

# The hard sayings of Jesus



Listen to this series on the Internet Archive <https://archive.org/details/HardSayingsPart39>

## Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	4
A spade is a spade.....	5
Discipleship born of hatred .....	9
If you can't beat them burn them .....	13
Pilgrim's progress .....	17
Top down redemption .....	21
Marriage of convenience .....	25
The better the day the better the deed.....	29
The Nobleman and the Centurion .....	33
Carers of His brethren.....	37
In denial.....	41
Passed over .....	45
Where did the seed fall in your life?.....	49
No place for old men .....	53
A tale of three kisses.....	57
In Sickness and in Sin .....	61
Waking the Dead. ....	65
Religious paternity.....	69
God's hierarchy of needs .....	73
Wash before YOU worship? .....	79
A day with the Creator .....	83
Hell fire and amputation .....	87
Lest we forget.....	91
Self proclaimed publicans .....	96
Disciples that are devils.....	100
Its all about JESUS.....	104
The Divine magnet.....	108
Worshipping in a black hole .....	112
Making Mammon work for you.....	116
Who will you really serve? .....	120
The Beatitudes: Lessons in discipleship .....	125
The Beatitudes: The happy beggar's inheritance .....	129

The Beatitudes: Happy mourners.....	133
The Beatitudes: Who wants the Earth anyway? .....	137
The Beatitudes: Humility gets the lot .....	141
The Beatitudes: A good famine .....	146
The Beatitudes: Twice blessed .....	150
The Beatitudes: From the other side of time .....	154
The Beatitudes: The cataracts of the heart.....	158
The Beatitudes: Brothers of Christ .....	162
The Beatitudes: Triumph in adversity.....	167

**Where Bible version is not stated it is the Authorised Version, otherwise:**

- CEV                   Contemporary English Version
- Darby                John Nelson Darby Translation
- ERV                 Easy to Read Version
- Geneva             1587 Version
- GNB                 Good News Translation
- GW                  God’s Word
- ISV                 International Standard Version
- KJV                 Kings James Version
- LEB                 Lexham English Version
- LXX                 Septuagint
- RSV                 Revised Standard Version
- YLT                 Young’s Literal Translation

Scripture quotations are in *italic script*.

**Cover: Casting out the Money Changers. Carl Heinrich Bloch (May 23, 1834 – February 22, 1890)**

He was born in Copenhagen, Denmark and studied with Wilhelm Marstrand at the Royal Danish Academy of Art (Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi). Bloch's parents wanted their son to enter a respectable profession - an officer in the Navy. This, however, was not what Carl wanted. His only interest was drawing and painting, and he was consumed by the idea of becoming an artist. He went to Italy to study art, passing through the Netherlands, where he became acquainted with the work of Rembrandt, which became a major influence on him.

Carl Bloch met his wife, Alma Trepka, in Rome, where he married her on May 31, 1868. They were happily married until her early death in 1886. The sorrow over losing his wife weighed heavily on Bloch, and being left alone with their eight children after her death was very difficult for him.

He was commissioned to produce 23 paintings for the Chapel at Frederiksborg Palace. These were all scenes from the life of Christ which have become very popular as illustrations. The originals, painted between 1865 and 1879, are still at Frederiksborg Palace. The altarpieces can be found at Holbaek, Odense, Ugerloese and Copenhagen in Denmark, as well as Loederup, Hoerup, and Landskrona in Sweden.

## INTRODUCTION

The Gospels are mostly Old Testament. These scriptures describe the last days of Judaism, as the Final sacrifice of the Son of God ushers in the New Covenant. The Gospels transport us with the disciples, through their doubts, fears, faith and victory as we share their experiences, which are, if we think about it, not dissimilar to our own.

As Jesus leads His disciples, the elite band of twelve and the many others who followed Him relentlessly, He dispenses wisdom. Much wisdom to the disciples and a great deal to the religious charlatans who posed as leaders and duelled verbally day by day, seeking to destroy the very object of prophecy, the Messiah Himself. Yes, it was the leaders of religion who were the blind guides.

In those short sharp discourses were embedded hard sayings. Very hard sayings. These were not subjects for discussion, they were the facts of the new life. If you are not born again you cannot see the kingdom, if you cannot hate mothers and fathers you cannot be a disciple, if the word sown to you dies, so will you, if you cannot care for the least of your brethren you will not enter heaven, if you don't take up your cross you cannot be a disciple, if you teach for commands the doctrines of men you are a hypocrite. These and many more sayings are examined in the following pages.

I trust that you will see much more depth in the Gospels as we focus on these "hard sayings" of Jesus? It had occurred to me that we perhaps do not give the Gospels the attention that they deserve and that we focus more on the Pauline teachings of the epistles as being more relevant to the Church. The Gospels make nice reading but we do not dwell on them long enough to extract their message. That may be a result of the way we learned them in Sunday School, as nice stories, told by nice people. Stories for children but not for grown ups. We read them, agreed with them and then passed on, without its message impacting upon our lives. They become "wise words" but at the same time irrelevant words. Words that cannot possibly be important in our day, because if they were, we would surely see more Christians doing the words. Do not be fooled, the Church in our day is but a shadow of itself. It bears little resemblance to the Church of the first century.

If it makes us uncomfortable, it is good because modern Christianity has developed a complacency that puts it in grave danger. Before you move into the doctrines of the Pauline epistles, make sure you understand the Gospels as they are the foundation of Christianity. Paul and the other Apostles merely argue the consequences of the Gospels.

**Dedicated to those souls who patiently sat through these ministries and shared their thoughts, to those who encouraged, together with those who will also derive benefit from them.**

**Love in Jesus, Mike.**

**Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> December 2014.**

Listen to this series on the Internet Archive <https://archive.org/details/HardSayingsPart39>

## A spade is a spade

Part 1. Luk 9:56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

Our thesis for this new series is that the Church needs to get back to using the language of Jesus however hard it seems to be at times, because the nature of the human condition and the true state of the world demand it. When we understand Jesus words, we shall be in the mind of God and we shall see things as they are to be seen, not how we would like them to be. Jesus' words have been watered down to the extent that they have become ineffective and irrelevant. An example of what is happening can be seen in that Institutional abomination the Anglican Church which has decided:

“Ministers are being trained to create new forms of Anglicanism suitable for people of alternative beliefs as part of a Church of England drive to retain congregation numbers. Reverend Steve Hollinghurst, a researcher and adviser in new religious movements told the BBC: “I would be looking to formulate an exploration of the Christian faith that would be at home in their culture.” He said it would be “almost to create a pagan church where Christianity was very much in the centre.” The Church Mission Society, which is training ministers to “break new ground”, hopes to see a number of spiritual people align themselves with Christianity.”

The Bible Society recently commissioned a study as part of its “Pass It On” campaign to encourage parents to give Bible stories to their children. “The study revealed a generation of children with little knowledge of the most important stories forming the basis of Christianity, and parents who often knew little more. Too few children have the opportunity to hear and reflect on what this life-changing book contains. Of the children who were questioned, more than a third failed to identify either the Good Samaritan or David and Goliath as Biblical stories. Many of the parents who responded saw the Bible as a source of good values for their children. But almost half did not recognise the story of Noah's Ark as coming from the Bible, and many confused Biblical stories with plotlines from well-known films such as Harry Potter.”

I was born in a time when people were more God honouring and I think, more honourable than today, a time when life did not seem so dangerous or vicious. A time where children played for hours in the streets and woods, unfettered from the perceived dangers that have become monsters in our present day. As the State has attempted to increase its control over our freedoms, it has invented its own demons to control us. It has elevated fears to paranoia. The role of politicians, especially those in opposition, is to sow fear in the populations and then gain favour by offering perfect solutions. Everything is dangerous, not the least, poorly chosen words and beliefs. Remember the Y2K computer problem that never was?

Dr Ben Carson said at the annual prayer breakfast in the US last year (2013) :

“But PC (Political Correctness) is dangerous. Because, you see, in this country one of the founding principles was freedom of thought and freedom of expression. And it muffles people. It puts a muzzle on them. And at the same time, keeps people from discussing important issues while the fabric of this society is being changed. And we cannot fall for that trick. And what we need to do is start talking about things, talking about things that are important.”

Freedom of speech and discussion are being stifled by PC and the consequence is that things are being introduced without debate just in case someone gets offended. That means the “offended” minority rules over the majority who are not offended. It became a national outrage a few weeks ago when the National Health Service sent a black woman a letter saying her password was set as “CHARCOAL SHADE” for accessing the hospital website. The woman was “horrified” when she discovered the 'highly offensive' password in a letter asking her to book an online appointment with a pain management clinic. On the same day Haribo were told by customers in Scandinavia to stop selling 'racist' sweets which 'depict primitive African, Asian or Native American art'. Welcome to the crazy world of political correctness, welcome to the cult of niceness, welcome to our streets paved with the eggshells of offence that we cautiously tread in fear of breaking anything and welcome to our world of censorship.

When we enter the world of Jesus, we are at once back in an age of free speech. **A spade was called a spade.** In fact, we would say from today’s point of view, many things that Jesus says are downright offensive and insensitive. “Why”, people would say, “if He spoke to me like that, I would tell Him where to get off!” He seems to correct His enemies and His friends in a ruthless manner but, was this case? Were the issues of the day (as today) of such importance that the only way to make people sit up and pay attention was to speak plainly in that way? We shall God willing examine the hard sayings of Jesus in order to understand this.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights upholds freedom of speech:

- Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.
- Article 19. Everyone has the right to **freedom of opinion and expression**; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and **to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.**
- Article 20. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

In accordance with article 19, I claim the right of freedom of opinion and expression, in this series, not that I need it, because God has given me the right to speak the truth without fear or favour.

We would have to acknowledge that if we want someone to listen to us or read an article, it has to grasp your attention within and few seconds or you have lost the contact. David Craig explains:

“When I worked selling management consultancy projects, we were very careful about the words we used with our clients. We would class key words into three main groups – power-selling words, neutral words and sales suffocators. For example, when flogging a million-pound project, we tended to avoid the neutral word “project” and would instead call what we were selling an “improvement plan” or even better a “transformation programme”.

Or, another example, when writing the blurb for one of my books, a publisher wrote that the book “examines” how the Government wasted trillions. But “examines” is a dead word. It’s lifeless. It makes the book sound like an academic study. It’s a sales suffocator. Much

better to use something like “reveals” or “exposes” or even “lays bare” – those are power-selling words.”

You get the point. Some words are more powerful than others. There is a vast difference, for example, between calling someone “naughty” and calling them a “hypocrite”. There is a difference between saying to one of your friends, “that was a nice thought Peter, wanting to save my life but its not for me” and saying, “Get thee behind me satan”. I have no doubt whatsoever, that the Creator who invented speech, who created languages at Babel, knew exactly how to use words effectively. I believe that Jesus chose His words most carefully. They were not intended to be vindictive or spiteful. They were appropriate and to the point. They were the right words. Here are some examples of Jesus rich descriptions of religious leaders of His day:

**Dogs, swine, ravening wolves, hypocrites, child of hell, fools and blind, blind guides, whited sepulchres, full of hypocrisy and iniquity, serpents, vipers, that fox, your father the devil, murderer, liar.**

You may not have liked to hear those words but they were the right words to use in those situations. Guy Fawkes is alleged to have said to King James I on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1605, having been caught trying to blow up Parliament the previous day, "Desperate diseases require desperate measures." This is certainly so when it comes to sin. Here is an example of how one minister caused a lifetime sinner to wake to the gospel.

“Muckle Kate was a notorious sinner of Lochcarron during the ministry of Lachlan Mackenzie. She had spent over eighty years in the service of Satan, and had openly broken every commandment except the sixth (‘Thou shalt not kill’). Her minister described her as ‘ugly . . . without beauty in the sight of God or men.’ She never crossed the threshold of a place of worship, but spent much of her time attending ceilidhs, listening to others recite Ossianic compositions and the poems of ancient Gaelic bards.

Knowing her fondness for such gatherings, Mr. Mackenzie composed a Gaelic poem in which he lashed her sins as sharply as he could. He then had the words set to music, and got some young men to sing it at a gathering where Kate was present. The words shot into her heart like arrows, till the nearby rocks echoed the cries of her wailing. From then on she spent her days in lonely places, weeping over her sins until she became totally blind. To all appearances, eternal despair was to be her portion. But at long last deliverance came, and ‘Mr. Lachlan’ wished to see her at the Lord’s Table. The very thought of doing such a thing staggered her. ‘Should I,’ she questioned, ‘whose hands have been up to the shoulders in my Saviour’s blood, dare to do such a thing?’

When an open air Communion Sabbath came round, and the table services were over, on returning to the preaching tent ‘Mr. Lachlan’ heard a piercing cry. He went over to the distressed woman, took her hand, and led her to the table. There this poor, blind, aged sinner partook of the symbols of her Saviour’s broken body and shed blood. The eyes of the whole congregation, who knew her past life, were on her; and there, alone, before them all, she bore testimony to the wondrous grace of God.”

I don't think that Jesus is so much hard in His speech as that we are often too soft in ours. I think that one of the reasons for this is that our world view differs from the world view of Jesus. We do not see clearly the horror of sin and the battle raging against it, we see sinful people as basically nice and not on their way to damnation, we see the scripture as a good book that is outdated and irrelevant for our age, we see Christianity as an option among religions that all eventually lead to God. We do not see the great price to be paid if we are to get right with God and we have relegated the Divine Creation to mythology.

You see, we "Christians" are either wilfully ignorant or blind to the facts of life. *2Pe 3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.*

Jesus had watched over this, His creation, for millennia and had only spoken rarely outside of the nation of Israel. He had given Israel the law and had even led them and fed them in the wilderness *1Co 10:4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.* Now, in the wisdom of God He would come and dwell as Emmanuel, albeit for a brief period of 33 years. *Heb 1:2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*

Jesus could have lived with us a lot longer than 33 years, He could have developed a much wider ministry, He could have healed more people, He could in short have saved everyone there and then and put an end to the evil World. None of that was in the Wisdom of God. It was ordained that in that brief window, all that needed to be said and all that was necessary for the salvation of mankind could be accomplished. Every second of every minute would have to count. Words that needed saying had to be the best words, the most descriptive, the most functional the most appropriate words, the most economic words. The jots and tittles of the law were just as relevant in the speech of Christ.

I do not see Jesus as a conversationalist. I do not see trivia in His speech. Take for example *Joh 4:7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.* Now you and I might say "Good morning, nice day isn't it, have you travelled far?" On the other hand we might say nothing to a complete stranger. Jesus is straight to the point, *Joh 4:10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.* Jesus is there to impact upon peoples lives, not to pass the time of day. We should learn a lesson from this about what is needful for people to hear and pray that He might speak through us likewise.

I was once at a Church Barbecue talking to a man who didn't know Christ as his Saviour. He said to me that he thought it was so nice how we talked together. Our conversations had substance. He said that at parties he went to, they usually ended up with people being rude and dismissive and belittling each other. We need to make our words count. *Col 4:6 Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.* That grace like salt may sting the wounds but is cleansing.



Jesus made His words count. He chose the right words for the situation. He called a spade a spade. People in a house that is on fire needed to know the truth of their situation. Christianity was not about polite society and polite conversation, it was about, as John the Baptist said, fleeing from the wrath to come.

### Discipleship born of hatred

Part 2. Luk 14:26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

This verse was probably never heard at the lips of Jesus by Luke. Just who Luke interviewed to provide the text is also unknown. That said, it is verses like this that prove to me the Divine expiration of Scripture rather than the invention of the human mind. Jesus uses the word “hate” to describe the relationship Christians should have to their family and their own life. They should hate them. Men would have happily altered this verse to either tone it down or try to harmonise it with other scriptures to soften its impact, yet here it is, in all its glory, clear as a bell, **“hate not his father and mother”**.

I have to say that Jesus was very clear as to what He intended to say and it requires no clarification. So if He had intended to say, “If any man come to me, and does not love me more than his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple”, would He not have said it? Or He could have said “You should love me more than your parents”, or “Discipleship requires a higher commitment to me than to your family”. He could have simply reiterated the first commandment which He does in a manner of speaking, by bringing us to the thought from a different direction. We are in fact looking at the command, *Mat 22:37.....Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*, from a different angle.

We are looking at the corollary of loving God, which is hating all else. We are looking at the cost of discipleship. People are very quick to latch on to God’s love for them *Joh 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*. They are less swift to count the cost of this love and they will assume that God’s love embraces all of their life choices and behaviours as part of the package, however bad or contradictory to God those choices are. Somewhere in there is the idea that God will even love us despite the fact that we fail to honour Him in our families or our personal lives. There is the thought that what we have in the relationships in this life is on the same level as our relationship with our Creator. Jesus makes it clear that this is not the case. If you thought that then you have missed the point. Christianity is not just about being saved it is about being a disciple.

The Greek word for “hate” is *miseo* (μισέω *miseō*) and the question is, how does hate manifest itself? A lot of people will jump to the conclusion that hatred means being nasty, getting revenge on someone, hurting someone, annihilating and enemy. This though has more to do with being angry than hating someone. We might better illustrate hatred by a child, who for the first time tastes something disagreeable and pushes the plate away, with the words, “I hate that”. Hatred is in part about disliking something but that does not fully explain what is happening.

I think that people often confuse consequences of hatred with hatred itself, for example, *Deu 1:27 And ye murmured in your tents, and said, **Because the LORD hated (LXX miseo) us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.*** In the minds of the Hebrews was the idea that God's hatred would have the consequence that they would be destroyed, hence hatred is associated with destruction. Well, those are often the emotions that accompany hatred but is that really what it is? We must not confuse the idea of hatred with the sinful emotions that sometimes associate with it, such as vengeance, violence, anger and bitterness.

I want to show that this Divine "hatred" does not carry those emotions and that it is the result of a conscious decision, to be disposed to an individual in a particular way. Hatred in essence means discarding or putting away. When Abimelech visits Isaac, Isaac says, *Gen 26:27 And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye **hate me, and have sent me away from you?*** Abimelech had dismissed Isaac. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah and put her away from him. *Gen 29:31 And when the LORD saw that Leah was **hated**, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.* Joseph's brothers put him a long way away in Egypt as a result of their hatred. *Gen 37:5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they **hated** him yet the more.*

Samson discarded his wife and she was given to another. *Jdg 15:2 And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly **hated** her; therefore I gave her to thy companion.* David's son Amnon raped Tamar and put her away from him afterwards. *2Sa 13:15 Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the **hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her.** And Amnon said unto her, Arise, **be gone.*** The consequences of hatred in these examples was the removal, putting away or the disposal of the objects of hatred.

Paul in Romans paraphrases the prophet Malachi *Rom 9:13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* It is also clear that God's "hatred" of Esau did not remove the temporal blessings of life. *Deu 2:2 And the LORD spake unto me, saying, .....Ye ((Israel) are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: Deu 2:5 Meddle not with them; for I **have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession.*** One might argue this as a demonstration of common grace and common curse. *Mat 5:45 ..... for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*

How then can God hate someone and at the same time bless them? *Rom 9:11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, **that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;**) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* It was clearly a choice by the Creator that had nothing to do with lives yet un-lived and character not yet unfurled. It was the Sovereign choice of God. I am not saying that God throws dice or that it is an irrational choosing, no, but it is presented to us in such a way as to illustrate the Divine Potter raising vessels to honour and dishonour NOT based upon individual ability but Divine choice.

How will you make your choice between God and family? Will you make a conscious decision to Love God and hate them, in the sense that we have just described. Will you have the Lord so close to you and be so committed in that relationship such that the others no longer seem to exist? I am not

saying that this involves a neglect of our duty. Not at all! What I am saying is, it will truly define our duty through our relationship with Christ. The closer to Christ that we are, then the better our decisions will be. Additionally, if we are not in a place where we can walk away from those relationships in this life in an instant, we are in no position to be a disciple. If we cannot go to be with Christ right now, when will we be ready? If it is only at a time and place of our choosing then we will never be ready and our commitment is not genuine. Do we want a relationship with the Saviour or Salvation without Him?

