'hear and obey' His 'voice' through the Word and by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Save yourself from this 'pretentious' Christian generation; Acts 2:40!

Between chapters 23 and 24, Jesus makes it very clear that He detests people who only pretend to love God and pretend to serve Him. These people may be great successes in the eyes of some very gullible people, but in God's eyes they are fuel for hells' fires; Matthew 7:21-23!

God hates hypocrisy!

Matthew 25

vs:1 ***"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.***

"At that time..." = the season or time of Jesus' near return.

This is a picture of what God's Kingdom will be like on earth as Jesus is nearing His time of return. First of all there will be awareness; expectancy among the true believer's that Jesus' return is very near. Secondly, these believers will be concerned about their responsibilities of holding forth the light of the gospel.

Bridegroom = Jesus Christ; the One returning.

vs:2 ***Five of them were foolish and five were wise.***

There will be two kinds of people anticipating the arrival of the bridegroom (or the arrival of Jesus). Both of these groups are 'believers'. Both believe and are in eager expectation of the bridegroom, but from among these believers, some are:

1. Wise 'believers' or Christians
2. Foolish 'believers' or Christians

vs:3 ***The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.***

What makes the difference between a wise and a foolish Christians?

The foolish Christians didn't plan ahead. They prepared for only a short wait for the bridegroom's arrival. They didn't consider the fact that the

supply of oil in their lamps was being consumed and that it might run out before the bridegroom arrived.

Oil = anointing, power, life, fire of the Holy Spirit. Without the 'oil' of God, your testimony is powerless. You know all the right words and actions and may go through the same motions and programs that were used by God in the past. But now your efforts are lifeless. Why? There is no fire in your lamp! This means that the oil has been used up. You have failed to maintain an extra supply or source of 'oil' and this is the cause of being branded a Christian 'fool'!

vs:4 ***The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.***

The wise Christians realized that if they were going to have lights (or lives) that shined, ultimately the oil would be consumed. In their wisdom, they prepared a reserve supply of oil in anticipation and knowledge of their needs and commitment to be faithful in their testimony (not holding forth a light-less, lifeless witness).

vs:5 ***The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.***

These 'believers' had an idea that the bridegroom (Jesus) was going to arrive by a certain time. But the reality was that he didn't meet their expectations. In the course of time, they all fell asleep. No longer expectant; no longer diligent in watching and holding their lamps high. Their human weaknesses overcame them all (which has nothing to do with differentiating between the wise and foolish).

vs:6 ***"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'"***

Suddenly, when their minds and attention were not focused on the important things - the time arrived. The bridegroom was here. The sleeping 'believer's' woke up!

What will wake up a sleeping church? The presence of Jesus! Do you want to meet Him? Then "come out"!

vs:7 ***"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.***

Nobody will be asleep when Jesus returns! Those who have been only playing around at being a Christian will suddenly be in a panic. They will realize that their lives don't meet the requirements for the occasion!

vs:8 ***The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'***

There will come a time when 'surface' Christians will seek out the 'real' Christians in an effort to take from them the 'oil'; life, anointing, seal of ownership (*II Corinthians 2:21-22*) that God has given them.

There are people who try to pretend that they have the 'anointing', but at best, all they can do is to perform in the dark. They offer no 'light' and the world watching detests the foolish deception.

vs:9 ***" 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'***

The answer for those who lack the 'fuel of the Holy Spirit' is for them to go to the source and pay the price for it. Only you can pay that price because

God wants your whole life in exchange! Only God can sell you the 'oil';
Isaiah 55.

vs:10 ***"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.***

You must plan ahead! There is no time to waste. The time of 100% commitment to Jesus Christ is NOW! You cannot have an excuse! Excuses or reasons will not be accepted once Jesus returns!

Are you ready? Is your life filled with the energizing fuel of the Holy Ghost? Is there anything lacking in your spiritual life that will cause you deep regret if Jesus came in the next minute? You must deal with it now before it is eternally too late!

vs:11 ***"Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'***

"As it was in the days of Noah..." When the door was closed, it was permanently closed; *Genesis 7:16-21*. There will be no 'second chances'!

vs:12 ***"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'***

The Lord knows the ones who are ready. But those who have been playing church games are strangers to Him. Can you imagine that there are people who sit in church their whole lives and act very nice and religious, yet Jesus doesn't even know them; *Matthew 7:21-23*.

Does Jesus really know you?

vs:13 ***"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour***

The moral of the story.....

In God's Kingdom there is no time or space available for religious games. Jesus will show up at the time you least expect him. Be alert! Take no chances! The eternal risks are too great to afford to gamble!

vs:14 ***"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.***

Here is another story to give us an example of what it will be like when Jesus' returns.

A man = Jesus

Journey = from earth to heaven

Servants = those who surrender to Jesus' Lordship

His property = the Kingdom of God, sinners, believers, God's Word, everything in the world and its wealth etc.

Entrusted = (Webster's dictionary) to assign the care of; to turn over for safe keeping; to charge or invest with a trust or duty.

vs:15 ***To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.***

Jesus has entrusted His servants with all that He has. That is, He has given to each servant only that which he has the ability to manage. To one person more is given because he is able to receive it whereas to another, less is given.

The responsibilities have already been assigned.

The expectation Jesus has is that what He has given to us will be invested for the expansion of His interests.

We are fully responsible for what we have been given. God's Kingdom is in our own hands. Jesus has invested it in us!

How are you doing with multiplying your 'share' in God's Kingdom? Do you know what Jesus has given you? Maybe you have forgotten that the material possessions and talents etc. that you have are not your own!

vs:16-17 ***The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.***

So also, the one with the two talents gained two more.

The men who had received 'shares' for the Lord immediately went to work. It takes work to increase an investment. They didn't delay or focus on their own dreams and fantasies.

They worked and invested what was given until it increased and doubled!

vs:18 ***But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.***

But the man who had the smallest amount to invest (which required the least responsibility) simply buried what he had been given and went off to pursue his own interest. No one even knew that he was a servant of his Master. There was nothing to show for it.

vs:19 ***"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.***

A long time passed. One day the Master returned and went to find his servants to see how they had done and to reward them accordingly.

vs:20 ***The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'***

What do you have to show Jesus - to prove that His investment in you was a good one?

Imagine the pride and joy of this servant as he came forward to show Jesus all he had gained. Nothing to hide! No fear!

vs:21-23 ***"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'***

"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Imagine Jesus pride and joy in such a loyal servant!

Faithful = full of faith

To be faithful with what Jesus has given us is to entrust it 'by faith' back to God so that through what we offer Him, His name may be glorified by the things He does with the 'invested share'.

In other words, to take what God has given us and then mix it with faith, risking it for the sake of God's Kingdom, is to be 'faithful'.

What 'talent' has God given you? Money? Time? Compassion? Gifts of the Spirit? A vision? Abilities to do something well?

Do you use your 'talent' to build God's Kingdom as your highest priority or your own kingdom as your highest priority?

Where will a person find fulfillment and real happiness? By faithfully investing what and who they are into God's Kingdom!

It doesn't matter what or how much God has given you. What is important is what you do with what God has given.

Kingdom Lesson: the key to increasing in God's Kingdom is to make God's concerns your own and doing something about it with what you already have.

The way to stop this kingdom principle from working is to take what God has given and hold it (invest it) towards your own self-interests and gain. Just start thinking about:

My job,
my ability,
my money,
my ministry,
my family,
my church,
my time,
my gift,
my car,
my body,
my rights,
my blessings,
etc.

— = vs:28-30; When you lose your place in God's kingdom, you become useless to God. You lose your joy. You are thrown away

vs:24 ***"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.***

"The unfaithful servant". He made his decisions based on what he thought he knew about the master, Jesus. And in fact, his concept of Jesus proved to be exactly what he anticipated! Since he thought Jesus was a 'hard man', he made decisions that forced Jesus to be hard on him.

vs:25 ***So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'***

Fear of failure! Fear based on a wrong concept of Jesus caused this man to be unfaithful, to not invest, but rather to only try to 'hang on to the end'.

The churches are full to overflowing with people who are 'just hanging on'! The fact is, they don't even know Jesus! They have no concept of who Jesus really is!

So, what about you? Are you just 'hanging in there'? Investing nothing and gaining nothing? Have you simply buried God's gifts to you in the soil of your own kingdom?

vs:26 ***"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?"***

You want Jesus to be a hard man? Well, He can be! What made the Master especially mad was what this unfaithful servant thought about Him. What the servant perceived his Master to be like then resulted in a chain reaction of choices resulting in laziness and wickedness.

The man thought the Master was unfair in His dealings. He was judging the Master by the 'worlds standards' rather than out of obedience and love in God's Kingdom.

vs:27 ***Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.***

The least that the man could have done was to place his talent in the bank (church). The church could have at least made some small profit from God's Kingdom from it.

vs:28 ***" 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.***

The end result for the self-centered, lazy Christian..... "Use it - or lose it"!

vs:29 ***For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.***

To all who are faithfully investing in God's Kingdom, God will give you an abundance. But whoever is unfaithful, God will take even what you have.

If you are losing instead of gaining in God's Kingdom (losing joy, provisions, no eternal fruit), wake up quickly! Get your eyes off of yourself and see the needs around you. Then by faith, take whatever remains in your life and invest it, risk it, for the glory of God. You may yet save yourself from the terrible final punishment.

vs:30 ***And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'***

There is a way to fall from Jesus' favor, completely! Just be worthless! Jesus paid a very high price for you. What is He getting in return?

vs:31 ***"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.***

"...in his glory..."! We have no idea of what Jesus will look like when He comes. We only know Him better in His human form. We do have a few recorded glimpses of Jesus in His glory:

Revelations 1:10-18, 19:11-16

Matthew 17:2

John 1:14

It will be no small event when Jesus arrives. He will not come alone, but with an entourage of angels. He will take over planet earth! He'll be the

clear winner. The glory of Jesus' throne as it is now in heaven will be no less here on earth!

vs:32 ***All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.***

All national boundaries will become null and void. Jesus will create new national boundaries based on allegiances determined by each person before he arrived. Jesus will simply divide between the people who loved him and followed him by faith, in obedience, and those who lived in rebellion to him, pursuing self-ambition.

vs:33 ***He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.***

Those who loved and served Him will stand at Jesus' right hand. All others will stand at His left hand.