Jesus had many who were prepared in theory to follow Him, just like you and I. *Luk 9:57 And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.* We need to look at the obstacles and weigh the costs before we make those statements. *Luk 9:59 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.* Surely Jesus wouldn't object to that but He makes a point out of it. Look, He is saying, don't make pretence of following me, don't be a sycophant. Don't think you can follow me on your terms. Don't think that you can pick it up and put it down when it suits you. *Luk 9:60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.* And another also said, *Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.* And Jesus said unto him, *No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.* You never plough a straight furrow by looking behind you at what has gone. Let the past go and look to the future.

The other part of the verse is about how you hate your own life. No, this is not about being on suicide watch because your life is to be miserable or worthless or meaningless. Its just not your life any more because God has purchased you. *1Co 6:19 Don't you know that your body is a temple that belongs to the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit, whom you received from God, lives in you. You don't belong to yourselves. You were bought for a price. So bring glory to God in the way you use your body.* GW.

Jesus has challenged us through a hard saying to hate all around us. To put it all aside. To see it for what it is as something passing away. Yet it is only through this hatred and the discipleship that it leads to, that we will do the greatest good to our self and our family because Jesus will be at the centre of our lives.

Evangelists seldom emphasis the cost of discipleship. Evangelists in our day have reduced the Gospel to a formulation of ask God's forgiveness and you will be saved. That is true but it is not all. *Luk 14:27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.* When you become a disciple, you may lose some burdens but you take up a cross. Now when this was said, the disciples had not grasped the nature of Christ's death. It had not happened and Calvary was in the future. To them, the cross was the Barbaric Roman symbol of public execution for criminals. The cross is a judicial symbol of guilt and judgement.

Wait a minute. If Jesus has born our sin and we have been crucified with Him we have in a manner of speaking already taken His cross. *Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that **our old man is crucified with him**, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* There is nothing that I can add to that, in fact, if I tried it would be a sin against the work of God. So what is MY cross as opposed to Jesus' cross? Those men who carried their crosses to their place of execution, those

criminals (and such are we in God's eyes) walking their way out of life were "dead men walking". The phrase "dead man walking" was used of convicted men taking their final walk to the electric chair for execution. That idea is, I think, encapsulated in the command to take up our cross, a reminder that we are dead to sin and this world.

Let me tie the thoughts together. We need to see that this world is not for us and while we are in it, we must not love it, we must hate it. We need Christ's world view in our minds and we need that mind in us which was in Him. We need to remind ourselves daily what our state is in regard to this world and that is why we take up our cross, daily. Do not think that your "cross" is the ache or pain that you have in your body, the nasty people you may have to work with, the cost of raising your family, the hardships of life, these are not crosses, they are just part of life. Your cross is the reminder of who you are, where you are and where you are going to.

It is a constant and daily reminder, lest we forget, that we are dead to sin. *Rom 6:11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Each day is a day where self should take second place to God. *Luk 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross daily**, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.* *Luk 14:33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*

Many will go away disappointed because they cannot rise to Jesus' challenge to hate. Like those on another occasion, they will say it is a hard saying. *Joh 6:60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?* That is perhaps why many are called and few chosen.

In closing I am going to raise some controversial issues that we shall DV explore in the next chapters.

1. Do you become a disciple before or after you are saved?
2. Is the purpose of discipleship to bring you to a saving relationship with your Creator rather than salvation being the precursor of discipleship?
3. Were Jesus disciples saved when He called them or did this happen much later? If so when?

### **If you can't beat them burn them**

Part 3. Luk 9:54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, **Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.** For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

The background to this rebuke is the account of Jesus and His disciples who are travelling to Jerusalem, possibly for the Feast of Tabernacles? Some of the disciples went ahead to book a room for the night but when the Samaritans whose village it was, knew that they were heading to Jerusalem, they were not made welcome. As you recall, the Samaritans were proselytes. They were Babylonians sent to replace the Israelites and take over the land after the exile.

*2Ki 17:22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them. Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land. Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the **Samaritans** had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt.*

The Samaritans had created a branch of Judaism that worshipped in Mount Gerazim and they still exist today with their own version of the Pentateuch and they still celebrate Passover every year with a sacrificial lamb. They did not get on with the Jews although Jesus did not cut himself off from them. Of the ten lepers that He healed, the one who returned to give thanks was a Samaritan, the woman at the well was the instrument that brought many Samaritans in her city to faith in Christ and Jesus even illustrates a story with a good (merciful) Samaritan, who towers over the priest and Levite in good works. To Jesus, Samaritans were just as worthy of the Kingdom as any other.

The disciples didn't share Jesus magnanimity with the Samaritans. When they were refused lodgings their anger boiled in them. If only they could punish them, if only they could call down fire from heaven to remove all trace of them. I have met so called Christians who would do that. They would get some great sense of satisfaction in seeing their opponents burning before their eyes. They are truly sick individuals and church history is littered with them, whether it is Protestants burning Catholics, Catholics burning Protestants and yes, Protestants killing Protestants, all in the name of Jesus. These are the people that desire to see the wrath of God in every catastrophe that falls upon those people they disagree with. They see divine judgement in every tragedy, because they live to see retribution because they have no love for their fellow sinner.

Even those revered Protestant heroes like Calvin, were involved in such deeds. He along with a council of 25 others in Geneva sentenced the man they called a heretic, Michael Servetus, to death. Servetus had disagreed with them on the nature of the Trinity and Paedobaptism and on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1553 the council condemned Servetus as a heretic. (We Baptists would regard Calvin's infant baptism as heresy). The following day Servetus was sentenced to burning at the stake. Calvin and other ministers asked that he be beheaded instead of burnt. This plea was refused and on the 27<sup>th</sup> October, Servetus was burnt alive on top of a pyre of his own books, at the Plateau of Champel at the edge of Geneva. All this in spite of the scripture saying *Tit 3:10 Reject him that is an heretike, after once or twice admonition,* (Geneva Bible)! What spirit was in Calvin and these so called reformers? Dance to my tune they say or burn in my fire. That however is God's prerogative.

I have also never been able to comprehend the wickedness of those so called "reformers" (Ulrich Zwingli amongst others) who disagreed with the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists rejected their infant sprinkling and were baptised by immersion when they believed in Christ as adults. I would by this definition be an Anabaptist because I was sprinkled as a baby. I am proud to stand with the Anabaptists, men of the calibre of Menno Simmons and Conrad Grebel.

Although the term Anabaptist was used negatively and the groups had a variety of goals, all were generally dedicated to returning to a "simple faith" which they believed to be more like what Jesus actually prescribed. The first such congregation was organized by Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel in Zollikon, Switzerland in 1525 and became known as the "Swiss Brethren." Many Anabaptist groups adopted the name "brethren" in an effort to distinguish them from people who became "Christian" simply because they were born in a "Christian" society, those we call Institutional Church members.

At the time, such rebaptism as an adult was a crime punishable by death. One popular method of execution was drowning, seen as ironically appropriate because of the reformers' interest in baptizing with water. Felix Manz himself became of the first martyrs by being drowned on the orders of the Zurich town council. He was not, however, the last. Some estimates place the number of martyrs at around 50,000 by 1535, and it may be that other Christians killed more Anabaptists than the Romans killed Christians during their 300 years of persecutions. What spirit I ask, was in these murders? In our own country, we had the ogre Henry VIII obtain a divorce and on the back of this sin, founded an Institutional Church (of England) which went on to maintain its own papacy through persecution and killing of its own citizens, who wouldn't sing from its liturgy. So much for the Gospel of peace and loving your neighbours as yourself.

The disciples in our text have a spirit which is not of Christ and so we must ask what spirit do they have? Jesus challenges His disciples with these hard words. It will challenge us also if we show that spirit. Remember, these men had sat through the "Beatitudes", probably more than once and it had not penetrated their understanding. In Luke's chronological account, they had heard them quite recently. *Luk 6:28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.*

There is vast chasm between listening to sermons, hearing scriptures and doing them. I have seen religious people nod along to these verses, why, they know them by heart. There is almost a sense of pride that they can follow the words without a prompt from the scripture. Yet, in their lives, the words are not working, they are not active, they are unproductive. They do not seek to apply them to themselves, rather they prefer to apply them to others. They are like these disciples at this stage of their lives, hypocrites. When they see someone, perhaps of another group doing good, it annoys them. *Mar 9:38 And John answered him, saying, Master, **we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.*** You see, Jesus had others working the Gospel of which **we know nothing**. *Luk 10:1 After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.*

When the people brought their children to Jesus, these same disciples saw no value in them. They had no idea of the compass of Jesus' ministry or the compassion. *Mat 19:13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and **the disciples rebuked them.** But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.* The very illustration of the citizens of heaven is that they implicitly trust the Saviour. Simple child like trust and the disciples couldn't see that.

Here in our text today, we see these same disciples, totally incapable of applying a blessing, a prayer or doing good to these poor lost Samaritans, how they themselves would like to be treated. No! It was bring out the fire and let's destroy them. Not even a thought that they might spend some time in discussion with the Samaritans to help them. It is against this background that I must ask this question. **Were these disciples "born again" at this time?** Were they regenerate? Could a true believer behave like them? Had the Spirit of God quickened them or were they the "natural man" and dead in trespasses and sins?

To some it may be a frightening thought that men could spend three years with Jesus, preach a gospel which had not entered their hearts, work miracles and yet not have been born again. Can it even be that there is a prospect that many adherents of Jesus can spend a lifetime following a Master who will disown them? Yet this can easily happen as we see in the life of Charles Templeton.

He was generally acknowledged to be the most versatile of the new young evangelists in the 1940's. Newspapers and magazines carried reports of his meetings informing readers he was winning 150 converts a night. In Evansville, Indiana, the total attendance over the two week campaign was 91,000 out of a population of 128,000. Church attendance went up 17%. However, despite his popularity and seeming success as an evangelist, all was not well with Charles Templeton. The more he read, the more he found he was beginning to question the essentials of the Christian faith, because he could no longer believe God's Word beginning with Genesis.

With 'science' pulling Templeton one way and the Bible seemingly pulling him in an altogether different direction, he resigned from his position with the National Council of Churches and took over the Department of Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church USA. At the same time, he hosted a CBS TV series, called Look Up and Live. Finally, however, the doubts about everything he stood for became too great and he decided to leave the ministry. In his autobiography, "Farewell to God",

Charles Templeton lists his 'reasons for rejecting the Christian faith'. Most of these relate to the origins issue and thus the accuracy of the book of beginnings, Genesis.

Templeton was a friend of Billy Graham. Templeton recalled, "All our differences came to a head in a discussion which, better than anything I know, "explains" Billy Graham and his phenomenal success as an evangelist. In the course of our conversation I said, "But, Billy, it's simply not possible any longer to believe, for instance, the biblical account of creation. The world was not created over a period of days a few thousand years ago; it has evolved over millions of years. It's not a matter of speculation; it's a demonstrable fact."

"I don't accept that," Billy said. "And there are reputable scholars who don't." "Who are these scholars?" I said. "Men in conservative Christian colleges?" "Most of them, yes," he said. "But that is not the point. I believe the Genesis account of creation because it's in the Bible. I've discovered something in my ministry: **When I take the Bible literally, when I proclaim it as the word of God, my preaching has power. When I stand on the platform and say, 'God says,' or 'The Bible says,' the Holy Spirit uses me. There are results.** Wiser men than you or I have been arguing questions like this for centuries. I don't have the time or the intellect to examine all sides of the theological dispute, so I've decided once for all to stop questioning and accept the Bible as God's word."

You see, it is possible for people like Templeton to think, perhaps for a season, that they are in Christ and some even spend a lifetime thinking it. *Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: **depart from me, ye that work iniquity.***

It is here that we shall consider the nature of the disciples and examine their faith and whether they as disciples were at the stage, where they knew regeneration and understood that they were born again. Indeed we may also ask the fundamental question "Just what is discipleship?"

I do not want to leave you thinking that there is no such thing as assurance of salvation or that such a thing can never be known until the last judgement. That is not the case. We can know that we have passed from death to life, we can know the forgiveness of sin. *Joh 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That **whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** We can believe not just in the external fact of the Crucifixion, we can experience in our innermost being. *Rom 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.**



## Pilgrim's progress

Part 4. Luk 9:55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

We began to examine the disciple's attitude to the Samaritan's. Was it any different to Jesus' attitude? *Mar 6:10 And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city.* NO! He is not invoking vengeance but merely laying down a marker that God will Judge those people who reject the Gospel.

We have very little knowledge of the lives of the 12 disciples of Jesus before they became His followers, for the brief period of three years. We know even less of the other 70 that Jesus called *Luk 10:1 After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.* We might wonder just how many disciples Jesus had but the gospels confine us to focus upon the 12 who were to become Apostles.

We do not know about the early lives of the Apostles, if they went to synagogue, if they were all capable of writing, what education they had undergone and especially their religious standing at the time of their calling to discipleship. Were they "born again" believers or just natural born Jews? I think that there is good evidence that the disciples were unregenerate at their calling to follow Jesus. In other words, they were not born again.

I have a number of reasons for adopting this view, not the least because of their response to the Samaritans as described in our text. There are only two conditions of men, in Christ or in satan. *Eph 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that **now worketh** in the children of disobedience:* The disciples were either "in Christ" or "in satan", there being no middle ground.

Since the New Birth was an Older Testament teaching, it must have been in operation. *Joh 3:9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and **knowest not these things?*** Let us ask:

1. **Were the disciples born again?**
2. **Was it necessary for them to be born again to work with Jesus?**

To the first question I would say no, because they found it difficult to even catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven and the person of Christ. To the second question, no, because God uses all manner of persons for His purpose. The question would then be, "**Why choose unbelievers?**"

Peter's life with Christ is almost a parallel of Christian in Pilgrims progress, both in his journey to the Cross and his stumbling after it. Perhaps it is intentional, so that we too might find Christ as Saviour, as we journey with the disciples through the Gospels? The Gospels are written with purpose. *Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that*

*believing ye might have life through his name.* The narratives of the Gospels do not need the disciples to add credibility to the message of Jesus. The Gospel message stands without them. Yet they have been woven in to the accounts. They have become part of our journey and their doubts and fears are our doubts and fears. Their stumbling progress is our stumbling progress. Their failures are our failures. We can as a result identify with them and all their imperfections.

In reading the Gospels, we are walking with them, we are being discipled as they were, following in their footprints, we are becoming those men and women who could take the Gospel to the nations. A believing "disciple" would hardly resonate with us as the "unbelieving" disciples, as we seek the Saviour. We all come to the Gospels as unbelievers. I am sure that we all shudder as we look back on things that we have done as young disciples but hopefully we learned from our mistakes. I am sure that Peter did. He would eventually go on to say, *1Pe 1:3 Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! God has given us a new birth because of his great mercy. We have been born into a new life that has a confidence which is alive because Jesus Christ has come back to life. 1Pe 1:4 We have been born into a new life which has an inheritance that can't be destroyed or corrupted and can't fade away. That inheritance is kept in heaven for you.* There was some ground to cover before he could say that.

At one time, the beloved fisherman Peter did a good impersonation of the devil. Jesus recognises the voice of His adversary in Peter's attempt to rescue Him from the Cross, *"Get thee behind me satan"*. Like all unregenerates, Peter cannot differentiate the voice of the devil from his own thoughts. Did the disciples understand and believe in the Crucifixion? Dr Hymers observes that Peter actually rebuked Christ for preaching the Gospel! At this point Peter did not believe the message of the Gospel, the death and resurrection of Christ! He not only refused to believe the Gospel, but rebuked Jesus and attacked Him for preaching it! Was the gospel hid? The disciples were not too smart in being able to understand the parables either *Luk 8:9 And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?* That was a fulfilment of Isaiah's words but it was not obvious to the disciples.

Jesus noted that Peter was a "little faith" at that time, too easily swayed by circumstance rather than the Saviour. *Mat 14:29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of **little faith**, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

On another occasion Jesus calls them all unbelievers. *Mar 4:40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that **ye have no faith**? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?* The God's word version puts it, *Mar 4:40 He asked them, "Why are you such cowards? Don't you have any faith yet?"* GW. They also have hard hearts that stop their understanding of the meaning of Christ's deeds. *Mar 6:52 For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.* They needed new hearts.

Peter could get divine insights into the nature of Christ but that is no proof of being born again. *Mat 16:15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* Remember that in the OT Balaam prophesied and he was unrighteous. *2Pe 2:15 Which have forsaken*

*the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;*

Peter's denial of Christ is another example of an unregenerate man. In fact, Jesus predicts his "conversion". *Luk 22:31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: Luk 22:32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art **CONVERTED**, strengthen thy brethren. Mat 26:74 Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.*

Certainly the changes in Peter are obvious, post-Pentecost, yet he is still a fallible human (as in the Galatian incident with the Jews) but then, who isn't. *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* So when did their conversions occur and what proof can we see of this. **Firstly**, post resurrection, when Jesus breathes His Spirit into them. *Joh 20:21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Secondly, Joh 20:27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, **My Lord and my God.** Thomas was not present on the first occasion.*

The disciples reach a point where they enter a new awareness of Jesus and from this gain strength for the next steps in their discipleship, the Great Commission. This raises further questions:

1. **What is discipleship?**
2. **What is the discipleship curriculum?**
3. **Where does conversion occur on the discipleship line? At the start, along the line or at the end?**

**What is discipleship?** A disciple (μαθητής mathētēs) is a learner or pupil of a master. *Luk 6:40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.* ESV. In other words, discipleship is about training and learning to become like the teacher. *Act 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.* For the first time, the discipleship revealed the Master. They were living representatives of Christ.

**What is the curriculum for disciples?** It is summed up succinctly in these verses. *Mat 28:19 So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have commanded you. "And remember that I am always with you until the end of time."* GW. It is the whole council of God. *Act 20:25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all the counsel of God.***

**When does conversion occur?** *Joh 3:7 Don't be surprised when I tell you that all of you must be born from above. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you don't know where the wind comes from or where it's going. That's the way it is with everyone born of the Spirit."* It is really none of our business to make pronouncements on the work of the Spirit. Who are we to question

the working of The Spirit? It is only something that we can know certainly for ourselves and only guess if it has happened to others. When we make those assumptions about others being converted it is generally based upon what we see in their lives outwardly rather than in their hearts. As we know, many who fall away, show Christ wasn't there in the first place.

That is also the danger of a "cheap" conversion. A conversion based upon some formula or some verbal commitment set out by an institution. It is a conversion where the groom doesn't turn up to the wedding because you never went through any process of getting to know Him. He was just a momentary convenience to get you over a current problem in your life. A conversion based upon walking to the front of the Church and "giving your life to Jesus", yes, just how much are you prepared to give? A conversion based upon a prayer of commitment. A conversion that came about on the spur of the moment without any conviction of sin and guilt. A conversion as a result of peer pressure and the need to conform to a group. I ask are many or even most so called conversions more like convenience than conversion?

Discipleship never ends. Somewhere along the path of discipleship, something must happen that carries the conviction to the soul that you are the sinner spoken of in the scripture and that you will personally receive the punishment for your sin. Then the light dawns that only Christ can truly forgive your sin and you cry out for mercy and forgiveness. Jesus is no longer an icon on a cross, a figure in a painting, words in a book. He is a living reality, quickening your life, you feel for the first time that forgiveness pouring in from God. There comes with that, the certain knowledge that you as a person have passed "from death to life". The Spirit of God bears witness that you are truly a son of God.

It may come for some as an explosion, a Damascus road experience that you can set your watch by. For other it comes after a long and hard struggle that rages through a long night of despair and hopelessness until at last forgiveness breaks through the clouds. For others it may be so slow that all one might say is that "I was once blind and now I see", which might be explained by the fact that "quickenings" and "conversion" may not occur at the same time. However, repentance is always the precursor of conversion *Act 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and **be converted**, that your sins may be blotted out.* You cannot convert yourself it has to "be" done to you.