Sheep = obedient followers

Goat - those who are rebellious to the truth

vs:34 ***"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'***

Those who are separated on Jesus' right hand, who proved their allegiance, are now formally restored to the rightful status of children of the Almighty God and given their rightful inheritance, the Kingdom of God which was originally prepared for them from the creation of the world.

vs:35 ***For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,***

What made those people worthy of this honor? The answer: Compassion applied! They saw the need and did something with no selfish motive.

Jesus then gives some examples of areas of need that really concern Him and the response His followers should have. In fact, Jesus' heart is so close to the needs of suffering humanity that He experiences it as though the suffering was His own. He desires that we too have this same heart felt compassion.

<i>Need:</i>	<i>Response:</i>
Hungry and thirsty	<u>Give</u> food and something to drink
(Spiritual hunger and thirst)	(<u>Give</u> spiritual food; God's Word)
	<u>Give</u> something to drink
Stranger (lonely)	<u>Give</u> companionship, get involved with their life, love them

vs:36 ***I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.***

Need clothing	<u>Give</u> them clothing
Sick	<u>Give</u> them care and support

Imprisoned	<u>Give</u> them your time. Find them, go to them, encourage them, represent them and their concerns, care for those they love
(Spiritual imprisonment)	Rescue their souls

Jesus wants us to be involved in other people's lives. You have to be! Who have you fed lately? What is their name? Where do they live?

It's good to financially support others who are helping others, but Jesus asks, "Who did you feed"? Who have you clothed? Who have you visited?

And isn't it wonderful to know that in the areas of your own needs and limitations, Jesus is representing you and calling others to come and lift you up in that area of weakness.

But it is not enough to just be involved with other people. We need to be involved so that we can give to them the life and hope that we ourselves have been given. In doing that, we then open up our own lives to receive more from Jesus.

vs:37-39 ***"Then the righteous will answer him, `Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?"***

When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?"

When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

The fact is, Jesus is present around us all the time and is found wherever there is need and suffering. He cares so much about hurting people that He lowers Himself to their level and situation.

Do you have an area of hurt or need? Jesus knows and deeply cares about you. He has provided His true disciples to express His care and give help to you in your situation if you will let them.

* Do you want to see Jesus?

vs:40 ***"The King will reply, `I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'***

Answer: open your eyes and heart to the needs of the 'least' of Jesus' brothers and sisters and get involved in offering whatever you have to meet their needs.

What have you done for Jesus?

vs:41 ***"Then he will say to those on his left, `Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.***

Hell! Jesus makes it very clear what hell is!

Hell was originally prepared for Satan and his angels. A place of eternal fire! But those who insist on ignoring and rejecting Jesus, people who live to pursue selfish ambitions and uphold Satan's wicked strategy for the people of the world, they will be cursed by God and punished along with the enemy of God whom they loved and followed.

vs:42-43 ***For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,***

I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

The way to identify these wicked followers of Satan is to see their self-centered lifestyle. No active concern for others offered without selfish motives.

It is very clear that Jesus has chosen to continue to be identified as the upholder of the weak and oppressed. And to reject them is to reject Jesus.

vs:44 ***"They also will answer, `Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?"***

The 'unrighteous' people will still call him "Lord".

They didn't see Jesus because they were blinded by self-centeredness.

Are you looking for Jesus? He is not just found in the pages of the Bible, but he can be found in your own neighborhood or even in your own family.

‘See’ the need. ‘See’ Jesus. Then by faith, get involved.

vs:45 ***"He will reply, `I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'***

You cannot say, "I love Jesus" and close your eyes and heart to others' needs. In other words, a Christian must be living and breathing for the purpose of serving Jesus in the needs of those around them.

Where is Jesus in your life? Where has He drawn your attention? What is the need? They by faith (not according to your own resources or ability) get involved and meet that need.

vs:46 ***"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."***

And if you refuse to help others, you have proven your 'love of Jesus' is only superficial, ranking you among the host of the 'unrighteous' and worthy of your eternal punishment rather than eternal reward.

Selfishness breeds ‘death’

Selflessness breeds 'life'

Matthew 26

vs:1-2 ***When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away--and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."***

Jesus was fully aware of His destiny. It was not a future anyone would desire, that's for sure! Yet despite His knowledge and abilities to alter His future, Jesus considered obedience to God a far greater choice of responsibility than the instinct for survival.

Death is in the hands of God. It is the requirement for humanity as a result of sin. In our sinful wisdom and worldly instinct, survival is a far more powerful force of the human than obedience to God. Yet this is not right. Jesus demonstrates a passion for obedience, regardless of the command,

above the passion for survival. We'll see later though that Jesus also struggled in His battle of survival and obedience.

Obedience to God brings 'life'
Self-preservation brings 'death'

vs:3-5 ***Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas,***

and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him.

"But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people."

As if on cue, with Jesus' declaration of a time frame, God releases the religious leaders into Satan's command. The fulfillment of Jesus' predictions is set into motion.

This was an organized 'church leaders' meeting in which the very focus of the churches hope and existence is carefully committed for elimination.

Sad to say, in many modern day churches, the Holy Spirit is also systematically eliminated so that the order of tradition and glorification of men's religious systems may reign supreme. All of it is done, of course, for the 'good' of the congregation, that everything be done 'decently and in order' (according to the religious standards set at the centers of higher learning).

It's not easy to eliminate God! So the Jewish leaders were very careful to plan it in a way that wouldn't alarm the masses. They were in control of the people.

Could the same thing be happening today? Could there be a systematic elimination of the presence of God from our churches happening right under our noses?!

Could it possible be happening in your own heart? Traditions and security of the familiar, the desire to be in control, religious appearances - all gradually forcing the Holy Spirit out of the 'temple' of your heart?

Can I say that I am any more righteous than these religious leaders? Have I not also preferred hypocrisy over surrender?

vs:6 ***While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper,***

Simon the Leper = Most certainly Simon had experienced a remarkable miracle.

vs:7 ***a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.***

This woman's action was totally out of order for the situation! Jesus was a guest. He was eating. He was an unmarried man.

Alabaster jar = highly ornate, permanently sealed until broken;
Symbolic of Jesus body.

Perfume = worth a years wages; Symbolic of the Holy Spirit.

The jar had to be broken in order for the perfume to be poured out. Once the perfume was poured out, everyone around was affected, made aware, of the wonderful scent.

- Jesus, like the flawless alabaster jar, was about to be broken.
1 Corinthians 11:24 (KJV); "...This is my body which is broken for you".
- With the 'breaking' of Jesus' body, the Holy Spirit was 'poured out';
Acts 2:33.

We also are called to a life of 'brokenness' through which the sweet scent of the Holy Spirit may permeate the society among us.

Are you surrendered fully to the will of God, painful as God's breaking of yourself may be?

vs:8 ***When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked.***

Don't be surprised if those around you, even the Christians, don't understand what or why you are serving the Lord the way you are. Those who ought to be encouraging you, people you look up to and respect, may ridicule you!

But the woman was not doing her 'act of worship' for anyone's approval except to express in the most meaningful way that she could think of, her love and worship of Jesus. That is all that mattered - not what anyone else thought or how much the cost.

Kingdom Lesson: Jesus is not concerned about the cost of worship and expressions of love to Him. Money is limitless in God's Kingdom! But honest, broken, open hearts are not!

How much does it cost you to express your love and worship of the Lord?

vs:9 ***"This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."***

Jesus had just taught the disciples about caring for the poor. Their only logical reaction in light of what they had been taught was that the best way to show their love and respect to Jesus was to economize and use the excess money to bless the poor!

vs:10 ***Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.***

The disciples are really disgusted with the behavior of this woman. Her actions are not logical according to human traditions of logic. But Jesus has looked way beyond her action and draws the disciple's attention to her motive. He rebukes the disciples for their religious, judgmental attitude.

vs:11 ***The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.***

Bringing the situation into perspective, Jesus reminds the disciples that no matter how much money they save and give, there will always be more poor people. If your concern for the poor is primarily to show your concern and love for the Lord, who identifies Himself with the poor, then Jesus will always be around.

The real issue regarding 'giving to the poor' is not only relieving the suffering of others, but also, and if not more-so, a way we can actively demonstrate our love for the Lord Jesus. This woman was doing this with no hope of getting any praise or acclaim in return for a noble deed.

Jesus also reminds His disciples that His days are numbered and that He doesn't want to waste His time on their bickering.

vs:12 ***When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.***

Then Jesus pointed out that what had actually happened had been a symbolic confirmation of God's will that Jesus would indeed die and be buried.

In the same way, when the Holy Spirit is poured out on us, is it not a confirmation to us that we are committed to dying to 'self' and that self is buried so that our new nature in Christ might arise alive with Jesus!

vs:13 ***I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."***

Jesus wants us to pay attention to the attitude and actions of this woman! It's important that we have a 'like' nature and not the attitude of the disciples.

- She gave her best
- She gave it all
- She gave it to Jesus
- She was scorned by the other 'believers'
- She was accepted and praised by Jesus

We must learn from her!

vs:14 ***Then one of the Twelve--the one called Judas Iscariot--went to the chief priests***

After all the miracles, after all the teachings, after all the love, Judas, one of the 12 disciples, throws in the 'towel'! He gives up! And he surrenders to the impulses and passions of his confused and sinful 'self nature'.

As Satan worked within Judas' mind and heart, he convinced Judas to act the part of 'God' and bring fulfillment to Jesus prophesy. He would set the wheels in motion himself to fulfill Jesus death.

Judas' reasoning may well have been like this: "If this woman has prepared Jesus body for burial, then I will prepare his body for death".

How could Judas come to this point in his life? A clue is found in *John 12:6*. Judas was entrenched in a hypocritical cover-up scheme. He was abusing his position of authority and honor and was thus forced to wear the mask of hypocrisy. We know that it is the hypocritical heart that is an open door for Satan to use. So Satan had before him a perfect tool through which he could develop his deadly plan.

I can't imagine that Judas hated Jesus so much. I rather think that because of the hypocrisy of his life, Satan convinced Judas that he was doing Jesus and His cause a service by bringing about the grand 'finale' of Jesus ministry.

Could it be that Judas thought that he too would be 'memorialized' 'throughout the world for his role in Jesus triumphant moment'?