Yet in all of these experiences there is but one outcome. WE who have believed have all been forgiven and "*the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin*". WE know it for a fact. Although the path and the process may NOT be a "one size fits all", the outcome most certainly is. *Jud 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of **the common salvation**, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.* One Saviour, One Salvation, One Faith ever unchanging, mediated by God alone through the Holy Spirit. That experience accords with the Spirit who goes where He will. No man can rule Him, no man can direct Him, no man can summon Him with some formula to make Him yield the New Birth from above.

## Top down redemption

Part 5. Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

The term **born again Christian** has become identified with evangelical Christians who claim a life transforming experience through a personal commitment to Jesus as Lord. The first President of the United States to publicly declare that he was born-again was Jimmy Carter in 1976. In the next 1980 campaign, all three of the major candidates (Carter, Regan and Anderson) stated that they had been born-again. It has now become an evangelical mark of respectability.

I was reading an article recently where the author said, "If you have never received Jesus Christ into your life as Saviour and Lord, do so now. When you pray this prayer and mean it, you will be reoriented to reality. As you find peace with God you will soon find your soul flooded with the peace of God. The prayer: "Heavenly Father, help me to be sure that my soul is at peace with You, so that I can claim the peace that comes from You. I do so now. Save me, forgive my sins, come into my heart and make me your child. In Jesus Name I pray. Amen."

Those formulas are like magic spells. Say the words and it just happens. There are millions who sing the General Confession every Sunday with no life change. Those formulas can be dangerous, especially the "coming into my heart". That phrase invokes a synthesis and may explain why so many go on to stumble and fall. You see, Jesus doesn't come and live in your old heart any more than He comes along and lives in your old man, your old life. He doesn't live in a corpse. Its not a partnership, it is a takeover. Your old heart has to be replaced and your mind renewed. *Eze 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* You are dead and in need of life.

Also it is not for us to give away something that we do not own. We cannot add to the church only the Lord can. *Act 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And **the Lord added** to the church daily such as should be saved.* We cannot give a new birth. There is no formula for a new birth and thank God, it is not in the hands of men. Paedobaptists note, that however well meaning you are, you cannot give any child redemption. You are deceivers and deceived. This is the lesson Jesus taught an old Pharisee in Jerusalem.

If you venture out at night in West Africa, you will notice immediately how bad the street lighting is. I am always struck by this on my arrival as we drive to a hotel having come from the bright lights of England. What lighting there is, often comes from kerosene lamps consisting of a large can with a rope wick burning out of the top. It is a very dim and smoky light but people conduct their business by it. The voices and the music are there in the dark but what is going on is hard to define. We in the west take our lighting for granted but it is a huge luxury. As a child in London I can still remember how badly lit the streets were. I can even remember the gas lamps which gave a strange ghostly appearance when it was foggy.

Can you imagine what it must have been like in Jerusalem in Jesus day? The occasional lights from within a house casting shadows on to the streets. No place for an old person to be wandering around alone at night, especially as the robbers would have been active. Passover was a good time to steal a living. Something must have really troubled this old Pharisee Nicodemus, member of the Sanhedrin

to venture out at night to enquire of Jesus. Something was already stirring in him as he is drawn to Jesus as a moth to a flame. His curiosity was obvious but his unwillingness to be open, led him to come in the dark so none would see him. He is probably just like us who have that early curiosity in Christ but are not confident to be open about our searching. Nicodemus is met with a straight answer, perhaps not what he was looking for but what he needed. If you want to **SEE** the kingdom of God, you need to be born from above, says Jesus.

While the idea of born again is implied, it is literally “born from above”. Peter speaks of born again. *1Pe 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.* Jesus speaks of the direction of the birth.

Two questions arise in Nicodemus mind.

1. *Joh 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, **How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?***
2. *Joh 3:9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, **How can these things be?***

If ever there was an opportunity to explain **how** to be born again or born from above it is here and this is how Jesus explains it. *Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. **The wind (πνεῦμα pneuma = spirit) bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. I like this literal translation.** Joh 3:8 The Spirit breathes where He desires, and you hear His voice; but you do not know from where He comes, and where He goes; so is everyone having been generated from the Spirit.* LITV.

That my friends is how a man can be born, even when he old. **There is no formula, no creed, no special words that unlock the birth.** C H Spurgeon said that, “To wash and dress a corpse is a far different thing from making it alive: man can do the one, God alone can do the other.” It is the gracious working of the Holy Spirit as He wills, when He wills. It is not demand led, formula led, creed led, man led or given. It is ever all and only of God Himself. It is a spiritual birth coupled with a water birth. What is that water birth? Is it baptism? If so it could have been stated “Except a man be baptised and born of the Spirit”. How then are we to understand these words? I am going to suggest that “**born of water and of the Spirit**” is a creative act. *2Co 5:17 Whoever is a believer in Christ is a new creation.* GW. I believe that Jesus is drawing us back to that Genesis beginning to show us that being born from above is a creative act of God.

We mirror Genesis at the commencement of John’s gospel. *Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word.* And that is where I go for an explanation. When John draws us the life of Christ, **John shows us Jesus the Creator** *Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name., Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.* This is the Genesis link.

In the second verse of Genesis we read, *Gen 1:2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.* We

might translate that better “*the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the waters*”. Out of that primeval darkness and from those waters brooded by the Spirit, LIFE came. Life was born.

Let me say it again, the birth from above is a creative act. It is not refurbishing. It is not new wine in old skins. It is not a patch of new cloth on an old coat. It is not a repair job, make and mend, fill in the cracks, paint over the damage and making good. It is a completely new person, created by God in His image. *Joh 3:8 The Spirit breathes where He desires, and you hear His voice; but you do not know from where He comes, and where He goes; so is everyone having been generated from the Spirit.* LITV.

“How can these things be” asks Nicodemus? You should really know that if you are a teacher in Israel, says Jesus. He is telling Nicodemus Heavenly things because He came from Heaven. He came to bring light. As we saw the Spirit of God brood on those lifeless waters, the Voice of God spoke and brought forth Light. *Gen 1:3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.* This is my mission says Jesus, to save the World. *Joh 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is **condemned already**, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* If you do not believe on Christ you are **already** judged and in darkness.

From all of the verses in Chapter 3 of John, one verse has stood out. According to BibleGateway.com it is the most-read Bible verse. *Joh 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* That verse has been so dragged out of its context to suggest a universal unconditional love of God. In some minds it means that God’s love is so great as to override all His other attributes and that He is duty bound to love me no matter what I do. However it is clearly conditional in terms of its operation to “**whosoever believeth in him**”. But there is more to it than that.

Jesus uses the analogy of the serpent to explain the Love of God. Scripture verses do not stand on their own. They have bookends either side that support them. These words are preceded by the description of an OT event that Nicodemus would have been familiar with. *Joh 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: Joh 3:15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* This is a reference to an event in the OT. It started with a complaint from the Israelites about their food (Num 21 v 5ff) so God responded by sending a plague of snakes. Of course, it was a snake that made our first parents dissatisfied with their God given food in Eden and here the people are dissatisfied with their God given food, the Manna, in the wilderness. Jesus text was an appropriate reminder of the origin of the Israelite complaint and the remedy.

*Num 21:6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.*

The snakes brought death just as the snake in Eden brought death. The serpent raised on the stake, could save, just by looking at it. *Isa 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.* How can God here be portrayed as a snake? Paul the Apostle explains this to us, *2Co 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin (sin offering) for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Christ was the sin bearer.* *Rom 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

The serpent or snake on the pole was a sign from the future. It was a look into the Gospel, it was the Crucifixion, it was the salvation from death and that is why Jesus is telling it to Nicodemus. The love of God raised the serpent on the pole that whosoever looked and believed would live. God had lovingly made a way of escape from death. Those dying Israelites could turn and live. Any one of them that turned and looked could live and I wonder if they all did? They had to turn. It was no use hoping that because there was this saving icon amongst them, that it would work automatically just because it was there. It was no hope to think that “because I live among religious people, I will get better”. There are churches full of people who week after week gaze up at the statue of Christ on a cross, or the stained glass window of the Crucifixion, or the cross on the wall above where the preacher stands and yet have never truly “looked” at it. The significance has never come down into their lives, the power of forgiveness and healing remain as distant as the furthest galaxy.

**How can a man be born when he is old? How can these things be?** The first thing that we must acknowledge in all that we have spoken about today is that there is nothing that we can do. We cannot make ourselves born again, we cannot make a serpent on a pole, we cannot free ourselves. I imagine that when those serpents slithered through the camp of Israel, many people escaped being bitten. They may have stood on a high place, lit a fire, or just run away. They never once had a reason to look at the serpent on the pole. They were well in themselves and like the “righteous” in no need of a physician.

The reason that they came to the serpent, the reason we come to the cross, is because we are in the wretchedness of sin. We feel the serpents bite, the reality of evil has come home to us. We are dead men walking. There are those who hide from it, those who deny it and those who fall down before it. The latter have seen the Light.

*Joh 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

There are those who will look at the crucified Christ and be taken with Him into the newness of life. There are those who will never bother to look and will never know the love of God, never see the Light of the World and never be born from above.



## Marriage of convenience

Part 6. Mar 10:3 And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? Mar 10:4 And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. Mar 10:5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.

*Deu 24:1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.*

There it was, written in the Torah, large as life, the great get out clause, “**How to exit a marriage**”. It seems to favour the male of the species but as the later verses here (Mar 10 v 12) show it was same for both parties. It didn’t create the environment for mutual edification, for mutual support. If things didn’t go well, as they often do not go well in marriage, according to this, you could bin the marriage. Start over again with someone else and so it seems, all with God’s blessing. It’s the sort of message that is perfectly suited to the sinful human heart.

For centuries, people had maintained their righteous position in the Jewish community by appeal to a law that was contrary to the creation. I wonder how many people in Israel sat around the fires of an evening discussing this? How could God in the very beginning join people and then give them an escape clause? *Gen 2:24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife. In this way two people become one.* ERV. God created the woman out of the man (He separates her internally and clones her) and then He joins her back to him externally. The reality is, his wife now lives outside of him and not inside him. The woman is the same person who was in Adam, its truly part of him, but now that woman walks beside him. How could Moses suggest that they could ever be separated?

In getting rid of the woman through divorce, a man is destroying a part of himself. They could never get back together again. Having broken the mould God gave them, He would not allow them to make mockery of it again. It would be a mockery, an abomination and a sin upon the land. *Deu 24:2 and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, **may not take her again** to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.* ERV. God had some very clear views on marriage but He also understood the nature of sinful men as we shall see.

Mark’s account is a short version of the confrontation with the Pharisees. Matthew enlarges. *Mat 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?* The Pharisees asks quite a good question. Since Moses seems to condone divorce, can you get a divorce for any cause, any reason? We talk today about quickie divorces where couples don’t seem to contest the charges. Perhaps the Pharisees were thinking about quickie divorces. What would the “any cause” be? I don’t like the mother in law perhaps? The wife snores in her sleep and I didn’t know that before we got married. She used to make herself look attractive when we were engaged but look at her now. She’s put on 3 stones, lives in a tent dress and hasn’t used perfume for years. She has these annoying habits. She has started to nag me, it was

alright at first but now I can't stand it. You get the point. It started out so nicely but there were a lot of hidden reefs and rocks to navigate on the ocean of marriage.

No doubt the woman might also have similar complaints. He used to be so affectionate and buy me flowers but he never looks at me now. He doesn't smell as nice as when we met. He used to talk to me but now it's as if he is deaf. He spends more time watching sport on TV than doing things with me. He's turned into an old tramp. I suppose that there are lessons here that to keep a marriage together you have to maintain what you did when you started out. It is like maintaining a house.

To all my young friends who have not yet entered upon matrimony, I say this. Trying to find compatibility at the start of a relationship is an unnecessary search. It is a myth and to base a marriage on this idea of compatibility is wrong. When Christ the bridegroom comes to us, we are incompatible. We are chalk and cheese. What Jesus does have, is a plan that will make us eternally compatible. That plan is set out in an agreement, a covenant between the both of us. *Mal 2:14 Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, **and the wife of thy covenant.***

Christ works on us *Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and **gave himself** for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water **by the word.*** If you are a Christian man or woman, according to that verse, marriage is a sacrifice of self and a cleansing in the word of God. Marriage is the embodiment of our commitment to Christ. That commitment extends to the use of the word of God in that marriage to make it clean. So the top two things to have in place to make a marriage work are, I suggest, **1. Faith in Christ and 2. A commitment to solve every issue through the wisdom of scripture.** Leave that out and you will have trouble. Needless to say, that requirement rules out a relationship with an unbeliever. Don't wander into marriage like a blind man and make sure YOU make a good choice and don't leave it to your mother to make choices you have to live with, because you answer to God for it.

To return, can you get rid of your wife for any cause? *Mat 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses **because of the hardness of your hearts** suffered you to put away your wives.*

You have the problem says Jesus, not Moses. It was a concession to your hard hearts. What is a hard heart (σκληροκαρδία sklērokardia)? It is sclerosis of the heart (kardia) and a hard heart is a dead heart. *1Sa 25:37 But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that **his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.*** A hard heart is void of sensitivity, void of compassion, or fear of God, *Isa 63:17 O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?* A hard heart shows no working of grace upon it and only a heart transplant will work. *Eze 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the **stony heart** out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

Why did God concede to the hard heart? I will venture to say that the consequences for the nation would have been terrible if He had not. The frustration and wickedness of people would have overflowed in violence and murder. It was not an ideal situation but then, the nation of Israel was not a pure nation, not a thoroughbred nation where all men were born again. It was a mongrel with bad habits. As Paul observes *Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:* There were people who were not true Israelites, they lacked the fear and love of God in their lives, they were just religious people, like the Pharisees.

God did not ordain marriage at creation with a divorce clause. *Mat 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but **from the beginning it was not so.** Mat 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.* Not only was divorce wrong, there were potential consequences. Divorce could initiate other sin, divorce could become adultery. It is as if God, in saying "*whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery*" is stating, "**In my eyes, they are still married, no matter what you do**".

They have not been separated in the eyes of ME, only in the eyes of man. Your divorce certificate carries no weight with ME. **You have a divorce but no right to remarry.** The debate as to whether divorced couples should remarry in a "Church" religious ceremony finds no support in scripture. They just cannot remarry. Period! The point is that although a judicial separation is allowed, it does not mean that God has forgiven the sin. These are two different issues. Adultery is a sin and that sin is dealt with by blood. A scrap of paper, the bill of divorce is not atonement. It is just that, a scrap of miserable paper, yielding to a rotten hard heart.

The exception clause now appears to be "*except it be for fornication*". I would define fornication as illicit sexual relations in or out of marriage. *Mat 5:32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of **fornication**, causeth her to **commit adultery**: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.* The wife could fornicate and in doing so could be guilty of adultery. If fornication was committed **in marriage**, it was adultery that could lead to a genuine separation recognised by God but not a right to remarry. That too though would indicate that there was something lacking in the heart of that individual.

Say you are a Christian wife, whose husband has committed adultery or fornication and he comes and asks for forgiveness, what do you do? Then a year later he lapses and does it again, what do you do? Could you live with this cycle of sin and forgiveness? You have every right for a divorce but should you not forgive and be reconciled? Oh says the wounded soul, I cannot get over the terrible betrayal of our marriage, which being interpreted means, "The rat has betrayed me and I am going to stick the knife in where it hurts, I will make him pay". Yet Jesus can forgive adultery, can you?

What would Jesus do? If He behaved like many so called Christians who cannot forgive 70 times 7, then we would be out of hope. We could not continue in Christ. It would be "one strike and you are out". Yes, it is a lesson to us of how much forgiveness we crave and how little we are prepared to give. It is HYPOCRISY in capital letters. Yet at the same time it is also a measure of the stature of Christ in our lives. How big in Jesus are we and how big is Jesus in us? Your attitude to forgiveness will tell you.

To summarise Jesus answer to the Pharisees, The law of Moses gave you an escape clause because you are hard hearted individuals but it wasn't the way God intended marriage to be. If you think that you can divorce at will and remarry, you are adulterers and your hearts are not right with God.

This caused the disciples problems. It is as if they had entered the estate of marriage with an eye firmly upon where the exit was located. In the event of "fire" make your way quickly to the exit. Jesus hard saying caused them problems. *Mat 19:10 His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.* Marriage could bring you into conflict with God so perhaps it was not such a good idea after all? The disciple's hearts at this stage show the same symptoms of hardness as their forefathers. They could not see that marriage can work if the heart is bound up with the word of God. That love is generated through mutual respect and obedience to the Creator. Rather than commit to that path, their answer was to avoid it altogether.

It was not that easy however. Singularity is a Divine gift. *Mat 19:11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.* If you do not have that gift and you do not marry, you will put yourself in danger of other sins. *1Co 7:2 But in order to avoid sexual sins, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. Husbands and wives should satisfy each other's sexual needs.* GW.

I came across an interesting observation about pornography. It said that, "It can be a substitute or proxy for "real" sex. But it also is a world of fantasy sex, a place where people can safely dream about things they would not want to have happen or do in real life (just as we may like movies that present us with worlds we would not want to live in). Research has shown that many men report having sexual fantasies that incorporate some element of coercion. And so do women. But in one's fantasy world, one is in control". This is the world of sexuality without commitment but that is not God's world. Many self-righteous people will condemn actual adulterers but excuse the acts of adultery that they commit, in the apparent secrecy of their own mind.

Pornography is the realm where people commit virtual adultery. *Mat 5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* That technology which now allows ready access to online pornography is not the real culprit, it feeds the demand of the adulterer, it is the fuel to the already burning fire. The idea that there is something dirty or wrong with sexual relationships may have originated in Victorian middle class England. The idea that piano legs were covered out of modesty. I think that the Victorians wrestled with the debauchery of their age and this was the outcome, just as temperance demonised alcohol.

It is not that physical "sex" is wrong. It is the context of it. *1Co 7:9 However, if you cannot control your desires, you should get married. It is better for you to marry than to burn with sexual desire.* GW. There are no doubt those who would find it hard to imagine the Creator designing sexual organs for pleasure but He did just that. It is a strange thought is it not, to think of God's design workshop, creating the Rolls Royce organs of pleasure, calculating the thermal response, blood vessel design and physical compliance of a penis? Not a subject for Church? Then you have a problem attitude. The element of pleasure would have been taken out if the organs were designed by "puritans" but it was not so. It is the abuse of that physical relationship that is wrong. Marriage is a mirror of our relationship to Christ. Sexual faithfulness within the boundaries of marriage best mirrors that image.

## The better the day the better the deed

Part 7. Mar 2:23 And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath. And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

There was an idea once that you could justify working on a Sunday because it was the high day of the week and as such made whatever you did, the better for that. "The better the day the better the deed". Somehow the day enhanced what you were doing. Of course this would not go down well with the Sabbatarians who believe that the Sabbath day is still sacred and should be honoured. They have also taken the liberty of adding to scripture and calling it "The Lord's day" as well as the Sabbath. Our text would rather contradict that because Jesus says that it is man's day not the Lord's day, "the sabbath was made for man". For the purpose of this study I will use the term "Sabbatarian" to describe those people who observe the Saturday Sabbath (Jews and Seventh Day Adventists etc) and also those who have turned Sunday into a Sabbath and changed the name to Lord's Day.

Before I go into our text in more detail let us remind ourselves about the requirements of Sabbath. Firstly, looking at the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath. It was not like other days and work was forbidden on penalty of death. *Exo 31:15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.* Lighting fires was prohibited, so no cooking, *Exo 35:3 Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.* Gathering the means of producing fire was prohibited. *Num 15:32 And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.....And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely **put to death**: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.* Even the method of killing is stated in the Law of Moses. Stoning. By what law we ask, do men continue to observe the Sabbath yet abrogate the punishment? Sabbatarianism is pock marked with inconsistency and hypocrisy.

You could **not** allow other people to do work for you, so that you could enjoy the Sabbath alone. *Deu 5:14 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.* This must have implications for the modern Sabbatarians who are happy to let others work and so enjoy their labour on their "Sabbath" while pretending not to work themselves. Those who produce the electricity, deliver the goods you buy on Monday in the Supermarket, carry your post, or man the TV stations you watch, while having the day off are Sabbath breakers, that the Sabbatarian supports. Under the law of Moses they should be killed.

Sabbatarians are also quite happy to read the sports reports made on the “Sabbath” the next day. What a load of hypocrisy.

The next Sabbath is the land Sabbath. *Lev 25:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.* This Sabbath was broken 70 times after they entered the promised land. That is 7 times 70 years (490 years). *2Ch 36:20 And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.* It is clear that keeping this land Sabbath was critical to keeping the inheritance of the land of Israel. It was just as important as the weekly Sabbath.

The third important Sabbath was the Jubilee which marked the 50<sup>th</sup> year and was the time when debt were cancelled and land adjustments were made. *25:8 And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubile; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession.*

Keeping the Jubilee Sabbath was an acknowledgement that you were a stranger on this earth and that it was **not** your permanent home. *Lev 25:23 The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.* I am not so sure that Sabbatarians can argue that all this does not apply since we are not an agrarian society. It must affect the way we do business, purchase property and manage our finance so that we could take a year out. There were other Sabbaths that coincided with festival days, such as the day of atonement. *Lev 16:30 For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever.*

The Sabbaths were a continual reminder of the people’s relationship with God. It showed that the only holiday they were entitled to should be spent with God. It showed that the land God had given them was only leasehold, not freehold. They never owned it just as they never had any permanent claim on this life or the things of this life. The Sabbath also showed them in every generation that the clock was reset on ownership and that they all had a duty of care for their poor neighbour. All that they had was on loan from their Creator and should be used as He said. Modern day Sabbatarians do not seem to have any purpose in their day other than doing what they see as no work and as far as ownership goes, judging by what people give to the works of God, we own 99% and God owns 1%.

Do the math. If a western Christian gave £500 a year, it would probably only be about 1% of their family income. Meanness does not adequately describe our attitude to what God has loaned us.

Modern Sabbatarians are clearly in a situation where they “Pick-n-Mix” their teaching. They pick what they want to observe and the sanctions that go with it. They are stuck under a home made version of the law of Moses which was not offloaded on the Church, in fact if ever there was an opportunity to make a statement about Sabbath keeping it was at the Council of Jerusalem. **They did not.** *Act 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*

What the Sabbatarians fail to see is that the observation of the Sabbath for its own sake was not God’s purpose. The Law was always a shadow. *Heb 10:1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.* We are not to look at shadows but at the objects that cast them. A shadow does not adequately define the object that casts it. You could not make out the details of an individual’s face from the shadow it cast. If you held a magnificent painting in sunlight, the shadow of the painting would not tell you much of the subject matter, the vibrancy of the colours, the outline of the characters portrayed. So the Law is at best a very rough guide to the real subject that it is cast by. We have to look beyond the shadows to see the true meaning of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was not the reality. The Sabbath was a shadow of the reality. *Col 2:16 Don't let anyone tell you what you must eat or drink. Don't let them say that you must celebrate the New Moon festival, the Sabbath, or any other festival. Col 2:17 These things are only a shadow of what was to come. But Christ is real!* CEV. Christ is the reality that cast the shadow called Sabbath. What does that mean? It means that the Sabbath portrayed the rest in Christ. When a man is “in Christ”, “seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus”, he has found God’s resting place.

The land of Canaan was another shadow land of God’s rest. *Heb 3:8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They **shall not enter into my rest.*** I believe that there were people who could see the coming Messiah in that Sabbath observance, certainly Abraham saw the day of Christ.

Sabbatarians like the Jews will see the observation of that day as an objective in itself. It becomes a work that has merit from doing it. It is something that can be used to despise others and put them under a yoke of law that even the Old Testament saints found burdensome. We can use it to show how ultra-orthodox we are. Yet the Sabbatarians will not apply the sanctions of Moses to the law of Moses. They will wave a gun at you but it has no bullets. Yet they will watch, like the Pharisees, to see who the Sabbath breakers are.

It is here we enter our text. Jesus has been seen walking through the corn with His disciples, eating as they went. There was a precedent for genuine hunger and it could be met as it was with King David. Recall also that God provided additional Manna for the Sabbath, so eating was not wrong.

Then Jesus goes into the synagogue and they continue to watch Him. In that synagogue there is a man with a withered hand. I imagine that from his childhood he had wondered why God had cursed him so. Why he had to endure the looks of pity as he wandered through the streets, deformed and despised. Hiding his claw under his cloak, unable to work and only fit to beg. Why would a God do such a thing? He was soon to find out and in the process be written into history.

The man is brought to the front, wondering what is going to happen. The religious zealots are going to be taught a lesson about the Sabbath. Jesus asks them a simple yes/no question. ***“Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?”*** The silence is deafening. People crane their necks, strain their ears to catch a response from the Pharisees. Nothing but silence. These men who week by week directed the congregation to the intimate details of the law of Moses were dumbfounded. They knew that they could not possibly say “Do evil” and because they couldn’t say that, the answer was obviously, “Do good”. They also knew that if they said “Do good”, they were going to condone a healing. I am sure that these men knew that Jesus could heal because if He couldn’t they would not have needed to confront him.

It is like duelling gunfighters each waiting to see who would make the first move. Who would draw first? Reputations were on the line and defeat would mean ignominy for the losers. Jesus face twists with anger as he looks from one to the next of His antagonists. He is angry because they are just so hard hearted. They have no compassion. They bask in their own self-righteousness and maybe some are even praying that “They thank God that they don’t have a withered hand” but they will not lift a finger to help him. What a different spirit those four men had, who were prepared to break a roof down to get their paralysed friend to Jesus. These Pharisees just want to stop it.

These Pharisees are no different to today’s “Christians” who say that the gift of healing has departed the Church. The reality is that they don’t want it. They don’t want it because it would disturb their comfortable religious corner. They don’t want change that brings a dynamic Christ into the battle. If we thought more about doing good and being less critical about the way others do good what power might we draw down into our lives? We might then turn from being “do gooders” to those who truly do genuine good. Try asking the Lord to show you the “good works” you should be walking in.

I read an article recently which highlighted our modern hypocrisy. It was about churchgoers who are rude to waiters at Sunday lunch. The pastor of Preaching Christ Church in Kingsport, Tennessee set up a website called "Sundays Are The Worst." Here, those who work in service industries can anonymously tell their stories of abuse at the hands of Christians. Some of them are truly shameful. A Christian who had to wait tables on Sundays to pay her college tuition notes "a certain attitude I often encountered that if I was working on a Sunday I must obviously be a godless heathen unworthy of even common courtesy." A white water rafting guide complains about customers who tip him with a pamphlet about salvation that looks like a \$20 bill. "This will not pay my rent," he wants to tell them. How true.

What are we trying to get across to people? A Jesus who wants to bless the less fortunate in life, or a Moses who wants to beat hope out of them and give them continuing despair? Think about it.



## The Nobleman and the Centurion

Part 8. Joh 4:46 So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth.

Capernaum was the epicentre of Jesus ministry not Jerusalem. We might say that it was the cradle of Christianity. Nestling on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee it had a population of around 1500 souls and was near the hometown of the apostles Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, as well as the tax collector Matthew. Jesus taught in its synagogue and it was there that he healed a man who had the spirit of an unclean devil. Capernaum is also the location of the famous healing of the paralytic lowered through the roof to reach Jesus. I doubt that there was anyone who had not heard of Jesus in the small town of Capernaum.

The walk from Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee to Cana is uphill and takes about a day. It is a journey of between 20 and 25 miles. The royal official or nobleman (Βασιλικός basilikos) has walked this journey to ask a Jesus for help. The nobleman's child (παιδίον is diminutive, literally, my little one) was dying, on the point of death and there was nothing he would not do to secure him life. I would have thought that he had exhausted all avenues of healing, been advised by the doctors that there was nothing more to be done and in desperation looks to a carpenter from Nazareth. Yet rather than meeting him with tender compassion, the tears that would be shed over Lazarus, the gentleness that He showed to the children that sat on His knee or the forgiving love that dropped with His blood from the cross, Jesus rebukes the man.

There was an issue of faith here and Jesus would use the occasion to reveal it. ***“Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe”***. There are times when truthful words must override all of the sensitive issues of life. There are times when the hard words must be said without fear or favour to any man. Your feelings are secondary to the message and you neglect it at your peril. To those who are standing in the way of great danger it is only a harsh shout that may wake them and move them to safety. The issue is not the child's health but the father's faith and his eternal soul.

I think frustration can often be heard in the Saviour's words. *Luk 9:41 And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring thy son hither. Jesus lived among people who day after day failed to embrace by faith, His person and His power. No wonder he became righteously angered. Mar 3:5 And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.*

What a marked contrast there is between Jesus response to the Nobleman from Capernaum and that other noble inhabitant of Capernaum, the Centurion. *Mat 8:5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a Centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The Centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.* It is quite possible that these men knew each

other. From what I can discover from the timeline of Jesus' ministry, it appears that the nobleman's son was healed about one month before the Centurion's servant. It is more than possible that the Centurion had heard of the healing of the nobleman's son and Jesus words to him. Capernaum after all was not a large place and an event like this would have been the talk of the town. It may have been this miracle that started the Centurion on his quest to find Jesus.

Luke's account gives us more details of the life of the Centurion. *Luk 7:1 Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. Luk 7:2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. Luk 7:3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. Luk 7:4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: Luk 7:5 For he loveth our nation, and **he hath built us a synagogue.** Luk 7:6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:*

The Centurion loved Israel so much that he built a synagogue for the Jews in Capernaum. He was on good terms with the elders who he sends to Jesus. He does not go to Jesus himself as he considers he is unworthy, rather he asks Jesus to use His divine authority.

How differently these two men are treated. To the one a rebuke, to the other an accolade. To one of the ruling house of Israel a sharp remark, to the other gentile Italian soldier, a place in the annals of the faithful, righteous among the Nations, far above those in Israel. *Mat 8:10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, **not in Israel.*** To one hard words and to the other a gentle willingness to come straightway to his house and heal his servant. It is this difference which explains the rebuke to the nobleman. The Centurion had come in faith to Christ. He was a man that understood the workings of power and the structure of order. He knew that Jesus had at His command such resources that to make a personal journey was totally unnecessary. I have those that do my bidding says the soldier and you have those that do your bidding. I don't have to be there to get my orders obeyed.

That nobleman did not at that time "believe" in Jesus. He did not have that faith that could embrace the word of God alone. It had to be seen to be believed. It had to be done in signs and wonders. If this Galilean carpenter is all that they say He is, then if He comes to my house, we will see the proof of it. That nobleman was desperate but he was not faithful. He would clasp any straw that floated past him as he was swept along the river of despair. I knew a Christian many years ago whose dear wife had cancer. As the disease progressed, the more he travelled and the more desperate he became to find a healer. His church was no longer enough and he would go anywhere that there was the slightest hope of a cure.

Would either the Centurion or the ruler have come to Jesus if He had not cast upon them the shadow of death? When the sun shone out on the sea of Galilee at Capernaum and all was well in life, what need had they of a carpenter's son? I was reminded of the poem "Tommy" by Rudyard Kipling. Tommy Atkins is the typical British soldier, who is continually reviled until there is a need for him to fight for his country. "For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Chuck him out, the brute! But it's "Saviour of 'is country" when the guns begin to shoot; An' it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an'

anything you please; An' Tommy ain't a bloomin' fool -- you bet that Tommy sees!" That is how people treat Jesus, with utter contempt until they really need Him.

The hourly cry of the night watchmen that "all was well" did not disturb their sleep in Capernaum. No! So Christ must summon the storm and it is when the cry "*The Philistines be upon thee, Samson*" and there comes the realisation that all strength has gone, that God has finally got your ear and your attention. It is then, when we come to our senses that we will say, like the prodigal son, *Luk 15:18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.*

The nobleman is desperate and it is this desperation that Jesus addresses with hard words. "**Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe**". Honours and titles are no security from sickness and death. The greatest men must go themselves to God and must become beggars. The ruler is not dissimilar to the Syrian leper Namaan who centuries before had been given instructions by the prophet Elisha, *2Ki 5:10 And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.* A bath in the dirty Jordan river would be enough but he wanted a wonder to be performed, he needed a sign.

What is important to Namaan? The healing of the disease or the manner of its accomplishment? Does God really have to honour disease and death with signs and wonders? Does death require the presence of Him who has the keys of death? Does the Creator have to bow and scrape to the corruption of our flesh to make the act of healing acceptable? Is it a case of the greater the sign the more believable the healing? How arrogant is that? What is it with people that they require God to always work in the spectacular?

There are enough miracles going on around us every day if we would but look. *Rom 1:19 What can be known about God is clear to them because he has made it clear to them. From the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly observed in what he made. As a result, people have no excuse.* GW. The book of creation opens to us each morning but we close our eyes and ears to the message of the Creator. We are surrounded by signs and wonders. The nobleman had been walking through "signs and wonders" all the way from Capernaum to Cana yet had seen nothing. He wanted special signs that would suit him.

But what is the purpose that drives that healing? Would the ruler have taken a second thought if he had seen the terrible things that would come in his son's generation? The fall of his nation under Imperial Rome, the destruction of the Temple, the persecution of his people? Perhaps that Centurion might eventually be ordered to kill that nobleman's boy he loved so much? *Mar 13:8 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.* Are a few more breaths, a few more years on this sad earth really worth anything in the grand scheme of things? Well obviously they were and yet it shows us something about ourselves.

We place too much emphasis on the importance of this life over the life to come. If there is ever ground for extending this life, it must be that the person has been given more time to find Christ. In

the evolutionist world, which has no absolute meaning, the death of a plant is little different to the death of a man. It is a chemical transition followed by decomposition. In the realm of Christ the death of a man has far more significance than the death of a plant. Man is made in the image of God. To God's people Peter tells us. *2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but **that all should come to repentance***. There if anywhere, is found the reason to extend a life. I wonder how many of those whom Jesus healed, used that extra life to cement their eternal relationship with their Creator? That is the priority.

So was Jesus unduly hard upon the nobleman? Yes, I think that He was and rightly so. The nobleman was a "chancer" and it was a chance to take. It might work, it might not but nothing lost in trying in the last resort. If he had true faith He would have only had to ask Jesus for mercy. The journey back to Capernaum with Jesus was altogether unnecessary. The test now for the nobleman was "can you believe me"? He did. He didn't need signs and wonders any more, he could live with the word alone. That was the real miracle that gave life to faith, the healing was I think secondary.

The healing took place between 12:00pm and 1:00pm, the 7<sup>th</sup> hour. *"Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, **Yesterday** at the seventh hour the fever left him"*. The nobleman could have started back to Capernaum and made it by late evening. It does not appear that he did so. Faith had granted him not just healing but the peace to accept that there was no need to rush home. Faith had shown him the boy in full health and so he arrives back the following day to the news that he already knew.

Ask yourself a question. Do I live my life like the Centurion or the nobleman? Do I have confidence in the Divine structures of order and command or do I live in that world of doubt where fear drives me to continually seek signs and wonders in order to believe that Power exists? Do I have the confidence that the person who created the universe is the God who can do *Eph 3:20 ..... exceeding abundantly above all that we **ask or think**, according to the power that worketh in us?* Not so judging by many of the Christians I know. Your answer to that question will show how big your God is, how mighty He is and what you are prepared to do with Him.

I think that we are afraid to take that challenge. We are afraid to make that "ask or think" because we are afraid of the consequences. What would you ask God today, if you were put into the thick of the battle against the principalities and powers? What if God actually does it? Gideon was in a time when the people of God were oppressed. Gideon's answer was to moan about the lack of miracles in his day not ask what he could do about the big issue. He is just like us. "God please do something but make sure I am no involved".

*Jdg 6:13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and **where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of**, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?* He is taken aback by the command, just go and do it! I am not sure it was the answer he was expecting. He wanted a solution without being involved himself. He liked wandering about on his crutches never able to take the lead.

No, he is not sure of God. He needs a sign? He is not able to think he can do it. Like you and me, he rolls out the excuses why he cannot do it. *Jdg 6:15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. He cannot for the life of him see God's hand. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.* It is not enough, he needs a sign, in fact he eventually needs two signs. *Jdg 6:17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.*

Well, God has spoken to us through His word. We need to take that step of faith and get involved by faith and not sit around waiting for signs that will not come. We need more of the Centurion and less of the Nobleman in our lives, more faith and less signs.

### Carers of His brethren

Part 9. *Mat 25:31* When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

There are ever and only two classes of humanity as we have noted before. They are not Black people and White people, Jews and Gentiles, rich people and poor people. They are Believers and Unbelievers, Righteous and Unrighteous, Redeemed and Unredeemed, Saved and Unsaved. These humans are here brought to us by the Great Shepherd who at His coming gathers the whole race of mankind and divides them as a shepherd separates His sheep from the goats. Apart from the fact that sheep have 54 chromosomes and goats have 60, another difference between goats and sheep is their flock behaviour. Goats tend to be much more independent and curious than sheep, who adhere tightly to flock mentality. The sheep are more compliant to a shepherd.

The words that follow show something of the nature of these sheep and the goats, especially in respect of their relationship to others. **Addressing the sheep**, *Mat 25:34* *Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

There are many people who use these verses to justify all manner of general charity, toward all men. It is good and right that we should, as Paul says, *Gal 6:10* *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.* This reflection of the Divine Beneficence is sometimes called common Grace, *Mat 5:44* *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* It must also be noted that just as there is God's common Grace, there is also God's common Curse. Not only does He give sunshine, He gives tempest.

I do not however see that Jesus is here, in the verses about the sheep and the goats, talking about general charity, giving to all manner of good causes. Filling the tins of the "chuggers" (charity

muggers) and giving to “Sports relief”. Jesus is talking specifically about our behaviour towards Him as He is in His people. **He is talking about our care for the Christians.** The Jesus in us here, is as important as the Jesus in us in Heaven. He is talking about how we, with the Jesus in us, meet the needs of God’s people in adverse circumstances. *Mat 25:37 Then shall the righteous answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of **the least of these my brethren**, ye have done it unto me.*

That verse is often misquoted or partially quoted. It says quite clearly, “**the least of these my brethren**”. It does not say that when you have done it to anyone, you did it to me. If a person is not a Christian, they are not a brother. You cannot give to Christ in an unbeliever. The unbeliever is a person who “walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2 v 2). That is not Jesus. This verse is not about turning Christian resources into the social salvation of humanity, it is about meeting the needs of Christians.

When you did that good to a brother, you did it to Jesus in him, FROM Jesus in YOU. Take heed also of the details of these words, you did it unto the “**LEAST**” of these my brethren. The least in terms of their standing, the least in terms of their dignity, the least in terms of their size, not the greatest. Doesn’t this counter the thought that because a man is a well known pastor or leader in a church, that his position does not elevate him above any other in that church? Christ has His eye on the “least” of His brethren. They are as important as any Apostle, as precious as any other saint of renown. Jesus is saying that He cares for the “least” and that He cares for them through us. Woe betide us, woe upon us, if we do not act as His carers. We are not just seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, Jesus is seated in us here on earth. He walks in His people.

We have to understand this very important point. “When did we see thee?” It is a good question. Do we look for or do we see Jesus around us in His people? Do we walk this world with a conscious attitude as to how we might see and bless the less fortunate Christians? Are we observant or are we just disinterested because that is just how the cards were dealt. I just got a good hand and that is the end of the matter. It is not!

Try looking at it this way. Do we equate our brothers and sisters with Jesus or do we hold them differently? The other day I was making some tea and there was a cup with a chip on it. I said to myself, I would not give that to Jesus so why would I give it to my wife? This has led me to consider in far more detail just how I support the people of God because I should be looking at them differently. This hard saying is getting me to re-examine my life.