Hypocrisy is the open door to religious confusion. What are you doing that causes you to act in hypocrisy?

vs:15 ***and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins.***

Of course there had to be something in it for Judas up front too! Money! That was his weakness. so he sold Jesus to the Devil (who was disguised in preachers clothing) for the price of a slave!

vs:16 ***From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.***

The plan was in motion! Judas has made a contract with Satan! It is all coming together smoothly! Satan is looking for an opportunity to attack you too! Though he may seem to have given up - beware! He will be back for another attack; *Luke 4:13*.

vs:17 ***On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"***

...making preparations for Jesus.

The disciples knew what Jesus was going to do, so they went ahead of Him to prepare the way.

vs:18 ***He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.' "***

When they ask, Jesus shows them what to do. God's plans are very detailed in this case. There is a specific time and a specific person to be contacted even in the simplest event of eating the Passover meal.

Notice that the disciples didn't assume they would share this meal with Jesus. But Jesus makes it clear that He wants them all together.

God has 'appointed' times for us too! Are you ready to face them?

vs:19 ***So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.***

This preparation time must have been a somber and bewildering occasion. Jesus had clearly told the disciples of the finality of His ministry. Yet the disciples certainly couldn't have comprehended the way the prophecies about Jesus could be fulfilled.

It's not easy to obey, especially when it doesn't seem reasonable!

vs:20-21 ***When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.***

And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

Everything seems to be going well. The traditional meal is... traditional, that is until suddenly Jesus announces a most unexpected statement. "Here are the facts! One of you will turn against me"!end of party! The special occasion now becomes one filled with guilt, suspicion, fear, sadness, anger, and dismay.

vs:22 ***They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?"***

The Passover meal was celebrated to remember how God had freed the Jewish nation from slavery and how the 'death angel' had passed over the homes marked with the blood of a lamb.

It was a time to rejoice in their God. Remember His loving kindness. Re-confirm their identity as God's Chosen People.

But suddenly Jesus forces the disciple's thoughts to focus on a new thing. The heart!

The 'angel of death' was knocking once again on each heart door. Their identity was being tested. One of them was an agent of death, the enemy. One of them was not on the side of their loving God.

The truth of the matter is that as each of the disciples faced this statement from Jesus, all had doubts about their loyalty and motives! Could it be that Jesus had really seen into their own heart? Could it be that they were the one Jesus was referring to?

They beg Jesus for confirmation. They understood that He knew their hearts better than they themselves did.

What does Jesus see in your heart? I dare you to open it up for 'truth'!

vs:23 ***Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me."***

There was one who was among the disciples that knew the truth. Judas knew! Would Jesus know? Would the truth be exposed?

Judas acts as if he is totally innocent. He eats with the others, fellowshiping, and celebrating. And in the act of 'communion; with Jesus - the truth is exposed!

Kingdom Lesson: Sin cannot hide in the presence of the fire of fellowship. There will come a day of revelation!

vs:24 ***The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."***

Is Judas' sin a surprise to God? Why did Jesus allow Judas to remain among the disciples?

The answer is clear. It was all part of God's plan. The course of events had been established eons before the fulfillment. Jesus was more concerned with the fulfillment of God's plan in His life than the survival of His temporary existence on this earth.

Kingdom Lesson: The evil, the plan of Satan against you, the various people who have crossed paths with you throughout your life, all come with divine purpose when you've made God's plan the center of your life.

Why did Jesus allow Judas to remain?

Answer: To demonstrate the magnitude of God's love towards sinners ...like me.

To betray the Lord, to have walked with Him and then turned against Him, is a sure way to seal a hell bound fate. Judas had walked with Jesus, been taught every Kingdom principle, had worked great miracles and seen more proofs than most any person alive. He had every chance, yet chose to reject the truth. The result was a fate so terrible that his existence on earth should never have happened. This fate could be none other than hell itself!

vs:25 ***Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?"***
Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

We never anticipate that lurking within our carnal nature, such evil or potential for evil exists. Jesus knew Judas and no amount of religious game playing would save Judas from the truth.

Judas may well have believed that his actions were for the good and that he was helping Jesus to fulfill His own prophecies by setting the stage for Jesus 'greatest miracle'! But Judas was not motivated by love of Jesus. He was motivated by love of self!

Could it be that there are a lot of things going on in the name of 'Christianity', religious efforts to 'force' God's Word towards self fulfillment that is in reality a betrayal of the very One Christianity embraces? And could it be that, like Judas, the hypocrisy of 'religious Christianity', though a betrayal of the Holy Spirit of God, is all part of a far greater plan?

All the disciples made the same statement, except Judas.

11 disciples said, "Surely not I Lord".

Judas said, "Surely not I Rabbi (teacher)".

Judas had related to Jesus on an intellectual level. He knew Jesus as a teacher, yet he hadn't surrendered to the truth of what Jesus taught.

To walk with Jesus and never surrender to Jesus' power, authority and will, is betrayal! For the truth of God's Word cannot bring glory to God when worked through men's intelligence alone. But when it is obeyed in loving submission, the glory of God is revealed.

What will Jesus say about you when you ask, "Is it me"?

Ultimately all the disciples deserted Jesus when the situation became life threatening.

Judas could have repented right then and there. God's plan would still have happened without Judas' participation.

vs:26 ***While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."***

The meal certainly must have been a somber occasion. No doubt there were angry remarks uttered in low voices regarding Judas' treachery. Yet in just a few hours, all the disciples would have the opportunity to see into their own dark souls.

"...While they were eating..." The 'communion' happened while they were eating together. The very act of eating this special meal was used as an object lesson, a time to focus on Jesus.

All over Jerusalem families and friends were gathered together for this meal to focus their minds on things of the past.

Jesus uses this meal to turn the disciple's minds from the past to the future. It was occasion to focus their minds on Him.

The symbol is 'bread'. Jesus gave thanks for all that it represents as well as its nutritional value.

The bread:

Manna (God's faithful provision)

(God's supernatural provision)

(God's love despite man's sin)

Yeast (enlarged with time and heat)

Life (Jesus = spiritual survival)

In the passing of the piece of bread that would reveal the traitor, the 'bread' had the power to bring either life or death to the recipient. It revealed the truth of the heart; *John 13:22!*

Jesus broke the bread. In the same way Jesus allowed His body (being represented by the bread) to be broken. Jesus broke the bread so that everyone else could share in its nourishment. In the same way as Jesus allowed His body to be broken, the entire world can now partake of the spiritual nourishment.

We too must now follow Jesus' example in allowing our own lives to be broken, so that the 'will of God' might be fulfilled through us as it was through Jesus.

Communion = a time of surrendering to the 'breaking of our will' as we follow Jesus' example to us of His will being broken.

The next time you share communion, think of Jesus' example of surrendering His will and body into the hands of Almighty God, to be broken. And how, in the breaking, God's purposes were fulfilled in the world and in your own life.

Now, consider how we are, as disciples of Jesus, to follow His example by living a life of surrender to God's will. Communion is a time of commitment to the act of breaking our self-will and embracing God's will in our lives.

"...and gave it to his disciples." Jesus gives Himself to His disciples. It's not enough to see the symbolism of communion and accept it intellectually. Only by consuming it can it bring life into your soul.

Are you 'consumed' with Jesus? He is the source of life, not only physical life, but eternal, spiritual life as well.

Will you allow God to use you the way Jesus was willing to be used?

I Corinthians 12:27; "Now we are the body of Christ..."!

vs:27 ***Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.***

Jesus understood fully what the wine represented. Yet – He gave thanks! Jesus had given the bread to the disciples, but with the wine, He offered it with the encouragement that everyone drink it.

vs:28 ***This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.***

This is not just a matter of taking a drink. The wine is symbolic of the blood of Jesus, His very life force. It is this life that redeems the human soul from the death that we have embraced in sin. The act of drinking is also a powerful symbol of commitment on our part to honor the death of Jesus, the contract agreement that releases the life-giving blood.

vs:29 ***I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."***

While the disciples were drinking, Jesus declares that He will no longer drink this wine until the fulfillment of the plan of God to bring His children into His Kingdom. Jesus declares this fast to emphasize how serious this symbolic drink of wine is!

When we share 'communion', Jesus only looks on. In His heart He must long for that day when we share it together as one family in His new Kingdom.

vs:30 ***When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.***

Jesus worships as He steps into the most difficult events of His life.

How do you approach difficulties in your life?

vs:31 ***Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:***

***" I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'***

While the disciples probably felt angry at Judas and proud of their own loyalty, Jesus prophesies that all are no better than Judas. All the disciples will desert Jesus because of the things He would allow to happen and because of the total misunderstanding the disciples had of Jesus' purposes and destiny.

Why would the disciples all fall away? Because it had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier by Zechariah; *Zechariah 13:7*.

Who is "...you (will) all..."? Yes, that includes me, too. How often I have declared to Jesus, I will never leave you and then within moments, have left Him to go my own direction. I am no different than the disciples! We are all like the disciples if we take an honest look at our own hearts.

vs:32 ***But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."***

Maximum faith! Jesus looks at death as though it's only a phase of life! And it is! Death brings no finality. What are your plans after you've died and rose again? Jesus said, "But after I have risen, I'll go ahead of you..."

vs:33 ***Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."***

Peter with his foot in his mouth ...again! How many is "all"? We are not immune to God's purposes. What He says is final. It will happen. Who did Peter think he was to reject the Word of God?

Peter's heart was in the right place. He had good intentions (Don't we all!). But good intentions and reality are two different things. Actually, Peter was being religious! He was exalting himself above the other disciples ..."I'm better than they are. I will never fail you".

vs:34 ***"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."***

Peter was just talking, but Jesus gives him a good dose of 'truth' in return. "You think you're so tough? The truth is that before the rooster crows, you will have renounced me three times"!

Peter thought he knew his heart, but only Jesus really knows what lurks within us. We think we are capable of so much and in reality, we are capable of doing just the opposite! We have no idea of who we really are!

So we're far better off just believing what Jesus says about us and accepting that.

vs:35 ***But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.***

Peter is stubborn! ...and we think we really love Jesus? We think that there is nothing that can ever cause us to fall away? The truth is, we have no idea of what the future holds, so we cannot prove the outcome of the testing of our hearts by God.