During the battle of Copenhagen, after three and a half hours of firing, the British Admiral, Sir Hyde Parker, offered Nelson, the hero of Trafalgar, an honourable route out of this bloody action. Parker is normally cast as the villain of the piece for foolishly recalling Nelson on the brink of victory, but his motives were good: he feared that Nelson’s attack had stalled and that Nelson would be unable to retreat without an order to do so. He explicitly hoped that Nelson would ignore the order if able to do so. Nelson turned to his flag-captain and said, ‘Foley, you know that I have lost an eye, and have a

right to be blind sometimes'. Then he raised his telescope to his blind eye and said, "I really do not see the signal."

I think that we Christians have lost an eye when it comes to these verses. We hold the glass to a blind eye and as a consequence see nothing. It is not a case of "When did we see thee?" It is more a case of "I never looked for you". I didn't make any effort to seek out Christians in need and because of this I heaped my labours upon myself. I found myself to be that needy Christian above all others and so I never looked for the needs of others. How can we justify that attitude, yet it is very much how we go about supporting Christians. We try to avoid it or we look no further than our church. If we are honest, we do not like the emotional commitment of being personally involved with a needy Christian. It is much easier to give the money to a fund manager so that you and I do not have to confront that need head on. We see church collections, if we have them, as a sort of goodness tax gathered by the leaders, who run the Church welfare programme. We by-pass the emotional connection, by giving to a fund manager. We avoid having to look at that need directly, rather like changing TV channels when we don't like what we are watching. It would be like handing out food vouchers rather than taking the person for a meal. And the less we confront ourselves directly with the needs of others, the less we shall be sensitive to those needs. In time they will not even be real needs to us. We will stop seeing Jesus in other Christians. We become very mean.

We may deceive ourselves about our generosity because it is in fact the appeasement of our conscience in order to justify our own consumption. It shows us something about our faith. We want the benefits from Jesus, we want the forgiveness but we do not want the practical involvement with His people. We want Jesus to care for us, keep us healthy and extend our life but we don't want to care for His people. We don't want them to have the same benefits that we would ask Jesus to pour out to us. This is at the heart of the hard saying in these verses. If you are in that class, one who is not personally involved as a carer, then heed and repeat these words regularly, because they apply to you.

*Mat 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me **no meat**: I was **thirsty**, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye **took me not in**: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as **ye did it NOT to one of the least of these, ye did it NOT to me**. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

There are some of those people among the goats that would say that they loved Christ or at least knew Him because they call Him Lord, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred?" Not that all the goats would say that. Many of the goats were in reality, goats in sheep's clothing. They had spent a lifetime wandering around with the sheep. They had through this association considered that they were sheep. They had begun to sound like sheep but you couldn't get the goat out of them. They didn't have that great love for the sheep or the shepherd and probably hoped to get through to heaven on the tail of another sheep.

Churches have many goats. These goats “Baa” like sheep every Sunday and learn the language of sheep but they never behave like the sheep. You see, the sheep love the shepherd and because they love the shepherd, they love each other and help each other. *Joh 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* But they didn’t love Him enough to see Him in the needs of His people. They are deceived. *1Jn 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* John asks this simple rhetorical question, **“How is it possible?”** Of course, it is not possible. If you cannot recognise those needs, Jesus says that you are not a Christian, you are a goat. You were happy for Jesus to do things for you, to ask and take blessings but you wouldn’t do things for Jesus. We were careless. We did not feed God’s people, we were not hospitable to God’s people, we did not clothe them, we did not visit them in persecution and the outcome is a goat roast in hell. You went around telling people that you were a believer in Jesus and that you were a “born again Christian” but not once did Jesus show Himself in you, appear in you, reaching out to His brethren.

The excuses will come thick and fast. Oh, “We live in a country that doesn’t have Christians living in those conditions so how can it apply to us?” But did you see Jesus limiting it to those being hungry and thirsty in your own country? No, I didn’t see it either. There are others of our brothers and sisters in all nations where the Gospel is preached and this verse is not just showing the consequences of our inaction, it is a clear and present warning to be proactive. If you don’t want to risk these words “to clear off” being spoken over you, do something about it.

Let us be reminded that it was the orthodox upholders of Judaism, the upholders of Jehovah’s word, the teachers of the Nation, that also failed to exercise compassion. *Luk 10:30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he **had compassion on him**, We might well substitute characters from our own day, for these people are still amongst us, yes we might even put our own names in there.*

Why did they avoid the man who had been mugged? Obviously, they lacked compassion but I think that there was more to it. They didn’t want the inconvenience of a long term commitment with the victim of the mugging. In their eyes, it was more satisfactory to their selfish lives that they left him to die. Perhaps they even offered a prayer over his bloodied body that God would take care of him or that someone else with more time might find him. Then off they scuttled like cockroaches into a dark corner. The Samaritan was in for the long term. *Luk 10:35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.* He didn’t just take care of the immediate needs, he went the extra mile.

So let us ask ourselves how we might avoid these words and their consequences? **“Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it NOT to one of the least of these, ye did it NOT to me”**. Firstly, we must ask whether it genuinely concerns us? I do not mean whether we agree with the subject matter as presented in this ministry but whether it is something that moves our heart to compassion? If it doesn’t, then we should be concerned. If it does, then consider, “Do we have a giving plan and if not



why not?" If we don't have a plan, isn't it hypocritical to thank God for the things HE gives us when we do not share His nature of giving? WE want Him to give us daily bread but we will not share it with the less fortunate. We want God to have a plan for our life but we want it without a plan for our giving, in His plan. Food for thought?

It is not for me to tell you how to give and what you should give to. It is your stewardship exercised by you. However it is always good to hear what good people can do by their giving as it acts as an encouragement. As this passage and others say, our works shall be judged and it shall be revealed just how much we cared for Christ's people, the brethren.

### In denial

Part 10. Mat 10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. Mat 10:33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Mat 10:34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

Perhaps one of the best ways to illustrate the meaning of "confess" is in John's epistle. *1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* The meaning is clear. If we acknowledge our sins, **if we confess our sins**, if we accept that we have sinned, if we bring our sin to Jesus as guilty sinners, if we say them to God and ask forgiveness, we get it. Confession we might say is about being "up front" about our condition. We don't make excuses for it and we don't hide it. To use a modern expression, we are not in denial about it. Denial goes much further than Peter saying I "I don't know Jesus" as we shall see.

We also have an illustration of denial in these scriptures. *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have not sinned, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth isn't in our hearts. But if we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away. **If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his message isn't in our hearts.*** CEV, Denial is the antithesis of confession. Denial is self-deceit about our true nature.

I have known many "Christians" who have never ever made a confession of an error or sin in their lives. They are the most perfect beings. They were perfect before they adopted Christianity and they are perfect after they adopted it. There is not one anecdote in their experience that could be used as an illustration for sinful behaviour. They can stand four square with the Pharisee and thank God that they are not like other men.

The context of our verses is the commission to the 12 disciples to take the Gospel to the Jews only at this stage. *Mat 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: Mat 10:6 **But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*** Israel was about to be shaken out of her complacency. Here at last is the hope of Israel. *Jer 17:13 O LORD, **the hope of Israel**, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters. Jer 17:14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise. Jer 14:8 O **the hope of Israel**, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry*

*for a night? Jer 14:9 Why shouldst thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.*

The words of the prophets accompany the Messiah. The hopes and fears of all the years are dealt with in the incarnate deity. This is the message of this ordinary band of men. Emmanuel, God with us, is indeed, with us. Will they accept Him or will they reject Him? Is He too ordinary, too simple, unrefined and unattractive for their taste? Will they deny Him? Hence the hard words of Jesus. *Luk 9:26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.* There is a particular context to the denial Christ speaks about and the conflict that He brings. It is found in families (Mat 10 v 35ff). That is where war is waged by Christ and I believe that it is because Christianity is undermined more easily in families than probably anywhere else.

You may have thought that to deny Christ had something to do with not admitting to know Him, being too embarrassed to own up to being a Christian, like Peter. *Joh 18:25 And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not.* You may have thought that denying Jesus was not wearing a badge or crucifix to display your faith or going out knocking on doors to annoy the unconverted. There are lots of people that do all of those things and yet there is hardly a shred of Christ visible in their lives. They try to pin their goodness on Christ rather than His godliness on them. Brother Titus makes a wonderful observation on denial. *Tit 1:16 They profess that they know God; but **in works they deny him**, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.* This statement says that denial is not just a verbal acknowledgement that Christ is Lord, it is the outworking of that Lordship in the life of the individual. And the practical profession of faith not just the theoretical knowledge.

When God's word makes demands of us, the denier turns to them and says no. There is a word which I think characterises Mark's Gospel. It is the word "straightway" and it is used some 19 times. It adds pace to the narrative, it creates the breathless leap to the next exciting event, it adds movement and direction. I think that this is what is expected of us. If the Word of God says something and you refuse to do it, then there is no pace in your religious life. You are among those who make the excuses, *Luk 9:59 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Luk 9:60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. Luk 9:61 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. Luk 9:62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

I know of people, more than one, who at this time are refusing to act on the word of God and are afraid of the consequences of acting. Yet these people will expect others to react and respond immediately to God's word. If they talk of the Gospel, they will expect the person that they talk to, to obey **straightway** but in their own lives they are completely disobedient to other scripture, "*they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and **disobedient***". They are deniers of Christ. These people will also expect God to intervene in situations that they themselves can act upon. They want miracles to replace duty, miracles instead of personal action, anything rather than confront sin or their duty head on.

There is a hypocritical trait in the lives of some “Christians” whereby they want you to obey the commands of Christ but they will not do it themselves. Physician heal thyself! They want you to put your life in order but will not respond to the sin in their own lives. They will justify their lack of response by saying that it is something they are praying about. This my friends is denial. It is the denial that Christ in us can do all things. Clearly in the lives of some He cannot.

That scoundrel’s sometime refuge, prayer, harbours many disobedient people. Prayer can be another form of denial. Here is a mission request I came across:

“If you are called to pray for our mission teams but don’t know where to start, here are 10 steps that can help you embark on your “mission field” of prayer: Pray for the families of those serving, Pray for the health of those serving, Pray that those serving have time to deepen their own faith journey, **Pray for the physical needs of those serving** and those being served, Pray for success for the goals of the trip, Pray that those serving do not struggle with feelings of loneliness, Pray for relief from stress for all involved, Pray for protection against the devil, Pray that God strengthens them to do the work for which they were called”.

And to that I cynically add, “please answer these prayers so that I don’t have to do anything myself”. I would have asked straight out, “send us some financial support and then pray for us”. *1Jn 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? Meanness is denial.*

I had a dear old brother, here in Bracknell, who reduced most of the error in the Churches to “unbelief”. He would have looked at our text and said that disobedience was down to unbelief. I think that he was right. If you disobey, you are saying that the word of God is wrong, that it cannot be trusted, that it cannot be done and that is unbelief.

You will also find that these “deniers” always expect their God to respond “**straightway**” to their requests. God must always be immediate to their demands but that does not reflect in their lives, by immediately responding to Him. When those stripes and blows come upon them they call out for you to pray God for intercession for them. They wouldn’t like my prayer for them. It goes like this, “**Lord, grant their request at the same speed that they answer your requests upon them, Amen**”. I am not joking. How can you and I pray for sudden change when it is not in that person’s nature to apply sudden change. They want the Lord to act NOW and they might just respond to Him in a few years. That is denial.

A brother shared some correspondence with me about an atheist (P Z Myers) that he was trying to debate. He signed off his letter to the man with these words. “I will pray that God gets your attention while you are still above room temperature.” We want God’s attention NOW but it is very hard for us to give Him our attention NOW. Perhaps that is why so many prayers go unanswered and healing never comes before the person “falls below room temperature”. Rightly so.

Our text confronts our indifference. The idea that we can have a cosy truce with those around about us who deny Christ is a lie. The word “send” is better rendered “throw”. It is from the greek word here that we derive the term ballistics. *Mat 10:34 Think not that I am come to **throw** peace on earth:*

*I came not to **throw**, but a sword.* Jesus goes ballistic at denial. We are in a war zone not a neutral zone. Where we allow family relationships to continue without confronting the sin that arises, is an open denial of Christ. It is a challenge to our allegiance. Who will we put first Christ or family?

Jesus did not come to bring peace in families where there are Christians and non-Christians. He came to inflame that situation. *Mat 10:35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.* He came to make us active in our confrontation of sin in family lives. I know a man who had a son who made a profession of faith and then denied Christ. That man still treats his son as if he were a Christian. He does not confront his apostasy but will happily spend time drinking beer with him. This is not a loving relationship, it is a relationship built on compromise and denial. It is locked in to the vain hope that if the errors are not confronted, somehow, magically, all will be made well.

It reminds me of the advice that Charles Spurgeon gave to a young woman who intended to marry an unbeliever. She was already denying Christ by even thinking that an unequal yoke would succeed. Yet in her own vanity, she supposed that she was capable of converting the man. She thought, as many do, that because she had made some profession of Christianity, she had been given a “get out of sin card”. She thought, as many do, that Christ will overcome our wilful sin and in doing so override the word of God. Let us remind ourselves that God does not contradict Himself and that what He has said in one place He would not then deny in another.

The woman was counting on God denying His own words, *2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? Why on earth would God do that?* Spurgeon, as you may know, in this story, asked the young woman to stand on a table. Now, said the preacher, pull me up. He made a good point because she could not.

Now consider this. What was the woman’s real relationship with Christ? She obviously thought that it was good and that nothing could disturb it. I am sure that we all get that cosy feeling that the “everlasting arms” are firmly around us, yet where there is open disobedience and unbelief of God’s word, there is only one conclusion we may draw. We are in denial of Christ.

In such circumstances, it is no use reverting to the idea that “once saved, always saved” overrides our disobedience. If you cling to this teaching, you must see it as part of a string of pearls. You cannot have one without them all. The thought that Christ is obligated to save me while I turn my back on Him is nonsense. Where there is open hostility to God’s word, how dare you make a claim that you are saved? You cannot produce the evidence. Where you deny Christ, you can only draw one conclusion, namely that He will deny you. ***Mat 10:33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*** No exceptions.

The consequence of the denial of Christ is to be denied by Christ. *Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

That is indeed a hard saying. It is a sword that at one stroke severs millions from the household of faith. It cuts off thieves, liars, lesbians, homosexuals, perverters of the word of God, those who put tradition before the word of God, the antichrists and wolves who prey on the flock of God. O you say, aren't you being hard on these people? Surely God loves everyone, isn't that why Jesus came? Look, get out of the habit of quoting John 3 v 16 on its own. Start learning John 3 v 18. *Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is **condemned already**, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

God does NOT love you if you have "not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." That failure to accept Christ condemns us to eternal damnation. *1Jn 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.* Our love is shown in obedience. *Joh 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.* It is impossible to say on the one hand that you love Christ and on the other, to deny Him by disobedience.

### Passed over

Part 11. Luk 4:23 And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. Luk 4:24 And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. Luk 4:25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; Luk 4:26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. Luk 4:27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. Luk 4:28 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, (Read also Isaiah 61).

Jesus returns from His temptation to His home town of Nazareth and in the synagogue He opens the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and reads the fulfilment of it to the audience. *Isa 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; Isa 61:2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and **the day of vengeance of our God**; to comfort all that mourn.*

The outcome of this declaration is that they want to kill Jesus. How could the carpenter's son come and say such a thing? How could He rise above His humble birth to do these wonders? Surely He is in need of healing Himself, let alone healing others. The fact is that familiarity will often influence people against the truth. The messenger is not honoured by those he is familiar with. Isn't this Joseph's son? How can He be of consequence? I recall many years ago a senior engineer where I worked, who used to get very annoyed with his wife, because she would mention the problems with her car to a totally unqualified neighbour. She never asked her husband and she had no respect for his ability. He was without honour.

The words that the carpenter's son expound, suggests that the passage in Isaiah had even greater consequences and this is what annoys them. The Isaiah passage is about the gospel coming to the gentiles. *Isa 61:11 For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth to growe that which is sown in it: so the Lord God will cause righteousness to grow and **praise before all the***

**heathen** (*gentiles*). Geneva. The widow of Zarepta (Zarephath) was a gentile living in a Sidonian city, Naaman was a gentile general in the Syrian army. That is what upset the Jews.

Yes, you have it right, only two people. It wasn't even a remnant of Israel, it was gentile. In that generation, the Lord was only prepared to show mercy to two foreigners, two gentiles, because the nation of Israel was rotten to the core. I have no doubt that the widows in Israel cried to the Lord but He refused to answer them. The lepers of Israel too cried to the Lord but He refused them a hearing. Rotten religion is fit for nothing and it gets no response however prettily it dresses itself up. The people in the church (synagogue or assembly Jas 2:2 AV) in Nazareth were cut from that same corrupt tree.

"Sidonians" was another name for the Phoenicians, a seafaring people on the Mediterranean coast who occupied the great cities of Tyre and Sidon. The Sidonian widow would have been even more distressing to the Jews because Ahab married the wicked Jezebel another Sidonian from that nation. *1Ki 16:31 And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.*

There were plenty of widows and lepers in Israel in the days of Elijah and Elisha the prophets but they did not minister to Israel, they went to the gentiles. Why? The king of Israel, Ahab, was an apostate who led the nation into sin. *1Ki 16:30 Ahab, son of Omri, did what the LORD considered evil. He was worse than all the kings who were before him. 1Ki 16:31 It wasn't enough that he committed the same sins as Jeroboam (Nebat's son). He also married Jezebel, daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon. **Ahab then served and worshiped Baal.** 1Ki 16:32 He built the temple of Baal in Samaria and set up an altar there. 1Ki 16:33 Ahab made poles **dedicated to the goddess Asherah.** He did more to make the LORD God of Israel furious than all the kings of Israel who came before him.*

Jezebel set herself to wipe out the religion of Jehovah, *1Ki 18:4 For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)* The nation was not totally apostate but it was only a small remnant who stayed faithful. *1Ki 19:18 But I still have 7,000 people in Israel whose knees have not knelt to worship Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.* GW. 7000 were the remnant population. One of her infamies, the murder of Naboth, is recorded for posterity.

It is only about 450 years from David to the captivity in Babylon as the nation spiralled down in division, idolatry and apostasy. Did the Jewish nation ever recover its true faith? An indication of this would be the number of people who responded positively to the gospel. In Jesus' day, there were an estimated 7million to 8million Jews in the world, with 1million to 2million living in Israel (Galileans, Judeans, Sidonians and those residing in the eastern part of Israel). The men and women of Israel who had a chance, wanted to hear Jesus, and many of them accepted Him. Yet in Jerusalem, probably no more than a couple of thousand religious leaders were responsible for leading the nation away from salvation, and into destruction and dispersion.

How big were the crowds who came to Jesus? One of the two times we are given an actual number, we are told that a multitude followed Jesus around for three whole days in a desolate place, without food. Yet we are told that there were 4,000 men, anywhere from 8-12,000 people following Jesus.

At times, Jesus tried to get away from the crowd to be by Himself, but the multitudes wouldn't let Him. They followed Him everywhere. On one occasion, His disciples advised Jesus to send a mass of people home. Again, they were in a desolate place with no food. How many were in the crowd that Jesus Himself fed? The record says 5,000 plus women and children, probably between 10,000 to 15,000. Some though, only followed because there was a free meal. *Joh 6:26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*

We know that a short time after His Crucifixion, 50 days to be exact, 3,000 Jews responded to Peter's message, and after that "the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were saved." Soon after, another 5,000 came to the Lord. In fact, years later, the Apostles told Paul, *Act 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many **thousands of Jews** there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:* It must be clear that a very small percentage, probably 2 or 3 per cent of the Jews, went on to follow Christ. *Rom 9:27 Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: (Is 10 v 22).*

Paul bemoans the unfaithfulness of Israel despite their advantages *Rom 9:4 ...to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants.* However, he reflects, *Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are **not all Israel, which are of Israel:** Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.* There was within the Religious Nation a believing Nation. Hidden in the corrupt fabric, was a remnant of the faithful.

What were the sins of Israel? They can, I think, be summed up in the disobedience to the Covenant. That is, the Covenant or agreement with God is based upon obedience to His precepts. *Exo 24:7 And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, **All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.*** When we come to The Lord, we put ourselves under an obligation of obedience. *Joh 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.* Disobedience is a sign that we do not love God and that we put aside the covenant.

*Heb 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:* The difference between the Old and the New is that the New sees the truth planted in the heart. If it is there, it will show.

I have rarely seen that the full nature of the New Covenant is clearly expressed when the Gospel is preached. I think that the emphasis of the Gospel is more on the Forgiveness and less on the Obligation to obedience. *Rom 16:26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:.* The obligations of the New Covenant must be understood because they carry a warning. *Heb 10:29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath **done despite unto the Spirit of grace?***

Salvation is to be worked out *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* Our calling is to be made sure, *2Pe 1:10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:* Doing these things is not saving ourselves by works but outworking the Covenant, it is doing things in remembrance of Jesus.

In Jesus day as in the days of Elijah and Elisha, the nation of Israel had failed to honour the Creator. They had not just broken His laws, they had invented their own laws and adopted the religions of the heathen. The hard saying of Jesus is that for all their pretension, they were unworthy to represent the Lord. This religious community in Nazareth, this church of the Jews, was not ready to accept the Christ. Rather they would drag Him away and throw Him off of a cliff. That tells you the state of their religion. It could not recognise God even if He strolled in the room. Of course all the churches today would chorus, "Oh, we wouldn't do that, we are not like that". Let us examine that thought.

Has anything changed? If Jesus were to turn up in any church meeting today and open the scriptures, would He be received? If he opened the book and read; *1Co 6:9 Don't you know that evil people won't have a share in the blessings of God's kingdom? Don't fool yourselves! No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual will share in God's kingdom. Neither will any thief or greedy person or drunkard or anyone who curses and cheats others.* CEV. What would many churches do? I tell you, He would be taken to the Police cells.

In the February 2013 issue of Premier Christianity, Steve Chalke the apostate Baptist wrote an article outlining his views on homosexuality, saying that he saw no problem with loving, committed homosexual relationships. He also said he had blessed a homosexual civil partnership at the church he leads in Waterloo. Chalke is an apostate who hides the truth of Christ under his own doctrine. How can these so called churches ignore the truth and at the same time sing praise to the Lord. You too cannot duck your head and be neutral. Do you stand against it or for it? If you are deceived like these people, the truth is, *Mat 15:7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* It is empty worship from the wicked heart. It is a waste of time.

If Jesus were to come and were to read in another place that *1Co 15:21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* Would He be sneered at because men neither believe in Adam nor the Resurrection? A survey this decade revealed that a third of Church of England clergy doubt or disbelieve in the physical Resurrection and only half are convinced of the truth of the Virgin birth. The poll of nearly 2,000 of the Church's 10,000 clergy also found that only half believe that faith in Christ is the only route to salvation. They are modern day Sadducees.

Can we say that Israel of the OT is any different to the Institutional churches today? The word of God was eventually lost and the result was that the nation adopted the practices of the false religions around them. At the end of the first century, we saw in our studies of Revelation, that 4 of the 7 churches were under satanic attack and only 2 of the 7 were not rebuked.



Are few saved? *Luk 13:23* Someone asked him, "Sir, are only a few people going to be saved?" He answered, *Luk 13:24* "Try hard to enter through the narrow door. I can guarantee that many will try to enter, but they won't succeed. In the old world only 8 (Noah's family) were saved. Only one family from Sodom (Lot's). Only 2 families (Joshua and Caleb) from the Exodus entered Canaan. The 144,000 of Revelation may be a spiritual number but it is not big considering the people who have passed through this life. Learn the lesson of this passage today. There comes a time when God will stop striving with people. Make sure of your calling now. Make sure you cling to the truth of Christ, because forever is a long time to dwell on your mistakes.

### Where did the seed fall in your life?

Part 12. *Mat 13:3* And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

If I were to ask you where the seed fell in your life, I would imagine that you would all say "on the good ground". If you ask people if they think that they are a better than average driver, very few will say no. If we ask, "are you an above average Christian in your commitment" many will say "of course we are". How do you make that assessment? For many, it is quite obvious that Christianity doesn't work in their lives and here is the reason. You can take the test here and see how much of your life revolves around Christ and or face up to how little, if any, of God's word has germinated. ***Mat 6:21 Your heart will always be where your treasure is. CEV.***

The parable of the Sower (Read *Mat 13 v 3 – 23*) is about how God's Word impacts the lives of men. It does so in different ways, sometimes with a lasting effect and at other times with a temporary effect. The word of God, wherever it is broad cast will always have an effect. Each of us has heard the word of God and as such fit into one of these classes of individual. We must state at the beginning that because someone has heard the word of God, it doesn't mean that they are saved. Because another has heard the word and been baptised, doesn't mean that they are saved. And yet another, who has become a preacher of that word and a leader of others, does not mean that he is saved, **because he heard it.** *Mar 13:13* ***And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.***

The passage is about endurance and fruitfulness. Endurance is how the word has taken root in a person's life, if at all. Fruitfulness is about how that word works out of that life, whether there is anything to show that grows from that word. If fruitfulness does not concern you then there is something wrong in your life. If you can go from Sunday to Sunday without opening your Bible, that word has no value to you. It holds no excitement, fascination, revelation, direction or relevance to your life. Do not deceive yourself, **you are DEAD to the word** and the word is dead in you. Also, when I talk about opening a Bible, it is not just to read a passage it is to read, digest and apply the word. Why else would you read it?

The word of God brings its own nurture *Rom 15:4* *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.* That is why it is so important. It gives us hope in a hopeless world. It takes us beyond this life to the life to come in the presence of the Saviour. Believe me, that is the only thing of lasting value in our lives. *Mat 6:33* ***But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*** If you are not a Kingdom seeker, what are you looking for in this life?

It is not my purpose here to extol the glories of God's word but to ask, in particular, what "word" of God Jesus is talking about. I do not think that it is every word, the law, the offerings or the prophets. I think that it is the Gospel or good news of Jesus Christ, "the word of the kingdom" (Mat 13 v 19). That word of God specifically embraces judgement, repentance, forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. This is the gospel of salvation. *Eph 1:13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.*

Now it doesn't matter how good a preacher or evangelist you are. Effective preaching, by which I mean preaching that saves men, is beyond your control. It does not matter how eloquent you are, how learned you are, how popular you are or how gifted you are, thank God, **you cannot save anyone**. You can strive to be better by going to college, study until your head aches and pray until you fall asleep but still, thank God you will not save anyone. You may be an orator that can work a crowd into frenzy, draw tears of emotion from your hearers and be so persuasive that men will run forward at an altar call, but thank God, you will save no one. Paul the apostle knew this truth. *1Co 3:6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but **God that giveth the increase**.* It is a lesson to all in service to God that Salvation is by grace through faith, the gift of God.

It may be an unpopular teaching these days but it is as true as it ever was that God chooses those that He will save. *Eph 1:4 According as he hath **chosen us in him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Eph 1:5 Having predestinated us unto the **adoption of children** by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the **good pleasure of his will**.* Before this planet existed and before the very atoms of our being had been created, we were firmly anchored in the Divine will, which in its due season, ordained that as the devils bastards, we should be adopted by Him, because it was His pleasure so to do. We became that reality, where the gospel was preached. *Act 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and **as many as were ordained to eternal life believed**.*

Therefore we reiterate that salvation has nothing to do with the eloquence of the preacher or the will of man. I only have to remind you of that dear old simple Saint that spoke God's word to Spurgeon's ear. *Isa 45:22 **Look unto me, and be ye saved**, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.* It has everything to do with the divine purpose in Christ Jesus.

There is something else, however, which affects the function of that word and Jesus explains it to us in this parable. It is the nature of the human heart and its receptivity to the gospel. It is this, in my mind, which goes so far as to explain why we see the divisions and differences in the Churches. It explains why some people seem on fire for the Lord and why others have a formal religion that is cold and lifeless and it explains why people can seem so enthusiastic at their first hearing of the Gospel and yet years later, fall away and lack interest. People like the once famous evangelist Charles Templeton, predicted to become a greater evangelist than Billy Graham, yet he fell away from the faith. The parable of the sower is a window that looks in on the effects of the Gospel. It will show us why some people are the way they are.

**Firstly** we encounter those wretched people whom the devil robs. *Mat 13:18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and **understandeth it not**, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by **the way side (road)**. Luk 8:12 Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, **lest they should believe and be saved**. We might also infer that their hearts are hard, like the well trodden road that the seed falls upon. It lays bare on the surface and will be crushed by the foot of man or eaten by the birds.*

This is the word that Isaiah prophesied, that never brings life to the hearer. *Mat 13:15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.* Many of these do end up going to church, as they did in the days of Jesus. Perhaps they were children of Christian parents and while outwardly conforming, they inwardly rebelled. The devil eventually snatches away the final vestiges of faith.

**The second** category of individuals provides some explanation as to why people seem to respond to the gospel and after a time have no interest. *Mat 13:20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. Luk 8:13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation **fall away**.*

These are the people who would run forward at an “altar call” if the minister invited them at a rally, these are the people like Charles Templeton who rejoice in God’s word at first and at the last reject it. These are the people that you have seen over the years who sang with you in church and now their places are empty. These are the people who even got baptised. Yet Christianity never took root in their lives. I have seen many of these people and they look like, sound like and act like Christians at the beginning. You can have religious conversations with them, discuss the Bible and pray with them. Then, one day, it is all over and you stand back shocked, asking yourself what has happened to them. The answer is here. They withered away rootless.

**Thirdly**, there is another category that seem very like the second category of “stony ground” hearers. *Mat 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the **care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches**, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. Luk 8:14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with **cares and riches and pleasures of this life**, and bring no fruit to perfection. Mar 4:19 And the **cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things** entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.*

The subtle difference between these and the “stony ground” hearers is that they do produce some fruit initially but eventually there is none. For these people however, instead of being consumed by life eternal, they are consumed by life in the present. We would say of these, that their level of commitment to the gospel was very low. If it were for them, a choice between involvement in Christian activities or secular activities, the secular would win. If there was an alternative to spending time with Christians doing Christian things, they would choose it. If there was an alternative to going

to church, it would be taken. Careers would take a priority and wealth would be used for the comforts in the here and now. Personal spiritual development is not a priority.

I am sure that the “stony ground” hearers and the “choked hearers” would have all considered that they were initially part of the “fruitful hearers”. It is this category that ends their lives before the bonfire of their own vanities. *1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. They are saved but by fire, if they are saved at all.*

So we have seen so far, those in whom the word does nothing and they are lost forever, those who appear to be saved but are eventually lost forever and those who are saved but choked by life. **Finally** we look at the **fourth** category, the fruit bearers. *Mat 13:23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Luk 8:15 But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*

Now what is that fruit? To explain this let me make a distinction between **gifts, works and fruit**. Gifts are what get hung on you by God, they are not a product of your life. Gifts are like the lights hung on a Christmas tree. Works are tasks that God gives us to do *Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* Fruit is the product of your life and relationship to your Saviour, a tree bearing fruit from within itself, not fruit hung on it.

For example, **a gift** would be the “gift of healing”, **a work** would be developing active Christians, *Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,* and **a fruit** would be “goodness”. *Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Gal 5:23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.* The fruit is a product of the spiritual relationship with Christ. Fruit is the outward proof of the working of the Spirit. It is the sign of a personal change and transition into Christ.

There are those who confound gifts, works and fruit. I have known those who bask in gifts as if it has exalted them in the church above others but they have little to show of Christ. There are those who consider works as a measure of their commitment and become mother Theresa’s, yet the works are of their own making, not given them by Christ. Then there are those who see fruit as all important to the neglect of seeking practical service and work. It is in truth a difficult path. It is for that reason each Christian should ask with the Apostle Paul, *Act 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

Sadly, many Christians do not seek for a gift and fail to find God’s work for them. As for fruit it suffers the same way. I believe that each and every Christian should be in possession of a gift, a work and fruit.

- **Gifts** *1Co 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

- **Works.** *Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*
- **Fruit.** *Joh 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

For our “good ground” hearers, “**which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it**” they bring forth varying amounts of fruit and there may be many reasons for that (I’ll let you work that out). These people “keep” or hold fast to the word. They don’t change it, reinvent it, reinterpret it or neglect it. You cannot be fruitful if you do not hold the word in an honest and good heart.

### No place for old men

Part 13. Mat 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Mat 18:4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

By the grace of God, I was summoned to the Kingdom of God by these verses. They have guided my approach ever since that day in January (3<sup>rd</sup>) 1971. I could not go into the Kingdom of Christ unless I did so as a child. I could not go in with adult baggage, I could not take those adult preconceptions with me, and in short I could not go in as I was. Of course, in a sense, we become a little child through the new birth. Here though, I believe that it means more than that.

In the ordinary course of human affairs, we enter into communities of the elite through achievement. You cannot become a member of a society without some great achievement. For example, the backbone of the Royal Society is its Fellowship, which is made up of the most eminent scientists, engineers and technologists from the UK and the Commonwealth. Fellows and Foreign Members are elected for life through a peer review process, on the basis of excellence in science. That of course rules out most citizens from the society.

Jesus Kingdom is not like that. In the nicest way possible it is an **upside down kingdom**. The King is a servant, the greatest is the least, the servants are the chiefs and it is lead by children. There is no place for old men. Greatness in Christ’s kingdom is not achieved by being older, smarter or better educated than others, it is through service. *Mat 23:11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.* Likewise entry into the kingdom is not achieved through climbing the ladder of success. To the contrary, it is by going backwards to the simplicity of our childhood, that lost era, before we were poisoned by the world and tied up in its falsehoods. A time when we accepted what we were told without question. It is a kingdom built on humility. It is a kingdom of kids and I never once had a Sunday school child question the Bible!

That I think is the characteristic before us, the humility, the abasement of self, the willingness to accept what we are told. Some will say that children will believe anything and a lot of that which they believe will be untrue. They will believe in Santa and fairies but these stories were never taught by the Saviour. I am saying that in respect of the words of Jesus, a distinguishing trait of the Christian is trust in the words of Jesus. *1Th 2:13 We always thank God that you believed the message we preached. It came from him, and it isn't something made up by humans. You accepted it as God's message, and now he is working in you.* CEV. So what should we think when people like John Stott come along and tell us that Genesis doesn’t mean what it says. Quote:

**“Not many Christians** (sic!) today find it necessary to defend the concept of a literal six-day creation (**six days do not mean six days** according to Stott), for the text does not demand it, and scientific discovery appears to contradict it (**Science now defines truth in interpreting the Word** according to Stott). The biblical text presents itself not as a scientific treatise but as a highly stylized literary statement (deliberately framed in three pairs, the fourth “day” corresponding to the first, the fifth to the second, and the sixth to the third)... “It is most unfortunate that some who debate this issue (evolution) begin by assuming that the words “creation” and “evolution” are mutually exclusive. If everything has come into existence through evolution, they say, then biblical creation has been disproved, whereas if God has created all things, then evolution must be false. It is, rather, this naïve alternative which is false. It presupposes a very narrow definition of the two terms, both of which in fact have a wide range of meanings, and both of which are being freshly discussed today...

“But my acceptance of Adam and Eve as historical is not incompatible with my belief that several forms of pre-Adamic ‘hominid’ may have existed for thousands of years previously (**Theistic evolution**). These hominids began to advance culturally. They made their cave drawings and buried their dead. It is conceivable that God created Adam out of one of them (**Adam was a monkey** according to Stott). You may call them homo erectus. I think you may even call some of them homo sapiens, for these are arbitrary scientific names. But Adam was the first homo divinus, if I may coin a phrase, the first man to whom may be given the Biblical designation ‘made in the image of God’. Precisely what the divine likeness was, which was stamped upon him, we do not know, for Scripture nowhere tells us. But Scripture seems to suggest that it includes rational, moral, social, and spiritual faculties which make man unlike all other creatures and like God the creator, and on account of which he was given ‘dominion’ over the lower creation.”

Stott is a mystical dabbler and makes the issue even more at odds with the scriptures. The consequence of this for a child of God is that his Saviour is from a long line of monkeys. Death existed before sin caused it and so sin is not the cause of death. Adam is just a throw of the dice for God and it could have been any of the thousands of other hominids that got chosen. Just what happened to those other hominids and their offspring in terms of sin and salvation is not clear *1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*. The bible never lists a non-Adamic genealogy and Stott’s view cannot explain it. Adam was first and after him the woman *1Ti 2:13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve*. Adam was literally “moulded” before Eve. They did not arise together as Eve was taken from Adam who was created first.

As for not knowing “precisely what the divine likeness was” like, if this is so, Stott never knew Christ. Again the word of God tells us clearly what that image was, *Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature*: Christ is that image of God. *Joh 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath **seen me hath seen the Father**; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?* I do not see how God “stamped” Christ on the evolutionary monkey man and that again is why the direct creation of Adam out of the dust is so necessary. Adam emerged completed as the image of Christ not as a series of mutations.

Stott's approach to the Bible destroys our childlike trust. He says to the child of God, you cannot believe what it says but you can believe my reinterpretation of it. I do not see that Jesus would support Stott's interpretation. It is devilish and he abuses the scripture to such an extent that it loses its face value, indeed it is valueless. Stott and those like him are theological child abusers. I will not use the term "Paedophile" because that is just the opposite of what they are. Paedophile is a euphemism, a smoke screen set up to evade the truth. No the term is "Paedoloideros", Child abusers. **Spiritually, they are abusing the minds of the children of God.** Stott makes me mistrust Christ's word. No I will not go with him. He will take the scriptures from my hand and give me another book.

I read that during the bombing raids of the second World War, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But, many of these children, who had lost so much, could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, "today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow". Stott would take the bread of life away from us children of God and leave us nothing for tomorrow. Does that concern you? It does me. Beware these men.

Mark Hodges in his website defends the faith and asks the question "What is different about Modern Society that would suggest wholesale apostasy?" He answered, "Maybe it would be easier to ask what is not different about modern Christendom compared to the pre-19th Century Christianity; the changes have been so manifold.....for almost 1800 years, there were very few direct attacks on scripture or the worldview supported by it. The Bible was sometimes repressed, banned, or not available in the common languages. It was sometimes controlled by church hierarchy, sometimes placed under church hierarchy, but never attacked or doubted in its God given authority or historical accuracy. The Church had plenty of trouble with false teaching and practice but for almost 1800 years there were no concentrated efforts to use science or philosophy or atheistic theories to overthrow the common man's faith in the historicity or authority of the Bible." This is the new front line in our battle with principalities and powers. Great minds like Isaac Newton believed that God created the world. He said, "It is unphilosophical to seek for any other Origin of the World, or to pretend that it [the universe] might arise out of Chaos by the mere Laws of Nature".

William Barclay whose commentaries are on the shelves of many pastors writes, "I am a convinced universalist. I believe that in the end all men will be gathered into the love of God...the choice is whether we accept God's offer and invitation willingly, or take the long and terrible way round through ages of purification." Barclay believes that God will relent and save everyone. It is no longer a matter of faith in Christ, if sinners hold out long enough, they can beat God.

Stott actually suggested the wicked would be annihilated. " C.S. Lewis, like Billy Graham believes that those who do not hear of Christ may, indeed, be saved without explicitly confessing Him as Lord. In a 1997 interview with Robert Schuller, Graham said: "[God] is calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world or the Christian world, or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because they have been called by

God. They may not even know the name of Jesus, but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't have, and they turn to the only light they have, and I think that they are saved and they are going to be with us in heaven."