Not to be out done by Peter, now all the disciples join in the protest against the Word of God!! A new denomination?

Are you ready and willing to die for Jesus? Are you ready to die to your 'self' will? This is what Jesus requires that all of us must do. Die to 'self' ...and that is what proves our loyalty to Him and which is probably far more difficult to do on a day by day basis compared to a one-time physical death; *Matthew 10:37-39*.

Have you ever disowned Jesus? Chosen to avoid identification with Him and His purposes?

vs:36 ***Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."***

Jesus and the 11 disciples go to a quiet park. Jesus wanted to be alone and He gives His disciples probably the simplest command ever... "Sit".

For many of 'Jesus followers', this is about the only command they have ever successfully obeyed! Sit! And they obey it every Sunday morning at 9:30!

When you are in distress, feeling rejected, or are facing life's most difficult situations - pray! And then face 'your giant' - with God!

vs:37 ***He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.***

Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Jesus then calls His three closest friends to go with Him as He began to express to them His inner agony. All He asked of them is that they stay with Him. Many Christians cannot or will not even do that for another hurting believer. They are too busy.

All Peter and the other two disciples had to do was to listen to Jesus and watch. Watch for what? To protect Jesus from His enemies? No! He wanted them to see how He was willing to die to 'self' and how He would love even the most treacherous man, while facing His darkest moments in life.

How would you respond to your enemy in your time of distress? Make him your scapegoat? Or love him?

Peter probably was thinking, "Somebody has got to do something". Make a plan of defense. Sharpen your swords. But Jesus' strategy of defense is to 'stay'. Do nothing! Stop and watch God at work! Watch how Jesus died to 'self', then go do the same!

vs:39

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Jesus goes a bit further (probably within hearing distance) and fell with His face on the ground. He was broken, submitted, yielding into the plan and will of God. Yet there remained a speck of hope that an alternative last-minute plan might be implemented.

As Jesus cries for mercy were uttered, expressed in agreement to whatever His Father required, certainly all heaven was silent as God shook His head in joined agony with His Son. Not only did Jesus die to 'self', so did His Father!

How hard it may be for a parent to release his child into the hands and plans of Almighty God.

How about you? Can you, will you, dare you, in all sincerity pray, "Not my will, but Your will be done in my life". What are your plans? Goals? Concerns? Are you willing to give them all up, nail them to your cross, in exchange for the plan of God for your life, regardless of what it might be or might require of you? This is the test of true discipleship! It is a very necessary step in your life if you ever expect to be a disciple!

Kingdom Lesson: The ultimate act of loyalty to God is to cancel all of your plans and desires and throw yourself in yielded surrender at the feet of Almighty God. Then and only then can you truly know and experience the power and effects of God's Kingdom at work in your life.

vs:40

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter.

It doesn't take long before a person can forget their own words and good intentions. Though Peter had insisted that he would never leave or fail Jesus, he could not even do the simplest task - staying awake! This was probably the most critical time of Jesus' life as He engaged in a fierce battle of 'wills'. Yet for Peter and the others, the battle was lost even before they knew the enemy had attacked.

vs:41

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Kingdom Lesson: The way to side-step temptation is to 'watch and pray'!

Watch = spiritual alertness; aware of the battle, aware of our weakness, aware of our source of strength and hope.

Pray = in communication with the One who knows all, sees all, is victorious over all, and who gives all to those who stand with him.

We also are daily in a battle of 'wills'.

Our spirit is willing and eager to die with God in the war against Satan and evil.

Our flesh is willing and eager to side with Satan in the war against God and righteousness.

"...but our body is weak". Though we desire in our spirit to do what is good and right. The flesh and our self-will are easily influenced by what feels

good, what is popular, what is self-gratifying. These are the areas of our lives that Satan embraces.

vs:42 ***He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."***

You cannot rely on other people to strengthen you in your time of battle. Friends are great, but when the battle is at full scale, remember that your friend's bodies and 'wills' are weak. Our only hope and sure strength is found in going to the Father. Sometimes we must go to Him repeatedly until the victory is revealed.

The battle:

Self-will struggles to find an easier 'feel-good' solution to the problem.

Spirit-will struggles to find God's will and live in it regardless of problems and the feelings involved

Kingdom Lesson: God's will may not seem to be the most logical plan. We may not understand it and may be tempted to pursue the logical solution rather than a Godly solution.

vs:43 ***When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.***

Jesus finds all His disciples asleep! How about you? What are the needs or crisis points in your life? Are you doing something about them or are you taking the easy way out by simply closing your eyes to the reality?

vs:44 ***So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.***

There comes a point when Jesus just lets us do what we want. He tried to involve His disciples in His life and yet the disciples just preferred to focus on their own simple needs.

Do you wonder where Jesus is right now in your life? Wake up! He may not be far from you. Don't expect Him to simply drop everything to give you full attention the moment you want His attention. Try giving Him your full attention first!

Watch and pray! Be involved. Stand along side the Master even though your eyes may 'feel' very heavy.

vs:45 ***Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.***

Jesus won't ignore you indefinitely. But there comes a time when you have to wake up to reality. The battle is coming to you whether you like it or not. If you claim to stand with Jesus, then you will be involved with Him in the good times as well as the bad!

Bad times with Jesushmmmm!

vs:46 ***Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"***

Is the war against Jesus over now? No! Satan continues to attack Jesus and we must fully expect to be not only involved, but the target of Satan's assaults as well. Are you still asleep? If so, you've already lost the battle!

vs:47 ***While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.***

It finally happens! This was the 'once and for all' stand off between Jesus and His enemies. Though Jesus enemies had pretended all along to be apathetic to Jesus teachings, the truth was that they completely hated Jesus and what He taught and stood for.

Hatred is like a seed that, though buried for a season in a person's heart, one day will spring up to reveal its existence.

Love is also like a seed. What is planted in your heart? What potential is buried there if you allow the seed to grow?

Jesus' enemies were ready to do battle with Jesus and His disciples.

How do you suppose the disciples felt as they saw former 'Sunday school teachers and preachers' along with their own former comrade heading up this assault on the Messiah? Confused, embarrassed, angry, hurt....

This is the grand showdown between truth and deception (hypocrisy).

vs:48-49 ***Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.***

What grand show of the ultimate hypocrisy! To pretend to love Jesus while simultaneously actively working to destroy Him!

Yet the same spirit of Judas lurks deep inside many 'believers'. On Sunday they can demonstrate such love and respect to Jesus while speaking against His body, the church, and plotting to manipulate it for their own selfish intentions.

We can easily condemn Judas' behavior, yet we too often betray Jesus by giving in to selfish desire and sins while holding up a mask of love and holiness..

vs:50 ***Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for. "Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.***

Jesus by all rights ought to hate Judas, but because of God's Spirit in Him, He cannot. Jesus loves Judas so much! Enough to even die for him!

What a demonstration of God's love! What comfort to know that if God could still love Judas, He can and certainly does still love me!

Jesus doesn't resist Judas and his gang. He surrendered - not to Judas - but to God and His plan.

Jesus gave total freedom to Judas to do whatever he wanted. It didn't matter because no matter what he did, it would still fit perfectly into God's divine plan.

Why have you come to Jesus? Why do you call him 'friend'? How often Christians have claimed Jesus' friendship only to moments later, mistreat and abuse Him.

vs:51 ***With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.***

As Christians, we have an opinion about our relationship to Jesus and it can stir up a lot of anger when we see someone else, especially a Christian, not

relating to our Friend the way 'we know' they should. When we discover the hypocrisy of another Christian, we want to destroy them, split the church, expose that person and manipulate others to reject him.

An angry, judgmental Christian, in effect, destroys another person's ability to hear from God.

vs:52 ***"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword."***

Whatever you sow, that is what you will reap. Sow violence - reap violence.

Do you think that there is any chance that the violence being reaped in America is the result of all the violence sown in the minds and hearts of the children of this nation by 'Hollywood'?

vs:53 ***Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?***

God is well able to defend Himself! When we see people mocking and abusing Him or His church, don't worry. He can handle it.

It was very hard for the disciples to comprehend that God's plan for Jesus was that He would be betrayed, arrested, and destroyed. How could God, the God of love, allow this to happen to His own Son? Yet we can see very clearly that there may be seasons that a Christian or the church may need to suffer through, which are all part of God's plan.

Before you rebuke Satan, be sure that what you're suffering isn't part of God's plan.

Jesus could have been delivered. We too can 'claim' our miracle, but is it God's plan and right time?

vs:54 ***But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"***

Jesus is more concerned about fulfilling God's plan than meeting His own desires for survival. Of course Jesus didn't want to suffer. But more than that, He didn't want God's 'will' to suffer.

Where are your priorities when comparing with Jesus' example? How much are you willing to give up for the sake of the advancement of God's eternal will and plan?

vs:55 ***At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me."***

This shows us clearly that Jesus does not operate as a rebel to society, but rather as a man concerned for the welfare of everyone. He does not encourage violence in any way, but rather, that His followers live the changed life and inspire others to follow their example.

Just because the doors are open to your ministry and testimonies, don't be surprised to find that the people who smiled on you on the 'outside' are filled with murder against you in their hearts. These are 'wolves in sheep clothing'.

vs:56 ***But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.***

Jesus understands! God's plan at His own expense was being fulfilled in detail! And then right on schedule, the disciples all desert Him, as prophesied in *Zachariah 13:7*, and declared by Jesus only a few hours earlier; *Matthew 26:31*.

At the time Jesus had reminded the disciples of the prophesy, the disciples had insisted that they were above the prophesied plan of God! Now the truth of the heart is revealed. They all ran at the sight of the threatening crowd and at the realization that their preconceived ideas of Jesus and how He would do things were all wrong.

What are your expectations of Jesus? Are they based on the truth of God's Word?

vs:57 ***Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled.***

Jesus allows Himself to be 'taken'. The experience may well have reminded Him of how Satan took Him through the temple at the very beginning of His ministry. It's happening again, only this time Satan is operating through the people. His goal is the same though - to destroy the Kingdom of God.

vs:58 ***But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.***

Peter tries his best to live up to his promise of never disowning Jesus. Yes, he is still following Jesus, but at a safe distance. This is the way many, if not most people follow Jesus. And once they see the outcome, then they will decide how close or how far away they should get from Jesus.

We all want to see the outcome of our association with Jesus. But Jesus wants us to be 'in' the outcome, not just observing from a distance.

vs:59 ***The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.***

Death! That is Satan's goal for Jesus, God's Kingdom, and Jesus' followers. The very people through whom God desired to bring life, His own people, were under the control of Satan and being ignorantly used by him to 'self-destruct'.

How could Satan gain such control over God's people? How can we prevent Satan's influence in our lives? How can we stand firm when Satan comes to 'arrest' us?

vs:60 ***But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward***

If Satan wanted to accuse you, would he be able to find any evidence to support his accusations? No doubt we would be condemned, were it not for the intervention of a higher court which declares our innocence.

When we stand condemned by the court of Satan, we can appeal our case to the court of God where Jesus testifies continually for our innocence! Thank you Jesus!

vs:61 ***and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.' "***

But as Jesus stood trial in Satan's court, there was no higher court to whom He could appeal His case. The false accusations went without contest.

These false accusations were based on truth. The truth was based on a spiritual reality of faith, which cannot be proven true by the carnal tests of truth on which this worlds systems and standards are based.

vs:62 ***Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"***

There is no way to argue spiritual truths to carnally minded people. These truths can only be understood by a revelation from God.

vs:63 ***But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."***

It's hard to have a one-sided argument!

What is the question you want people to ask you? What is the question that Jesus is waiting for you to ask Him?

vs:64 ***"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."***

Ask the right question and get an answer.

This is the fact: Jesus is the Son of God! You may not see it now, but regardless, the fact remains.

What kind of trial have you put Jesus on? Do you wonder why you fail to get answers from God? Are you ready for the answers?

This is the fact: Everyone will see Jesus in all His power and glory both in heaven and on earth at some future time! It will happen!

vs:65 ***Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy."***

What will you do with the revelation of who Jesus really is? Religion cannot tolerate Jesus in all His power and authority. He wasn't who they wanted Him to be. Has Jesus turned out to be the one you had envisioned Him to be?

vs:66 ***"What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered.***

What do you think? Is Jesus worthy of us dying to ourselves? When we discover who Jesus is, we are the ones who must die!

vs:67 ***Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him***

Religion is a total mockery of Jesus. It cannot accept His power and authority. It cannot represent Him. The world hates the way religion is treating the One it claims to represent!

vs:68 ***and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"***

Even though they hate the reality of who Jesus is, they still try to play the game. Pretending to know who Jesus is. Pretending to accept His power.

Do you really want Jesus to prophesy to you? And if not, why?

vs:69 ***Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said.***

Peter had done his best to stand by the commitment he had made to Jesus; *Matthew 26:35*. It wasn't easy. Certainly he was very frightened, yet he tried. How far are willing to go with Jesus? How far have you promised to go?

vs:70 ***But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.***

Fear is very powerful! It can break the strongest people. This kind of fear is not from God. It is a result of 'the knowledge of good and evil' (knowledge of the consequences and effects based on this world's systems and standards). The temptation and failure of Peter was that he surrendered to the facts of the world and lost focus on the facts and promises of God, which are proven realities by faith, established in God's Kingdom.

Spiritually speaking, Peter lost sight of Jesus and began focusing on the enemy. It was the same situation all over again of Peter getting out of the boat and walking on the water. As soon as he was distracted from Jesus and saw the natural reality of his situation, fear dominated faith and he began to sink. He begins to struggle in his own efforts to save himself.

vs:71-72 ***Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth."***

He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"

The more Peter struggled to save himself, the quicker he finds himself failing.

vs:73-74 ***After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away."***

Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed.

Kingdom Lesson: No matter how noble your intentions, without God's strength and power, we cannot do anything. We cannot be loyal to Jesus. We cannot love Him. We cannot follow Him. Every day is a miracle when we continue to walk in obedience and love to God.

We all must face this reality! When we do, when we know who we are not, then religious pride and hypocrisy is conquered and we become a submissive and obedient tool that Jesus can effectively use.

vs:75 ***Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.***

Has the rooster crowed in your life? It took a chicken to show Peter who he really was. (That he was a big 'chicken'!) He didn't discover this with a big lecture or with professional counseling.

It doesn't take much to push a person to the breaking point. Jesus could have intervened for Peter, but Jesus knew that Peter needed this lesson. We shouldn't be too quick to try to rescue a person from their predicaments. We need to simply obey Jesus and sometimes 'let the rooster crow'.

Matthew 27

vs:1 ***Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death.***

Just as Satan had determined that the only way to stop Jesus was to put Him to death, so too he has determined that the only way to stop God's people is to put them to death. If he can't actually kill Christians physically, he certainly will do his best to destroy them spiritually.

Satan's character and purpose is to destroy whatever God creates. His main target will be to destroy the life of Christ that dwells within us; *I Peter 5:8*. Obviously, Satan can and will use any method or vehicle that is available for his use or manipulation.

Satan achieved his seemingly greatest triumph by using God's most 'loyal' star representatives, the priests and elders and even one of Jesus' own disciples. He didn't gain it by using Godless reprobates or people who were recognized as 'evil'. Rather he gained his objective by using those regarded as most loyal to his opposition!

The decision had already been determined to kill Jesus; *Matthew 26:4*. The priests and elders now simply make their dirty work official.

vs:2 ***They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.***

Jesus is bound! Can God be bound? Only by His own consent!

What binds you? Who binds you? What are you bound to?

Jesus wants us to be bound by Him and to Him, so that He can lead us to God and the ultimate death of our carnal nature.

vs:3 ***When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders.***

Judas was first 'seized' by Satan; *John 13:27*. Now he is 'seized' by guilt and remorse. Satan's work at destroying the work of God in him now brings its painful affects into the light.

It's a sad and difficult thing to be a guilt ridden Christian.

Judas repents! He tries to undo the chain of events that link him to his awful actions and compromise. The reality is though, once you commit the sin, you cannot, in your own strength, undo the chain of events. Only the forgiving grace and mercy of God can cover up these terrible things.

vs:4 ***"I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."
"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."***

Reality! This is the truthful sad condition of everyone's heart that is apart from God's forgiveness! Satan doesn't care about you! He doesn't take any blame for our compromise with him. We are indeed responsible for our own sins and compromises and must carry that burden until we get to the foot of the cross where Jesus alone is strong enough to lift the load of guilt off our shoulders.

vs:5 ***So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.***

There is not fulfillment from sin! Apart from Christ, the situation is hopeless with death offering the only final passage of escape from the guilt.

vs:6-8 ***The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money."***

So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.

That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Where is the guilt that should be tearing at the hearts of these religious leaders? Their hearts are so hard! They have determined to cover their sins with 'hypocrisy', Satan's substitute for the blood of Jesus!

vs:9-10 ***Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."***

A memorial to the sin of hypocrisy and betrayal. At the end of the road of sin is a graveyard!

Sin always leaves behind some sort of memorial to remind us of either our guilt or the forgiveness and saving grace of the blood of Jesus.

vs:11 ***Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.***

Every person must answer this question. Is Jesus really the promised Messiah? The facts are that Jesus is the Messiah, but whatever you say or determine to believe about Him, this is who He will be to you.

Who do you say Jesus is? What do you believe or expect of Him?

vs:12 ***When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.***

We don't have to give an answer to everyone. Silence can sometimes communicate as loudly and effectively as words!

vs:13 ***Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?"***

Revelation 12:10-12. If Jesus suffered from false accusations – we will also.

vs:14 ***But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of the governor.***

We need not respond to false accusations. A one-sided battle is a 'no contest'. There can be no victor when there is no opponent

vs:15-17 ***Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd.***

At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.

So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"

Who do you choose? Jesus or whatever is popular among those influential people around you?

vs:18 ***For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.***

The truth is obvious to the discerning eye! Pilate knew what was motivating the choices of the religious leaders.

What motivates you in the choices you make?

vs:19 ***While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."***

Do you dream about Jesus? What do your dreams in relationship to the truth bring? Suffering and guilt or hope and joy?

vs:20-21 ***But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.***

"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered.

Just because important people say something is 'right' is no reason or excuse to agree with them. We must base our choices on the truth, not according to the trends and pressures of those around us.

It can be a very dangerous thing to rely on the choices of others. Acts 17:11.

vs:22-23 ***"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!"***

"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

What are you doing with Jesus? Are you denying him his rightful place in your life? Are you putting to death the life he wants to live through you?

vs:24 ***When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"***

What is your responsibility? The truth comes home at last! The religious leaders, the ones who had determined to put Jesus to death, had passed the burden of their guilt to Judas and tried to wash their own hands of their dirty deeds (Matthew 27:3-4), But the truth comes back to haunt them.

vs:25 ***All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"***

Your guilt must find a resting place! It will either fall on your own head or on Jesus, our guilt bearer. Can you bear the burdens of your own sins? Can you bear the burdens of your ancestors sins - curses inherited upon yourself which were passed through the bloodline? Our one and only hope is found in Jesus, the sin and guilt bearer, the perfect 'Sacrifice Lamb' who takes away the sins of the world; John 1:29.

vs:26 ***Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.***

Hypocrisy is not free from justice! To cover your sins with hypocrisy requires payment from ...someone. And since a hypocrite is unwilling to bear the cost for his own sins - it will then be necessary to find payment from another person.

vs:27-31 ***Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.***

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,

and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.

They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

We find here a clear picture that gives a clearer picture of what hypocrisy really is like. So much of what is done by these soldiers is correct in appearance and action. But the heart and motives are very evil!

- They gather around Jesus.
- They know every detail about Jesus.
- They dress Him up to 'look' like a king.
- They crown Him to look like Jesus is their Lord and King.
- They give Him a scepter but recognize none of His power and authority.
- They go through the motions of worshipping Him.
- They make a complete mockery of who Jesus is and what He represents.
- They destroy the reality of who Jesus is in the eyes of anyone who observes Jesus.

vs:32 ***As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.***

We must choose to 'willingly' carry Jesus' cross. Religion forces you to carry your own cross, a burden that will indeed result in spiritual death. But the cross of Jesus will bring a death to our carnal nature, which releases our spirits to life from God.

What do you carry?

vs:33-34 ***They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull).***

There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.