Graham's salvation does not require the word to be sown in the heart, does not require repentance, does not require the conviction of sin, does not require a new birth or conversion but only requires sinful hearts to turn to the "light". No doubt provided by the angel of light in many cases. If these so called teachers and evangelists cannot be trusted in fundamental issues, what is hidden in their other teachings? The church had to wait for 18 centuries for these men to tell us eternal punishment did or did not exist, salvation came by seeing a light and that Genesis was rubbish science and a fairy tale.

If you find gross error in a man's teaching, why do you go on reading what that man writes? The effect of this spiritual pollution on your life will debilitate you and weaken you. If you drank impure bottled water and were as a result sick, I am quite sure that you would avoid that brand like the plague. Try that strategy with the things you read.

What are we to make of these people who hold the word of God in part? We are tempted to say they cannot surely be Christians and we might well be right. Yet it is not given for us to question Salvation (The Creator will deal with that) but it is for us to question whether the truth is being upheld. *Rom 16:17 Brothers and sisters, I want you to be very careful of those who cause arguments and hurt people's faith by teaching things that are against what you learned. **Stay away from them.*** *Rom 16:18 People like that are not serving our Lord Christ. They are only pleasing themselves. They use fancy talk and say nice things **to fool those who don't know about evil.*** ERV. **Stay away from these men, that is the advice of scripture.**

You have been warned about these misguided people *2Ti 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: **from such turn away.*** Keep away from them. Remember in the beginning how the devil reinterpreted the word of God and exalted his word above God's word? *Gen 3:4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:* Well she did die (twice) and she suffered in child bearing. She was the first person to suffer illness as a result of sin. The first recorded case of sickness. These false teachings of men, like satan's words, are the exaltation of the word of men above God. This is not humility, this is not taking the word at its face value. This is not the little child speaking and it is not speaking to the little child.

How can people contradict God's word when they should know it far better than most? I will posit three reasons. **Firstly**, satan has distorted their understanding and they are deceived *1Co 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, **He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.*** This will happen when we start mixing the philosophies of man with the word of God. When we try to use science to interpret the word, when we adopt cultural values to interpret the word, when we use human emotions to interpret the word and when we adopt a world view made by sinful men guided by satan.

**Secondly**, we need to examine the impact of the "Sower" in the life of a person. This parable does so much to explain the mixture of belief, unbelief and practice in churches. Not everyone that receives the word is fruitful. Some will be in total unbelief and ignorance of God's word and there is nothing



you nor I will ever do to change that, because you cannot change their heart. Others will be in a compromise position between the leadings of this world and the demands of Christ. There will be the impact of peer pressure, the desire to be accepted by men, the desire for recognition, popularity, success rather than obedience and humility to the Saviour.

It is never our duty to please men but it is our duty to uphold the faith *Jud 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. Jud 1:4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.* The parable of the Sower will also explain why in so many areas of human life, there is conflict of belief in science, philosophy and society. How the world and society is seen, is very dependent on whether a man has believed on Christ.

**Thirdly**, they have lost the child and they have lost touch with the Saviour. I have noticed as I grow old, how that childlike nature can mutate into a hardened old cynic. The pleasure in simple things can get lost. *Ecc 12:1 Remember your Creator when you are young, before the days of trouble come and the years catch up with you. They will make you say, "I have found no pleasure in them."* GW. Yet it is that same word that I heard as a child and if anything, it is me, not the word that has changed. Not once as a child, did I ever question that word, even if I did not fully grasp its meaning.

I grew in a world where men added poison to that word and drew me away from trusting the Saviour. With Paul I can say, *Rom 6:21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.* No, I will return to my Father's house and I will sit as a child at His feet and I will enter the Kingdom He has prepared. *1Pe 5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 1Pe 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.* I will be that child He asks me to be, will you?

### A tale of three kisses

Part 14. *Luk 7:45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Luk 7:46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.* Read. *Mat 26 vv 1 – 13, Mark 14 vv 1 – 9, Luke 7 vv 36 – 50, John 12 vv 1 – 11.*



There are those who are so absorbed with their own self righteousness that they cannot see any good in others. In fact they are so righteous, everyone around them is a sinner. There is a complete inability to see "good" even when it is staring them in the face. This is the case here with Simon the Pharisee or Simon the Leper. It is the same person. *Mat 26:6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, cf, Luk 7:36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.*

I want to add some detail to this story which takes place in Bethany. *Joh 11:18 Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: (1 furlong = 201.2 meters. Therefore 3km or ~2m from Jerusalem).* It was a convenient place to stay if you were heading to Jerusalem for a major festival.

The narrative takes place in the week before the Passover, when Jesus was crucified. *Joh 12:1 Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. Joh 12:2 There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Joh 12:3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Joh 12:4 Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Joh 12:5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?*

We can see that in this little village, people were known to each other, sufficiently well enough to share a meal together and we have some of the key characters of the gospels meeting to share supper. There is Lazarus, Martha, Mary, Judas Iscariot, Simon the Leper, Jesus and John with some other disciples, who recorded the narrative. We may ask how they were related and knew each other? The scripture records that Jesus was fond of Lazarus. *Joh 11:1 Lazarus, who lived in Bethany, the village where Mary and her sister Martha lived, was sick. Joh 11:2 (Mary was the woman who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. Her brother Lazarus was the one who was sick.) Joh 11:3 So the sisters sent a messenger to tell Jesus, "Lord, your close friend is sick."*GW. I will speculate. It is possible that Jesus knew the family of Lazarus through His travels and that he had stayed in Bethany because of its proximity to Jerusalem, *Mat 21:17 And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.* It may be that he knew Lazarus from His youth? Lazarus had two sisters, Martha and Mary.

**Martha** you recall was the diligent housewoman. *Luk 10:40 But Martha was cumbered (περισπάω perispāō "drag around") about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.* Even when **God came into her house**, her housework was more important than sitting at the Creator's feet. *Luk 10:41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: Luk 10:42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.* Martha, in her busy domesticity had not recognised Jesus for who He was. For Martha, the things of the world always took precedence and the things of God came in a poor second. She even told God to stop Mary having fellowship with Him. The meal always had to be on the table at the set time and there was little or no flexibility. I would even reckon she was like those Christians who only find time for prayer and a daily reading in the bathroom. I wonder whether she ever looked back in sorrow at these lost and precious moments with the Creator of the Universe?

**Mary** on the other hand did know Jesus. I imagine Mary was quite an attractive woman and that she had possibly made a good living out of prostitution. I say this because she has secrets that Simon the Leper knows about. *Luk 7:39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.* It does not say what sins but I suggest they are sexual because that would have defiled a man. We might go further and suggest that this is the Woman

spoken of in John 8, the “pericope de adultera”. Was Mary the woman snatched from the bed of adultery while the man ran free? Was the man Simon, because how else would he have known what manner of woman she was? The “World’s oldest profession” was and still remains one of the few means a poor woman can make money in a poor world. Globally today, the sex trade is thought to be worth \$31.6 billion with Europe and America making up 50% of this huge sum.

Mary however, knew forgiveness and loved Jesus. *Luk 7:47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* Where did Mary get this costly perfume. *Joh 12:3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.* Could this have been from the wardrobe of her profession, the enticing perfumes, now sanctified and put to the Divine glory? It was not the perfume, the origin of the perfume or the means whereby it had been purchased that touches the heart of Jesus.

In that room, at that supper, by the glimmer of oil lamps, casting their flickering shadows on the walls, what Jesus saw was the love of a sinner saved. She loved so much, that she gave of the best she had and that best she had, was received with gratitude by the Saviour. The spikenard was her sacrament, an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual divine grace, the reflection of the preciousness, the symbol of the high value that Mary put on her salvation. What would we give and do, to show how we value it and how would we reflect outwardly that miracle in the heart?

Now we turn to **Simon**. Simon had been a leper but clearly had been healed else he could not sit in good Jewish company. How had this happened? Was Simon one of the many lepers that Jesus had healed? Perhaps this healing out of the many healings has a darker undertone. Is it here, that the foundations for Jesus’ betrayal are laid? Is it here that Jesus prepares the ground for His betrayal? Simon was a Pharisee, so he was connected to the religious hierarchy. I see nothing in Simon’s nature to suggest that he was little else than a selfish bigot, a typical Pharisee. He sees too readily the sins of others and he is not slow to point them out. We are not told what his sins were but if he was forgiven, he has forgotten too soon the grace that was shown to him. He does not greet Jesus as a friend, *Luk 7:45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.* I do not think it would be beyond Simon to discuss the plans of Jesus and the disciples with the Sanhedrin. Indeed, what was the purpose of this invitation to his house? Was it to gather information?

At this point we turn to Judas Iscariot. Judas was a Judean, NOT a Galilean. ALL the other disciples apparently were Galileans. He was in many respects the odd one out, sitting uncomfortably among his fellow disciples. What is Judas doing at this select gathering in Bethany? He is there because he is the son of Simon the Leper. *Joh 6:71 He alluded to Judas, the son of Simon the Iscariot. For he it was who, though one of the Twelve, was afterwards to betray Him.* Weymouth. *Joh 6:71 (Now he was speaking about Judas son of Simon Iscariot, because this one--one of the twelve--was going to betray him.)* Lexham. *Joh 6:71 And he spake of Judas, Simon's son, Iscariot, for he was about to deliver him up, being one of the twelve.* Youngs. It is possible that Judas co-conspirator was his own father Simon and it was this that gained Judas such easy access to the Sanhedrin.

**Judas** was an unsavoury character. He was also avaricious. He could not see the kindness Mary did to Jesus as other than a waste of money. But Judas was also a thief. *Joh 12:4 Then saith one of his*

disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because **he was a thief**, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. So it is that God in His infinite wisdom uses all men and all circumstances to bring Glory upon Himself. *Pro 16:4 The LORD has made everything for his own purpose, even wicked people for the day of trouble.* GW.

**Lazarus**, the friend of Jesus was allowed to die prematurely so that Jesus could show His power over death and His power to resurrect. Lazarus had become quite a celebrity. *Joh 12:9 Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. Joh 12:10 But the chief priests consulted **that they might put Lazarus also to death**;* Lazarus was also a wanted man.

The company at this select gathering in Bethany is interesting, to say the least. It brings the protagonists and antagonists together as the divine drama approaches the Crucifixion. In this final chapter, we gather in a simple domestic setting to be challenged by Christ. How did they all see Jesus and how do we see Jesus? To Simon, Jesus was an ordinary guest (unworthy of a kiss), to Lazarus, He was the Resurrection and the Life, to Martha He was just a house guest, to Mary, He was everything (The kiss of the forgiven heart) and to Judas He was an opportunity to make a quick “buck” (the kiss of betrayal). Jesus was someone different to each of those present. He was seen differently by each and that is the challenge to us, how do we see Him?

I was told a story recently about an old Afrikaner Christian lady. Every day when she got up, she opened the front door to invite Jesus in to her day. How do we welcome Jesus into our day and our lives? If we get up with scarce a thought about Him, we are no better than Simon. If we get up with an attitude of what God will do for me today, we are little different to Judas. If we get up with an attitude of how we might serve Him with gratitude, we are like Mary

Simon the Leper is in all of us to some degree. Firstly we are presumptive and take Christ's presence for granted. No matter what great thing Jesus did for us, we will find fault in any good deed another does in Jesus Name. It is as if righteousness is a competition rather than a state of being, we being the judges. When we see Eldad and Medad doing God's work we complain because they are not in our clique. *Num 11:26 But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, **Enviest thou for my sake?** would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!*

When it comes to criticism, are we jealous for the Lord or “**Enviest thou for my sake?**” That woman who had wanted to do a nice thing for Jesus had saved her pennies for this moment. She lay at His feet still overcome by the magnitude of her sins and she weeps. She wipes the dust of His feet with her tears, she lays her crowning glory (her hair), in the mud, she is debased before God.

Like Simon we too need to learn a lesson. If the cap fits wear it. Have you kissed Jesus today? Have you greeted Jesus with that kiss of welcome? Do you greet Him each day with a kiss? Do you find it

hard because you don't have that height of Love? This is a hard word that asks us to question our love for the Master and Jesus presents Simon with a question. *Luk 7:40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, **which of them will love him most?** Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.*

I am not clear if Simon was forgiven in the sight of God. If he was, forgiveness was not a great thing and it wasn't shown by his love. Bare in mind that at this moment, the Crucifixion had not taken place, so for these people, forgiveness did not have the same association with substitutionary atonement of Christ as with us. Men did not look at the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for their forgiveness of sin, as yet. They hung on the words of God in the OT that they were forgiven by the typical sacrifices of the law. The repeated sacrifices of the law showed that their conscience was still not clear. It must have been a strange thing when Jesus came along and forgave people, seemingly without direct reference to these things. The only conclusion you would draw was that Jesus was the sum and fulfilment of the law and the dispenser of forgiveness. **HE WAS GOD HIMSELF.**

Perhaps it was harder to appreciate forgiveness if your sin was not illuminated by the cross? It may be that the appreciation of forgiveness was less clear in the OT because sin was not fully seen for what it was in the sight of God. That however is no excuse. Simon's self-righteousness left him blind to what he really was. One might also add that he probably did not care much about sin. He was content that his position in the religious elite which elevated him in the eyes of the people. He was alright in his own eyes. Sin was not a subject for polite society. If we have the attitude of Mary, the measure of our love for Jesus will be in direct proportion to the measure we perceive our forgiveness and the depth of personal sin that we are prepared to acknowledge.

### **In Sickness and in Sin**

Part 15. Joh 5:14 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. AV. Joh 5:14 Later, Jesus met the man in the temple courtyard and told him, "You're well now. Stop sinning so that something worse doesn't happen to you." GW.

The name of the pool, Bethesda, is said to be derived from the Hebrew language and means either house of mercy or house of grace. In both Hebrew and Aramaic the word could also mean 'shame, disgrace'. This dual meaning may have been thought appropriate since the location was seen as a place of disgrace due to the presence of invalids, and a place of grace, due to the granting of healing.

This place was where sick people hung out for a miracle. There was only one miracle at this season of the feast of the Jews (John 5 v 1). One a year it seems but what did that teach? It teaches that God will heal people Sovereignly, although it is no comment on the spiritual or moral state of that person He heals. It does not mean that they are good because they are healed. We have to be very careful that we do not make a presumptive diagnosis. We cannot say that because someone is healed that it means they are a believer or that they have a special relationship with God. Of the 10 lepers healed, only one was saved *Luk 17:19 and he said to him, 'Having risen, be going on, thy faith hath saved*

*thee.*' YLT. Likewise, we have no grounds to associate sickness with sin unless we have a special revelation, as is the case here.

Jesus, the angel (messenger) of God only healed this one man and not the crowd of sick around the pool at Bethesda. It is clear that His primary mission here on earth was not to eradicate sickness from the world but healing was closely linked to the gospel of salvation. At Bethesda it was just this one man but there is a lesson as we shall see, that perhaps not all sickness requires a miracle to heal the person.

There may be other truths to be gleaned here. The man had been ill for 38 years but it doesn't say that he had been here at the pool for 38 years. This man may be a symbol of sinful Israel in the Exodus, where they were stopped from entering the promised land because they did not believe they could overcome the indigenous people. *Deu 2:14 And the space in which we came from Kadeshbarnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was **thirty and eight years**; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them. Deu 2:15 For indeed the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from among the host, until they were consumed.* That may be fanciful to see this man as a symbol of Israel but what is clear is that this man was in the state he was, because of a particular sin. *Joh 5:14 ..... thou art made whole: **sin no more**, lest a worse thing come unto thee.* Just what that sin was we are not told but it establishes the fact that sickness and sin may be associated. Our sin may make our sickness.

How many others at the pool of Bethesda were ill because of sin? How many people hung around for years waiting for a miracle for a problem that was caused by sin? It is a fact that all men and particularly Christians may suffer sickness because of sin. *1Co 11:30 This is the reason why **many of you are weak and sick** and quite a number of you have died. 1Co 11:31 If we were judging ourselves correctly, we would not be judged.* GW. Not a few but MANY. Corinth was a sick church despite having many gifts.

There are people who think that being judgemental is wrong. To those I say, you are wrong. You should be particularly judgemental to yourself. This sickness and weakness is a consequence of the failure to judge our own lives and if we were judging ourselves correctly we would avoid this chastisement, a chastisement that can lead to death.

It is also the duty of the Church to invoke this chastisement. *1Co 5:5 turn this man over to Satan for the destruction of his body, so that his spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord.* ISV. When a man gets into sin and his fleshly desires rise, such chastisement is necessary. Even the Apostle was brought down to earth from his heavenly experiences. *2Co 12:7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of the exceptional nature of these revelations, a thorn was given to me and placed in my body. It was Satan's messenger to keep on tormenting me so that I would not become conceited.* ISV.

If we dismiss these scriptures, then we shall fail to associate our sickness with the possibility of sin in our lives. If the Lord judges us for our improper conduct at the Lord's Table, I have no doubt that He will do so elsewhere. *Jas 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: Jas 5:15 And the prayer of faith*

shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Here are some examples of sickness that can be associated with sin.

- **Eve.** Gen 3:16 He said to the woman, "I will increase your pain and your labour when you give birth to children. Yet, you will long for your husband, and he will rule you."
- **Sodomites.** Gen 19:11 And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.
- **Miriam.** Num 12:7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. Num 12:8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? Num 12:9 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. Num 12:10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.
- **Asa.** 2Ch 16:10 In response, Asa flew into a rage and locked up the seer in stocks in the palace prison because of what Hanani had told him. Asa also tortured some of the people of Israel at that time. 2Ch 16:11 Now the accomplishments of Asa from first to last are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah. 2Ch 16:12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa suffered from a foot disease. Even though he suffered greatly, he never sought the LORD, but instead looked to doctors.
- **Uzziah.** 2Ch 26:18 And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God. 2Ch 26:19 Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar.
- **Gehazi.** 2Ki 5:26 And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? 2Ki 5:27 The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.

The nation of Israel was clearly warned that apostasy carried penalties. Many of the penalties were associated with health issues. Deu 28:14 **But you must not reject any of his laws and teachings or worship other gods.** Deu 28:15 Israel, today I am giving you the laws and teachings of the LORD your God. And if you don't obey them all, he will put many **curses** on you..... Deu 28:21 The LORD will send **terrible diseases** to attack you, and **you will never be well again.** You will suffer with **burning fever** and **swelling** and **pain until you die** somewhere in the land that you captured. ....Deu 28:27 The LORD will make you suffer with **diseases that will cause oozing sores** or **crusty itchy patches** on your skin or **boils** like the ones that are common in Egypt. And there will be **no cure** for you! Deu 28:28 You will become **insane** and go **blind.** The LORD will make you so **confused,** Deu 28:29 that even in bright sunshine you will have to feel your way around like a blind person, who cannot tell day from night. For the rest of your life, people will beat and rob you, and no one will be able to stop them.

Not just open sin but physical defects stopped a man from being involved in the duties of the Sanctuary. *Lev 21:17 "Tell Aaron: If any of your descendants (now or in future generations) has a **physical defect**, he must never bring food to offer to God. Lev 21:18 Indeed, no one who has a physical defect may ever come near the altar. That means anyone who is blind or lame, who has a disfigured face, a deformity, Lev 21:19 or a crippled hand or foot, Lev 21:20 who is a **hunchback** or **dwarf**, who has defective sight, skin diseases, or crushed testicles. Lev 21:21 If a descendant of the priest Aaron has a physical defect, he must never bring sacrifices by fire to the LORD. He has a defect.*

Some of these defects are clearly genetic. More than 300 well-described conditions are known to cause short stature in a child, dwarfism or achondroplasia. Most are caused by a spontaneous genetic change (mutation) in the egg or sperm cells prior to conception. Others are caused by genetic changes inherited from one or both parents, also advanced paternal age. We might see this as the expression of genetic entropy, the deterioration of the human genome since the fall. Part of the thorns and thistles, that make life difficult. People with these conditions, of which they were not primarily responsible (like the blind man in John's gospel), were none the less, barred from service. Malformations are treated as a defect from the original pattern and not normal, like a disease, a consequence of original sin. I make the point that sin has physiological consequences and that some of the sins of the parents may result in genetic changes in their offspring that will continue to appear for generations.