Jesus had just stated the previous evening that He would never drink wine again until the time He would drink it 'anew' (a new kind of wine) with His disciples in His Father's Kingdom; *Matthew 26:29*

The purpose of this drink was to numb Jesus to the things He was suffering. But Jesus would not resort to anything that would prevent Him from fully bearing all that was required by Him of God. He refused to resort to methods of 'escapism', so that He could realize the full effects of human suffering which He was determined to fully and willingly carry for us.

vs:35-36 ***When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.***

Jesus came into this world with nothing, and He left this world in the same physical condition – with nothing. But spiritually He was taking with Him the sins of the world and the souls of those men and women who had put their trust in Him as their Savior and Lord to present them with their sins

forgiven, punishment cancelled, holy and righteous through His blood, before His Father in heaven.

Like Jesus, when we leave this world we cannot take any physical things with us. So what will you take with you when you leave this world? Sin? Or will it be the souls of men and women who through your life and testimony have also put their trust in Jesus as their Savior, Forgiver, and Lord?

vs:37 ***Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.***

While this sign was put up as the charge against Jesus, in reality it was the most profound billboard ever raised to declare the most profound truth that has revolutionized the world. Pilate himself had placed this sign there, much to the dismay of the Jews; *John 19:19-21*. Perhaps Pilate had discovered the truth for himself and has given one of the most simple, pointed and powerful testimonies of faith that has ever been made.

This is our job as Jesus disciples; to point others to Jesus, the cross, the empty tomb and declare Him the King of the Jews – the Messiah, King, Lord, and Ruler of all.

vs:38 ***Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.***

Never has anyone looked like a greater failure. Jesus had declared that He alone offered the answers to the dilemma of the effects of sin in the human heart. He claimed to be the only source of truth, life and hope. Now this! Left alone to die a criminal's death in the company of other condemned criminals! Only God could ever rescue the disaster that Jesus seemed to have made of His ministry and life.

Yet it was for this very kind of situation that Jesus came. He came to identify with the worst that sin could do to a person. He came to share in the total defeat of a human life, like these two condemned criminals. He became like the worst of us so that He could lead us to be the best that God has to offer us. He can understand our most hopeless situation because He experienced it. His compassion for you in your most complex and hopeless situation is genuine!

vs:39-40 ***Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"***

How easy it is to misunderstand someone else's situation. And, how easy it is to be misunderstood. People see what they want to see! Jesus seemed helpless to defend Himself. But the truth is that He deliberately chose not to defend Himself. At any time He could have backed out of the deal and called on the angelic armies of heaven who would have instantly been at His side in a rescue operation that would have proven beyond any doubt the true identity of who Jesus was; *Matthew 26:53*.

vs:41-43 ***In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him.***

"He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

How could these religious scholars and leaders have missed their Messiah? Jesus was the One they had been longing for, praying for, waiting for. But they missed Him completely! Why did this happen?

If these highly educated Bible scholars missed the most important person and event in history, is it possible that you and I could also miss something of God's plan and intended work for our own lives? Is there any chance that pride in our perception of who we believe Jesus to be and in what we are convinced is His nature according to popular interpretation of the Bible keep us from being open, teachable and receptive to God's "higher thoughts and ways"; *Isaiah 55:8-9*?

What proof do you search for in order to confirm the truth of what you struggle to believe in? Do you need Jesus to fit your preconceived concept of who and what you envision Him to be before you'll dare to put the whole weight of your trust in Him? Will you only believe to the extent that Jesus proves Himself? If that is what you're waiting for, you're going to be disappointed! Jesus requires us to believe first, the understanding will come later for those who have made that choice to first believe.

Even Jesus' own disciples didn't understand yet that the Kingdom Jesus was building was a spiritual Kingdom. Up until the very time before Jesus went up to heaven, they held to their preconceived ideas that Jesus was going to build a physical nation; *Acts 1:6*.

vs:44

In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

I find it amazing that even in their suffering and the final moments of their lives these men had the energy and ambition to insult Jesus. As Jesus hung on the cross taking on Himself the sins of the world and the connection that He had with God was severed because of that sin, Satan moved in to use any and every heartless method available to add to Jesus' suffering and defeat.

The same heartlessness of sinful humanity continues to be true. Men and women, condemned and dying in their sin continue to defy and mock the Son of God, blinded to the truth because of the darkness of sin. And if they scoffed at Jesus at His weakest moment in life, we too must realize that we who represent Jesus today will be the target of similar abuse.

The pattern continues as the world observes God's people embracing the same sins that the world is dying in. It's no surprise that they scoff at the church.

vs:45

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.

This darkness was a physical representation of what was happening in the spiritual realms. Satan and all his forces were converging on Jesus to celebrate and gloat over the slow and painful suffering and death of the Son of God, his archenemy from ages past. This, he mistakenly thought, was his finest moment and greatest victory.

Simultaneously Jesus' Father was turning His back on His only Son as Jesus freely took and became the sin of the world, an act that made Jesus the ultimate object of ungodliness and abomination to the eyes of God which He could not bear to look upon.

Without the living presence of God in the world and in our own lives, there is only darkness. God is light and life. Without God there is only darkness and death.

vs:46

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Throughout history, these are perhaps the most heartrending words ever spoke. Imagine what Jesus was feeling at this time. Utter, complete hopelessness! Isolation, loss, and rejection beyond comprehension! Add to that the gloating, insults, and mockery of Satan and his host of evil demons!

Luke 4:13; This was the ‘opportune time’ Satan had been longing for. His moment of opportunity, yet Jesus never wavered from His determination to follow through with the will of God for His life – and death.

How about you? Have you ever ‘felt’ that God has forsaken you, left you to the will and whims of Satan? Why would we ever ‘feel’ that way? What is the truth? Did God actually forsake Jesus? No! He was right there, ready and waiting to fulfill His promise to His Son in this great plan for the salvation of the human soul. Yet Jesus’ ‘feelings’ of abandonment were so strong that it seems like He actually believed it.

In the same way that sin affects our own lives, the sin that Jesus was taking on Himself would have blinded Him to the truth. In reality God never left Him. But in the same way that sin affected Adam and Eve, sin makes us feel that God can’t or won’t accept us as we are and that we must hide ourselves from His presence.

Jesus was feeling the same affects of sin on His life that we feel when we are in a condition of unrepentance and unforgiveness. Without God’s forgiveness, without our accepting and believing God has forgiven us of our sins, we will feel abandoned and unworthy of God’s presence in our lives.

Who told Jesus that God had abandoned him? Satan, who is the father of all lies. The truth is, God is always with us and is always reaching out for friendship and fellowship. It is our sin and the efforts to hide that sin that makes us feel abandoned by God.

Whether Jesus was actually being subjected to Satan’s deceptive powers, I’ll probably never know. But the question He raised in His final moments still demands an answer. Why did Jesus have this feeling that God had forsaken Him? The answer is clear. *Read Deuteronomy 31:1-8, 15-18.*

Jesus’ feeling of being forsaken was because of my sin and your sin and all the sins of the world throughout the ages. Jesus took them all upon Himself and carried them to a place where they could no longer cause His Father grief. But in doing so, Jesus Himself became sin and experienced the incredibly soul wrenching emptiness of a severed relationship with His Father. He did this amazing thing for me. He did it for you!

What is the solution for ‘feeling forsaken’ by God? First, recognize that the Word of God holds greater truth than our own feelings. God loves you. God wants to be with you. He is very near to you even at this very moment as you are reading this sentence!

Second, understand that it is sin that opens the door for Satan to whisper his lies to you that God has forsaken you.

Third, repent! Repent from doubting God's promise to 'never leave you or forsake you'. Repent from the sin that you have been secretly holding on to. Commit to living a life of 'forsaking sin'. (God hasn't forsaken you, but rather, because of your sin, you have forsaken God!) Commit to 'forsaking' the lies of Satan. Commit to coming out of hiding and deliberately making yourself available to God and His purposes for your life. Make yourself available for regular visits with God. Perhaps you will find Him in His Word, in prayer, in fellowship with other believers, and especially as you commit to active obedience to His commission to carry His burden and passion to rescue the lost souls of this world for the deception of sin and to be called into relationship with God.

vs:47-49 ***When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."***

Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.

The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

People all around the world are crying out these same words that Jesus cried, yet we don't hear it. Like those at the foot of the cross, we misunderstand the signals and messages that are being expressed through the actions of people around us and the words that they say. We need to listen carefully and observe with deliberate intention to understand what is really being expressed by the lives and words of those around us.

The people at the foot of the cross didn't hear Jesus correctly and offered Him something that wasn't according to the real need of his heart.

How often we miss hearing the cry of those sin bound souls around us and instead of giving them what they really need, the truth of God's love, we give them something else – often totally meaningless – like our religious meetings, our program, our counseling, our food, etc. when in reality all they want to know is how to not feel forsaken by God!

We need to learn to listen to the soul cry of those around us. We need to interpret the signals being sent out and respond in compassion and truth to the real need being expressed.

- Why do people fear or worry? Because they feel that God has or will forsake them.
- How many children around the world cry themselves to sleep each night because they feel that they have been forsaken by their earthly father?

vs:50 ***And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.***

Jesus did not seem to die in weakness. Sure, the torture He had suffered, the weight of the cross He had carried, and the hours hanging by nails on the cross would certainly have taken any human to the very edge of death. But there was a super strength in Jesus that is demonstrated in His final cry. It is not the cry of defeat. It is the cry of victory! It is the cry of a warrior who has just delivered the final blow to the enemy. And indeed, Jesus was in the middle of the greatest battle ever fought as He hung there on the cross.

The cross did not kill Jesus. He "gave up his spirit" by choice! He gave His sin-laden spirit to God and God brought upon Him the punishment for the sins that He had become. God took His life as the perfect sin sacrifice. The wrath of God towards sin-infected man was finally satisfied. Jesus chose to allow

Himself to receive sin's penalty of death on our behalf. This is the greatest demonstration of love ever expressed – ever! No one has or can love you more than God! *John 3:16*

vs:51 ***At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.***

The effects of the spiritual struggle spilled over into the physical world. The penalty of sin had been 'paid in full'. Now sin's power no longer held authority over the world. The barrier sin had in keeping man separated from God had been destroyed. No longer was the separation necessary between God and man. The division that had kept man from God's holiness, the curtain in the temple that kept sinful man from God's 'holy place', was split wide open! Man had free access to God! God had free access to man!

The power and presence of God was unleashed from the restrictive walls of our sins and nature itself could not quietly stand by as God's presence was revealed to the world.

vs:52-53 ***The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.***

They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

As God's power burst forth from the 'tomb' of the 'holy of holies', His life force touched many who were dead and at His presence, they were raised back to life! These people were noted for the holy and Godly lives they had formerly lived and it is to these dead people that the Spirit of life touches.

All across Jerusalem and the surrounding area, sealed tombs were broken open (not from the outside, but from the inside) and people long dead were restored back to life. This is no small phenomenon! Imagine the effect on your life if you were to see a long departed friend or relative in real life!

What a demonstration of the power of God's presence!

Are you feeling spiritually lifeless? There is really only one solution for this condition. The solution is - God's presence. So what is required to experience God's presence?

It's been said before:

1. Repent of sin in your life.
2. Believe what God has promised you in His Word.
3. And then, obey Him – the Lord of your life.

The result of these 3 steps = LIFE (a restored relationship with God)

vs:54 ***When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"***

"Hindsight"! The facts become so much clearer when viewed from the vantage point of experience. A short time earlier, these guards thought Jesus was just another insignificant man. Suddenly the revelation comes of Jesus' true identity, but now it seems to be too late and the guards are terrified. It seems that they have inadvertently had a hand in committing the greatest injustice the world has ever known. Then the realization of the reality hits home, even the heart-hardened, bravest men are brought to their knees.

How about you? Will you acknowledge the truth about Jesus now or will you wait until later – when it will be too late?

God makes this solemn promise to you:

Isaiah 45:23-24; "...By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.'"

All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.

Someday you will kneel before the throne of God Almighty. This is a promise whether you choose to believe it or not. For sure though, someday you will believe! But if you choose to believe it later – it may be too late. What will it take to convince you that Jesus really is God's Son, the long awaited Promised One, the Messiah? Just read the sign (God's Word) and believe it. Even at Jesus' crucifixion the sign placed over Jesus on the cross by Pilate was very clear; "The King of the Jews". The Bible is our sign today and we can choose to either believe it now or believe it later.

vs:55-56 ***Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.***

Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Jesus had 'needs' during His ministry on earth and caring people did something about those needs.

Does Jesus need anything now that we can take care of for Him? Jesus 'needs' our obedience! Read *Matthew 28:18-20* for just one example. Do you care about these needs? Do you care enough to find out what Jesus has 'commanded' of His disciples – and then obey it?

"...Watching from a distance". Sometimes we need to step back from the situations we find ourselves in so that we can get the 'big picture' – to see the situation from God's perspective. Rather than rushing to conclusions about the confusing situations we encounter in life, take a 'time out' to "watch and pray"; *Matthew 26:41*.

vs:57-61 ***As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus***

Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him

Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth

and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

What happened to Jesus' closest friends? The eleven remaining disciples have just – disappeared. This certainly looks like the end of Jesus and His 'good news' message. The disciples had invested their lives in Jesus' ministry. Now the only thing left for them was threat of arrest and a similar fate to Jesus', embarrassment, remorse for wasted years, and the financial losses of sacrificed businesses and investments. Or, if they were willing, they could

continue to hold onto the promises Jesus had made to them that He would indeed come back to life.

This is the process of that all believers may need to face at some time in their life. The time when everything is against them and even all of God's blessings seem to have become curses. But there is one thing that remains. That is God's Word. But for the disciples, Jesus' word was not logical. It was not reasonable that He would come back to life physically. Yet, which truth is greater? Our perception of reality, or the promise of God?

vs:62-63 ***The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.***

"Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'

No one really understood what the outcome was going to be, that the best was yet to come. But the religious leaders have a feeling that the battle isn't over yet! This in itself is the heart of the 'good news' – God always has another option available when we think the battle is lost. God is never defeated! And if you are on 'his side', your battle is never lost either. There is always hope when everything seems to be hopeless.

These religious leaders actually believe the words of Jesus more than Jesus' own disciples did! What has God said to you in His word that is too strange to actually believe and act upon? The fact remains though that God's Word will always be proven true. Always! So will you choose to believe everything that God has said – now, or later? Make a list of some of God's promises, including those promises that, to you, are too hard to believe.

Here are a few samples to get you thinking:

"I will never leave you; never will I forsake you." ; Deuteronomy 31:6

"I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am." ; John 14:2-3

"Love never fails." ; 1 Corinthians 13:8

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." ; Matthew 18:3

vs:64-66 ***So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."***

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."

So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

The religious leaders were doing everything in their power to make sure God's Word didn't come true! But guess what? Nothing you can do can hinder or prevent God's word from coming to pass.

God's promises are powerful! It was God's word through which everything in existence was created. John 1:1; "In the beginning was the word...". Genesis 1:3,6,9 etc.; "And God said, 'Let there be...'"

If God's Word is so powerful, what are the affects of Satan's word in our life? Make a list of things Satan says to you.

Here are a few ideas to get you thinking:

God isn't really with you.

There really isn't a real heaven or hell.

Jesus is never really coming back – and if he does, you're certainly not going to go with him.

Jesus doesn't really love you.

Whose voice are you going to believe? The promises of God received by faith or the messages Satan plants in our mind and feelings?

Don't count on religious leaders to always guide you into the truth of God's Word. You alone are ultimately responsible for what you believe and how God's Word will work in your own life. You need to hear God's Word for yourself and believe it regardless of what popular opinion dictates.

Matthew 28

vs:1 ***After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.***

All that was left of their lives of these women was a great sense of loss, heartache, and shattered dreams. The tomb represented all of these feelings.

From other scriptures we know that great doubts stirred in the minds of these women; *Mark 16:2*. Even when the disciples saw the empty tomb, they assumed that the greatest scandal had taken place and that Jesus body had been stolen; *John 20:1-2*.

What did they hope to find at the tomb? What do you hope to find at the places that only hold death? We have the truth that sin is death. So why do people always go to those places of sin in hopes of finding life there? The same question is asked to these two women; *Luke 24:5*, "*Why do you look of the living among the dead*".

vs:2-4 ***There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.***

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

Even in the places of death, God is present. Revelation comes! For many people it is in the time of greatest darkness, death and sin in their lives that the light and power of God penetrates into their souls.

Angels! They are real! They are supernatural beings from somewhere beyond the realms of our world and its natural limitations. Here are just a few references among many about angels found throughout the Old and New Testaments; *Genesis 3:24, Hebrews 1:14, 2:7 & 9, Psalms 91:11-12, 103:20, 104:4, Daniel 9:20-23, 10:4-11:1, Matthew 24:31 & 36, 26:53, Luke 15:10,*

Though angels are fascinating to consider, we must not seek after them, pray to them, give them orders, or worship them; *Revelations 19:10*. They are servants of God.

vs:5 ***The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.***

Why do people invest so much time in things that are meaningless, empty, and dead? It is because they are in search of something. Most likely these two women didn't understand what they were actually looking for or they were searching for a substitute to fulfill the emptiness they felt brought on by uncontrollable circumstances.

The women had many things to fear. Their futures were at stake. Their friends had scattered. Events had taken control of their lives and they were helpless in getting things back in order. They (two women) would be facing several Roman soldiers at the tomb. Would they be arrested as supporters of Jesus' ministry? Then to top it off – the encounter a supernatural being from beyond the realms of known reality!

The angel clarifies what is in the hearts of the women. He understands perfectly their fear and their feelings of loss and hopelessness in overcoming their fear and loss. Like so many people in the world who are fearful and empty – God wants them to know that He understands. And He comes offering the solution for their hopelessness. The answer is and always will be found in - Jesus! The end is not the grave, fear and loss. In reality, the beginning is found at this particular grave! Hope and Life! Jesus!

vs:6 ***He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.***

Sometimes we must be taken into the very depths of our sin and taste and smell the reality of its death in order to be convinced of the emptiness it offers. And having done that, we finally realize the futility of the path our lives have taken. But it may take a revelation of the place where Jesus is not at in order to become convinced that hope still remains alive and in another place.

vs:7 Suddenly the women discover that their ministry is not over after all! There is more! What good news!

Kingdom Lesson: Maybe you have thought in your heart that God is done with you. Maybe you have lost faith and hope and your ministry seems to be finished. But the good news is - Jesus is not dead! He is alive and He is going ahead of you if you will make the changes in your life and attitude that are necessary in order to surrender to the new direction Jesus is taking you in.

Where is Jesus going in your life? Are you willing to follow? It may not be the direction you are accustomed to going. It may not involve ministry in the way you are used to doing things. But if you'll catch the vision and step out in obedience, you're going to 'see Him'!

Don't you want to see Jesus at work in your life and working through your life? What has He already told you to do? Maybe it is a very unexpected task that you need to do or an attitude that you need to change.

Obedience to God's word results in an encounter with Him!

vs:8 ***So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.***

They were experiencing a new kind of fear. Fear of the unknown; of having faced the unknown and having been thrust into the unknown. Fear of having suddenly been caught up in God's purposes, and joy of having been suddenly caught up in God's purposes again.

vs:9 ***Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.***

Now their heads are up. They are running towards obedience and the thrill of new life and hope. In the course of their obedience and enthusiasm, they meet Jesus. They meet Him sooner than anticipated. They meet Him with a new understanding and revelation of who He really is and there is only one way for them to respond to His presence. That is to worship Him! They had now come to truly believe that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that what He said, regardless of how unbelievable it might be, His word was and is true. He was and is alive, just like He had promised. Now they really believed. Do you?

vs:10 ***Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."***

"...tell my brothers" Incredible! After the disciples had denied, doubted and abandoned Him, Jesus still calls them His 'brothers'.

If you are a disciple of Jesus, do you feel that He is your brother? Whether you feel this way or not, Jesus thinks of you as immediate family. Remember the story of Joseph and his 11 brothers? You can read about this family which is given to us as a pattern of Jesus and His disciples in Genesis 37:11-36 and Genesis 45:1-15. This story is an example of Jesus love for you and me.

Where must you 'go' in order to see Jesus? Perhaps, like the disciples you will need to make some kind of an effort to get to the place where you can get the revelation of Jesus that you are longing for. We know for sure that Jesus is revealed in His Word, the Bible. We also know that He is revealed, as we are obedient in surrendering to His will. What do you need to leave behind in order to meet Jesus? Are you searching for Him in His Word? Have you been surrendering to someone else's will or to the carnal 'will' of your old nature instead of the will of your 'Lord'?

vs:11-15 ***While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.***

When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money,

telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'

If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."

So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

What is the truth? Is it what is most believable? Which is easier to believe; that Jesus died, was buried, and came back to life or that the disciples managed to steal Jesus' body out of the grave in order to give the illusion that He had come back to life?

Truth is not an easy thing to acquire. The guards in this account were the ones who probably had the greatest understanding of the truth about Jesus' resurrection. But for little money and the need to satisfy men in authority the guards gave witness to a lie. How did Matthew (the author) manage to discover the truth about the cover up? Perhaps Jesus Himself told the disciples about the schemes of the guards and the religious leaders. Or perhaps one of the guards confessed to the truth.

What is the truth about your own life? Are you involved in a cover up plot? Are you hiding what God has done in your life in order to maintain an edge with the peers you have influence with? Or are you creating an illusion of God's power at work in your life when in fact you have a testimony to the truth and God's power is still sealed up in the tomb of your heart?

(vs:14) Who are you trying to satisfy? God? Yourself? Other people?

Because the religious leaders were recognized as 'men of God', whatever plan they devised would be perceived as God's truth by their followers. But there is a big difference between the perception of truth and factual truth. To determine factual truth, a foundation must be established by which perceived truth and factual truth can be gauged and compared. Jesus offers that foundation. Why can He do that? Because He is God! If you are willing to accept this as truth, then the rest is easy. God has given us His Son, Jesus, who is the foundation, the Word of truth, which always supercedes the opinion and word of men. Always! And without the foundation of the identity of Jesus' established truth will always be up for question. Life will never hold a firm foundation if truth is always in doubt.

vs:16-17 ***Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.***

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

"When they saw Him..." Have you seen Jesus? I don't mean physically but rather in the evidence of His presence by His Spirit at work in your life and the lives of others?

"...and they worshiped him..." Now the disciples were beginning to realize that Jesus was no longer just their teacher and leader. He really was the One He had been saying He was – the Messiah, God's Son. But how can this be true? How can it be believable?

Worship and doubt – a strange combination!

Some people reason that if they could have a miracle or just see Jesus with their own eyes, then they would believe. But believing is a choice! These disciples certainly had enough evidence to be convinced. Yet, some of the disciples doubted!

Are you waiting for God to prove Himself in your life in a hope that this would make you into a 'super-believer'? These proofs may help you to believe, but Jesus said (*John 20:27-29*) that you can be blessed by believing without the personal proofs. In fact this seems to indicate that it is better to believe without having seen the proofs!

Once someone hears the message about Jesus, that person must choose to either believe or to not believe. If they choose to believe, they will receive the blessings that God gives to those who believe.

Can a person believe and doubt at the same time? Can you believe, but at the same time conduct your life as though you doubt? Or can you doubt, but pretend that you believe? What kind of faith would this be? Is it faith?

Here are some verses about ‘doubting’ and ‘believing’:

James 1:5-8

Matthew 21:21

Matthew 17:14-21 and Mark 9:21-24

Hebrews 11:1

Romans 10:14-17

Mark 1:15

John 1:7

1 Thessalonians 4:14

vs:18 ***Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.***

This is certainly one of the most revolutionary statements ever made and Jesus wanted to make sure that the disciples understood it. “All authority”! This is more authority than any world leader possesses. This is more authority than any situation holds over your life. This is more authority than any addiction, disadvantage, or spiritual power. No enemy, personality, title or office supercedes Jesus’ authority. AND this is spoken by one who calls those who are His disciples - ‘brother’ (vs:10)! My brother! Your brother – if you are a disciple!

Consider what this means!

vs:19-20 ***Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."***

In order to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we must be obedient to his commands. That is what a disciple does. He obeys the commands of Jesus. And in this final command of Jesus recorded in the book of Matthew, Jesus commands those who are his disciples to go out and make more disciples. In other words, you cannot be a disciple of Jesus unless you are actively involved in making other people into disciples of Jesus.

A disciple of Jesus makes disciples of Jesus (not disciples of himself, or of a denomination, or favorite doctrine, but disciplined followers of Jesus Christ, disciplined in a lifestyle of hearing and obeying the voice of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Before you pick up the charge of this ‘great commission’, first, you need to be a disciple – a disciplined follower of Jesus Christ. Second, you need to believe and understand what it means to have Jesus as your own brother, the position of authority that He holds and how that relates to you. Then perhaps you’re ready for the next thing – the ‘therefore’!

“Therefore ‘go’”. Go where? Jesus gives His disciples a big vision. He offers them a worldwide vision. How big is your vision?

Many Christians have only enough faith to ‘go’ to church once a week. That is not what Jesus commanded His disciples to do. Rather Jesus commands His disciples to ‘go’ and take the church out to the world – just like Jesus took the presence of God to those who were lost and under the power and authority of sins curse.

“Therefore YOU must ‘make disciples’”.

“Therefore YOU must ‘teach’”.

How can we go? How can we teach? By faith! By faith in the promise directly from Jesus mouth that He has ALL power, and ALL authority and that he is with us! What a promise! Can you believe it? Can you really believe that Jesus, God himself, is with you in all his power and authority and that if you will do what he asks us to do, that he will make available his power and authority on our behalf as we obey his command to ‘GO’!

What are you waiting for? What is keeping you from

So where do we go from here?

By now I hope that you have received some idea of how the Holy Spirit speaks to you through the Word of God as you have read and meditated with me on the verses of Matthew. But you cannot stop now! He, the Holy Spirit, has much more to teach you. Not only through further study in the book of Matthew and the rest of the Bible, but in the classroom of real life, as we take what we've learned and dare to venture out by faith on this day-by-day journey with Jesus. He eagerly desires to walk with you on this journey through life and lead you into God's custom designed purposes for you.

We train our spiritual ears to know His voice as we listen to Jesus speaking to us by the Holy Spirit in His Word. We must continue in the discipline of meeting with Jesus in the Word of God. The older I get, the more amazed I become at the unlimited treasury of truth and wisdom that is to be found in God's Word. There is always more to be learned and new adventures in faith to be searched out and lived.

Now it is your turn! Do like I have done. Get a notebook and begin writing out what the Holy Spirit speaks to you, verse-by-verse. He has so much to tell you! Take time to listen. Shut out every distraction and welcome Him into an environment of disciplined quietness, a time and place you have set aside just for Him.

Read God's Word as though it has been written to you personally. Put your name in the verses and with the commands and promises made by God. For example, when Jesus made the promise in Matthew 28:20 that ... ***surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*** , understand that this promise wasn't just for 12 disciples 2000 years ago. This promise is for disciples of Jesus Christ right at this very moment. It applies to you - if you are truly a disciple of Jesus. Receive it and believe it. Put your name on it and write it down!

Why write out what God says to us? Because through the process of writing we force our minds to slow down enough that the word of God can take root in our heart. And as we write, so often in just that short time, we allow the Holy Spirit opportunity to speak further thoughts and insights to us that we would otherwise miss. In this high-tech, fast pace society, we must understand that God is under no obligation to operate at our level of intensity. And in fact, we are not bound to it either! Rather, we must take up the challenge to seek out where God is and meet with Him on His terms. He said " ,... ***go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen***". So go to a place where there are no distractions, entertainment, or temptation for religious showmanship. We are to be in control of the gift of time he has given us and make meeting with Him a priority and on his terms. It is part of what being a disciple is all about.

Are you ready to take control of your life and bring it under the lordship of the will and purposes of Jesus Christ? I sure hope so! Why? Because it is in that unpopular place of disciplined surrender to His Lordship that our purpose in Him is found. And when we have found Jesus, we have found everything that the world is striving to attain and has repeatedly fallen short of.

We're living in very exciting times. While some folks sit around wringing their hands in growing alarm because of the darkness that is obviously sweeping our nation and the world, God is calling his children to step forward in total commitment to His service. We have a job to do. This is no joke. There is no more time to wait for someone else to do something! Those who claim to serve and love the Lord Jesus are the only ones who can truly meet the challenge.

WE'RE IT!!

Many generations of Christians have done well at faithfully attending their churches week after week. But there is no more time for just sitting and soaking it in! It's time to GO. It's time to BUILD on the foundation of faith we've received after all those years of church. It's time for God's people make their faith alive and effective by choosing to surrender to Jesus lordship over their own will and lives and to become active and involved in the passion and burden of the One we claim to follow.

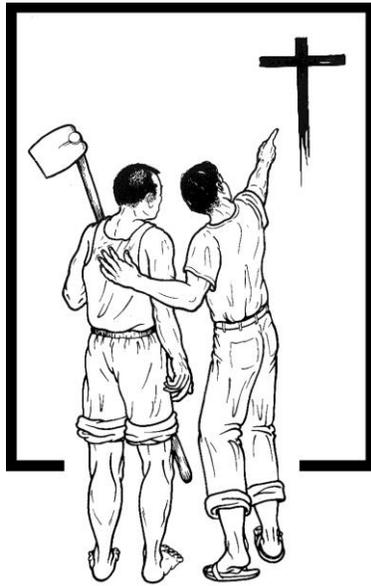
Tell me, what more can we possibly learn before we 'feel' qualified to finally enter the ranks of those Christian soldiers who burn with such a love and devotion to their Savior that they are compelled to.... action! Men and women, sometimes with much, but often with little or no talent or training or resources, struggling, yet pressing forward because they really, really, believe what Jesus does and says. Pointing others towards the cross and leading them into a disciplined walk with the living Lord Jesus. That's it! Simple! Yet it's so incredibly powerful. Like lights shining in the dark.

Guess what? When you choose to throw it all to the wind - your hard earned rights as a citizen of planet earth, all of your worries and fears, your lack of perfection and self confidence - as you let it go, you can become more and more that shining light boldly representing Jesus Christ in this ever darkening world. You can be one of those special ones who really make a difference! Go ahead, take the light that's in your heart, and throw off those things of this world that cover it. Hold your light high... and see!

May the Lord bless you in His special way!

In His service,

Wendell Martin



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