Lifestyle impacts affects disease. The drunk that falls in front of a car, the glutton who becomes obese and ill, the drug addict who suffers permanent physical damage are some examples. Changing lifestyle can make for a better life. *Exo 15:26 He said, "If you will listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what he considers right, if you pay attention to his commands and obey all his laws, I will never make you suffer any of the diseases I made the Egyptians suffer, because I am the LORD, who heals you."*

Sometimes people only go to God in the last stages of disease which is sad and desperate. Do we have such a view of our Saviour that He is the last resort of us scoundrels rather than the first resort? More than that, do we ever consider that some of our diseases can ONLY be healed by Christ as He is the origin of them? *1Co 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* "Oh no", you say, "I am a Christian. God doesn't hurt His people". Think again, there are plenty of examples to show that He does.

Watchman Nee makes this observation, "Therefore, a sick believer should not hastily seek after healing or methods of healing at first. He does not need to be terrified or afraid. He should put himself fully in the light of God and sincerely examine and find the shortage in himself that has led to God's discipline. He should judge himself and condemn himself. Then the Holy Spirit will reveal to him the area where he failed. Whatever he sees he must repudiate immediately, and he must confess the sin to God. If this sin has caused a loss to others, he should do his best to compensate and believe that God is pleased with this. He must consecrate himself anew to God and be willing to do all of His will."

Watchman Nee has a good point here. Our illness may lead us to the grave but what is there to fear in that? Why is it necessary to rush off to some doctor, who is in all probability not a Christian, to



squeeze out a few more years of life? Why are we fearful of death? Then we will use that other altruistic excuse, “I am not doing it for me, its for those around me”. Have we not committed all those things into the capable hands of Christ or are we so untrusting that we feel it is only us who can care? If you were to ask for more of this life, how much more would you ask for? Time flies and you would be back asking for more. Why do we hold so fast like limpets to this sinful world?

Whether or not we are honest enough to acknowledge it, we tend to believe that doctors are better healers than Christ. We show this by visiting them long before we visit God. I find it difficult to join a person’s prayer request for healing, if they have not involved the Lord from the beginning of their sickness. It is not because I lack compassion for their sickness, it is because my God is NOT the last resort, He is the FIRST resort. Our faith is sometimes compromised by others because we jump into their prayer requests without any understanding of the cause of the illness. We might unwittingly find ourselves fighting against the will of God in that individual’s life.

Yes, it says “pray for one another that you may be healed” *Jas 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* Note that the prayer for healing comes in tandem with the confession of transgressions.

Isaiah 53 is fulfilled in Jesus. *Mat 8:16 When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: Mat 8:17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.* It is quite clear from this verse that the healing was physical not just spiritual.

Without doubt, much sickness is a result of sin. It is the result of lives lived in rebellion that receives the chastisement of the Creator. For many, the consequences will continue in eternity. You will never be able to say upon the death of a sick unbeliever, that they are now at peace. It just gets a lot worse for them; for the believer, the outcome just gets a whole lot better.

We should start to see that sickness may be an indicator that our relationship with the Lord is fractured. That itself is more important than the impact of sickness and is the real motivation to get well again.

### **Waking the Dead.**

Part 16. *Mar 5:38 And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. Mar 5:39 And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*

Read *Mat 9 v 18 – 26, Mark 5 v 21 – 43, Luke 8 v 40 – 56.*

Have you noticed how many obituaries start with the words “it is with great sorrow that we announce the death of...so and so”? Obits are the Facebook of death, the last entry in the log of life’s journey, the final Tweet. Some use it for a final kick at society, like this one on Theodore Roosevelt Heller, “88, loving father of Charles (Joann) Heller; dear brother of the late Sonya Steinberg. Ted was discharged from the U.S. Army during WWII due to service related injuries, and

then forced his way back into the Illinois National Guard insisting no one tells him when to serve his country. Graveside services Tuesday 11 a.m. at Waldheim Jewish Cemetery (Ziditshover section), 1700 S. Harlem Ave., Chicago. **In lieu of flowers, please send acerbic letters to Republicans”.**

It is surprising how much you can learn about someone in so short a space of copy, like this person. Dolares Aguilar’s passing was it seems, a relief to her family. (Times-Herald Napa/Sonoma paper): “Dolores had no hobbies, made no contribution to society and rarely shared a kind word or deed in her life. I speak for the majority of her family when I say her presence will not be missed by many, very few tears will be shed and there will be no lamenting over her passing... There will be no service, no prayers and no closure for the family she spent a lifetime tearing apart.” Perhaps there is a lesson here to write your own obit and not leave it to others.

What would you want written for your obituary? I would want something to the effect that “Free at last, Mike Winnett has gladly departed this present evil world to join forever with His Lord in heaven;-)”. For some death seems to be a relief, for others it creates a huge emotional scar that will never heal. Tony Benn, the late politician, expressed his grief, “I thought of Caroline. Where is she? Her body, which I loved and knew so well, was taken away and burned, and she's not there, and all the things I should have done for her, all the time I should have given to her, I didn't give. I think she was happy, but I'll never ever see her again till the day I die, and after that, who knows? Death is such a final thing. It hits you sometimes and its hit me today in a terrible way.”

Death is never welcome and can never come at a convenient time and that is why people strive for those extra hours and years of life. If only they could obtain healing for the sick then death is held at bay. Jairus the synagogue elder comes running to Jesus having seen his daughter’s fatal illness and passing. The crowd swells behind them as they press, push and shove in the narrow streets towards Jairus’ house, when another event takes place. In the middle of this melee someone grabs Jesus’ clothes. In that instant He feels power (virtue) drain from Him. It is as if someone has connected the jump leads of life to His Divine Glory.

The disciples cannot understand this. You want to know “Who” touched you when the whole crowd is touching you? There was a difference in the touch. There were those touches that were accidental and those touches that were deliberate and Jesus knew that this touch was deliberate. In fact it was the touch of faith. *Mar 5:34 And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.* Her faith had as its object Jesus. Faith is never blind, it doesn’t grope around in the darkness trying to find something to cling to. Faith works objectively in the light. Faith seeks out targets. *Mat 9:20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched **the hem** of his garment.*

The word “hem” in the NT is the same as the word in the LXX for “borders” of the garment. *Num 15:38 Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: Num 15:39 And it shall be unto you for a fringe, **that ye may LOOK UPON IT, AND REMEMBER** all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that **ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes**, after which ye use to go a whoring: The Greek word rendered “blue” in the LXX is hyacinth.*

This statute was to teach the children of Israel to be obedient. Just as the phylactery was placed between the eyes to remind a person that they should view things that they saw, through the lens of God's word (a sort of divine eye filter), the hem or border was a reminder to walk in the boundary of God's law, to "**LOOK and REMEMBER**". The hyacinth border surrounded their feet as the law surrounded their life. It is this that the woman grasps.

I have no doubt that there were many Jews who decided that this teaching about "hems" was out of date and that in an enlightened age it was meant to merely illustrate a principle and that it was not meant to be a literal observation. Well, we all saw what happened to those who did not sprinkle the blood on the post and lintel at the first Passover. It is not unlike those women today who do not cover their hair in prayer. They say, that in this, their enlightened day and in the opinion of their church, it was a practice of another age and culture. Yet God's outward observances are given because He knows best that we soon forget the teaching and we need practical reminders. The Jews were told to "**LOOK and REMEMBER**". Each time that ancient Jew walked the streets of their town and they looked down at the flapping hyacinth border of their coat in which their dusty feet moved, it would remind them of the commandments and with that their duty

We might in passing also note that these observances serve not just the people who have the blue hem in their garment or the covering of the hair. It is not simply limited to those who obey the ordinance. It is a rebuke to those who refuse the observance. Those who in ignorance or rebellion refused to obey the command. It also serves as a reminder to others of our responsibilities and duties to God. The hem would signal to those who were of a like mind and remind us who we should be walking with in life. It would say, these are your friends, these are your people and those who do not have the hem are no friend of God, so why are they your companions? The hair covering likewise reminds the husband of his duty to lead and be worthy of the respect shown by his wife and to the angels, the ministering spirits.

We learn of this woman who reaches out to Jesus, *Luk 8:43 And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any.* There are some things that cannot be healed by doctors because they have a spiritual cause. As the woman bends to touch the symbol of the law in Jesus' garment, she draws out virtue or power. No longer in her own strength she is made strong by the Creator Himself. *Rom 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*

Is this a lesson for Christians? You go to Church each week but when it comes to being healed, the first thing you do is go to a doctor rather than your Creator? *2Ch 16:12 And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians.* I am sure if we did not live in a Welfare State, we would be much more tuned in to seeking our God for help rather than physicians. Is this a reflection of our world view, that separates the spiritual and physical? It is quite clear in the scripture that there are often links between the two when it comes to sickness as we have seen.

On the road with Jairus, we have already been challenged about healing and our attitude to it. As we approach his house we receive another challenge. It is too late, the sounds of wailing and weeping meet our ears. Death has beaten us to the door and claimed another soul, but Jesus walks on, *Mar 5:39 And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is*

*not dead, but sleepeth.* Sleepeth? How hard these words must have seemed? No wonder they laughed Him to scorn. How insensitive to grief, how unkind to create false hope and how brazen to continue into the house? If only we could see things as Jesus saw them?

Jesus had not yet experienced death for Himself but was familiar with its effects. He also had something else that we should pay heed to. He saw through the veil of life. We use an expression “to see through people”. It means that we are not distracted or confused by what is presented to our eyes but rather, see through what is before us to the real state of things. We need Jesus world view to see through things.

I do not believe that the scripture puts words into the text for no reason. As far as the healing of the two women goes, it adds nothing to the miracle to know the age of the girl or how long the woman had an issue of blood. The girl could be 10 years old and the woman with an issue for 16 years. The healing miracle stands without any of this information, so why include it? I think that there is a deeper meaning to this miracle. You may think that I am being fanciful but bear with me.

We learn here, that the very year Jairus celebrated the birth of his only child, the woman began to suffer bleeding. *Luk 8:42 For he had one only daughter, **about twelve years of age**, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him. Luk 8:43 And a woman having an **issue of blood twelve years**, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any.* One person had rejoicing those twelve years earlier and for the other it was the start of sorrow and separation. The woman with the issue of blood would have been an outcast from the congregation of Israel, little different from a leper. The two women are connected by a strange providence that brings them together on the same day by miracles that will glorify Christ through the ages. Their lives merge and it is this confluence that leads me to see more here than just healing.

Let us ask what the woman had been suffering with? What sort of issue of blood was it for there are many types of issue? I think it was a menstruous flow. The words used in Luke’s gospel are the same as those used in Leviticus (LXX). *Luk 8:43 και γυνη ουσα εν ρυσει αιματος Lev 15:25 Καὶ γυνή, ἐὰν ῥέῃ ῥύσει αἵματος LXX.* Lev 15:25 And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation.

The law concerning menstruation states that *Lev 15:19 And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: Lev 15:19 "When a woman has her monthly period, she will be unclean for seven days. Those who touch her will be unclean until evening.* GW. The modern translation brings it out better. If that flow of blood continues, then so does her separation. *Lev 15:25 And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean.* The woman that touches Jesus was ritually unclean. In touching Jesus, she knew that it would also defile Him. Perhaps that is why she is so reticent to come forward?

I think that this woman is stands as an allegory for the Older Covenant, the Nation of Israel which is described as a menstruous woman in Lamentations. *Lam 1:17 Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her: the LORD hath commanded concerning Jacob, that his adversaries should be round about him: Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them.* Israel was in need of

cleansing and it is only by coming to the Messiah that she can ever be cleansed. She needs atonement. *Lev 15:29 And on the eighth day she shall take unto her two turtles, or two young pigeons, and bring them unto the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. Lev 15:30 And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering; and **the priest shall make an atonement for her before the LORD for the issue of her uncleanness.*** We see in a figure, Israel cleansed and Israel raised.

Another human attitude to healing is revealed in Matthew's account. *Mat 9:24 He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.* They derided Jesus because He said that the girl wasn't really dead, she was asleep. It is clear that these people have no idea as to what happens when a person dies and to what state they exist in. The NT uses the word "sleep" to describe death. *1Co 11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 1Co\_15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. Joh 11:11 These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.* Jesus wakens the dead.

Texts like these have led to the idea of "soul sleep" (believed by Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, Seventh-day Adventists) which is the idea that we are unconscious in death until the final resurrection. I think that the term sleep is used for a number of reasons. It shows that the deceased continues to exist, that to us, this side of eternity, the person appears to be asleep but they are not annihilated and especially that they are at rest. The term sleep, as far as I can tell is only applied to believers not unbelievers.

What happens to these people on the other side of life, in eternity, even though they appear to be asleep to us? They are consciously with their Lord. *Luk 9:30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Luk 9:31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.* The story of the rich man and Lazarus is another example of consciousness after life in what is called the intermediate state, the state between physical death and resurrection.

I think that the nicest part of this story is that when Jairus' daughter is woken up, she is holding Jesus hand. What a thought that is. I pray that is true for all Christians, that when they close their eyes in death and fall asleep in Jesus, they open them looking at Jesus holding His hand. *Mat 9:25 But when the people were put forth, he went in, and **took her by the hand**, and the maid arose.* Amen!

### Religious paternity

Part 17. *Joh 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. Read John 8 v 21 – 59.*

The subject of demons is not often spoken of in polite society and those who do are considered to be slightly mad. Yet one of the greatest lies of the age is that satan does not exist; that he and his cohort of devils are a figment of the imagination and a symbol, rather than a person. As for the Jews in our story, Jesus says in our text that they are the children of devil, because they too are murderers and liars. In Jesus world, devils are only too real as are the effects of their presence.

The story of the possessed man in Gadara is instructive. *Mar 5:2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and **no man could bind him**, no, not with chains: Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains **had been plucked asunder by him**, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man **tame him** And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, **crying, and cutting himself** with stones. The man as we see was possessed by multiple demons *Mar 5:9 ... My name is Legion: for we are many.* A regiment of devils.*

The consequences of possession were that the man had unusual strength, he self harmed, cutting himself with stones, he cried out in his torment and he was untameable. He is probably at the extreme of possession because there were so many devils in him. *Mar 5:6 The man saw Jesus at a distance. So he ran to Jesus, bowed down in front of him, and shouted, "Why are you bothering me now, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me."* GW. The demoniac recognises Jesus as the son of the Most High God. Strange that the mass of humanity who are of satan do not, *Eph 2:2 ... the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:* they are unable to make this acknowledgement. They are devils in denial.

It would seem that devils, having no corporeal nature, take over the human body so that they can exercise their destructive powers. *Act 19:13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? **And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.*** I suppose that if they killed a person they possessed, they could move on to the next person or animal.

In dealing with these devils Jesus simply commands that they leave the man. There is no ritual, candles, crosses, incantations or ceremonies. It is a straight command. Notice also that Jesus does not destroy them or permanently contain them from their evil works. They are cast out into the swine but they are free to continue their progress. The manner with which Jesus controls devils is almost casual. *Mar 7:26 The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. Mar 7:27 But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. Mar 7:28 And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. Mar 7:29 And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; **the devil is gone out of thy daughter.*** Healing at a distance, without a verbal command with almost a casual side comment. Is this all part of the mystery of iniquity? *2Th 2:7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work:*

Evil spirits wander the world seeking to enter and corrupt mankind, looking for a host to destroy. *Mat 12:43 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none, Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and **the last state of that man is worse than the first.** Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.* The implication is that the purpose of the unclean spirit is to defile men to the uttermost and the working of this evil will continue unabated until the final judgement *Rev 20:10 And **the devil that deceived them** was cast*

*into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

With such evident power over devils, why does Jesus not rid the world of them in one go? They have a purpose to fulfil in the chastisement of sin. Of course there are those who try to isolate the Sovereign God from evil as if it acts outside of His command. He doesn't. He creates evil and it is the same word used in Genesis for the creation of the heavens and earth. *Isa 45:6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. Isa 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and **create evil**: I the LORD do all these things.* That does not make God evil, it confirms Him as Sovereign Creator.

**God uses evil and on occasion encourages its use.** *Jdg 9:23 Then **God sent an evil spirit** between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: 1Ki 22:20 And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. 1Ki 22:21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. 1Ki 22:22 And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: **go forth, and do so** 2Co 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, **there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.** The church likewise uses the evil one. 1Co 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Satan serves the Creator.*

Jesus is one who clearly sees the workings of devils and He strips back the veil to show their deeds. They obey His commands and do His bidding as a tool of chastisement. Paul also has as part of his gospel ministry saving souls from satan's power. *Act 26:17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and **from the power of satan unto God**, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.* As long as this world exists, the battle between satan and the Creator will continue and that is as real today as it was in Jesus' day.

The Jews Jesus addresses with this hard saying about their paternity were religious men. *Joh 8:41 Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; **we have one Father, even God.** Jesus said unto them, **If God were your Father, ye would love me:** for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.* What is said to these religious Jews applies to all men who do not love Jesus. They are not God's sons, they are satan's sons. They not only hated Jesus but they were active in encouraging others to hate Jesus.

You may create a world view that sees all men as the same, essentially good. Some having a religious interest but no better than others, in a world in which there is a universal good and a god that accepts everyone at face value. That is not Jesus' world. The other day, I read that a cemetery in Germany was making an area available for lesbians so that they could be together in eternity. People do not spend eternity together in cemeteries; they spend it together in heaven or hell. They do so because of their paternity.

The Christian should take time to understand the nature of our relationship with evil. It is as we well know, an ongoing battle. That battle will be fought hardest in the churches. Why? If satan can infiltrate the church, he will undermine the faith and strength of the believer. This will also lead to a perversion of the gospel that will be so diluted and twisted that it will save no one. Four of the Seven Churches of Revelation have some connection to satanic influence (Smyrna Rev 2 v 9, Pergamos Rev 2 v 13, Thyatira Rev 2 v 24 and Philadelphia 3 v 9). They are under attack in some way from the powers of darkness. We issue a warning to the churches, "Watch carefully for the evil amongst you".

*Act 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also **of your own selves shall men arise**, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*

*2Co 11:13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if **his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness**; whose end shall be according to their works.*

*Jud 1:4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, **who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men**, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*1Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. **They went out from us, but they were not of us**; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

How can we discern between true and false ministers? *1Jn 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*

John Gill exegetes this verse well.

"... every doctrine which carries this truth in it; or every man that owns, and professes, and publishes this doctrine concerning Christ, is on the side of God and truth; and which contains several articles in it, **respecting the person and office of Christ**; as that he existed before he came in the flesh, not in the human nature, or as man, or as an angel, but as the Son of God, as a divine person, being truly and properly God; so that this confession takes in his divine sonship, and proper deity, and also his true and real humanity; that the Messiah was incarnate, against the Jews, and was God and man in one person; and that he was really man, and not in appearance only, against the heretics of those times: and it also includes his offices, as that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Messiah, which the Jews denied, and that he was the anointed prophet, priest, and King; and so is a confession or acknowledgment of all the doctrines of the Gospel, which came by him, as a prophet; and of



his satisfaction, sacrifice, and intercession, as a priest; and of all his ordinances and commands as a King; and that he is the only Saviour and Redeemer of men.”

In 2007, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, “has described the Christmas story of the three wise men as nothing but a “legend”, and says not all followers must believe in the virgin birth of Jesus.” He has also condemned the teaching of biblical creation in schools. Out of his own mouth, Williams is convicted as antichrist. By his example and words, he undermined and destroyed the scripture. If you believe Williams and deny that he was satan’s mouthpiece you have fallen into the same deception as the Jews that Jesus is speaking to.

In this confrontation with the Jews, Jesus goes on to say this. *Joh 8:47 He that is of God **heareth God's words**: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.* The children of the devil are deaf to the voice of God. The consequence of this deafness is that they cannot believe or DO the word of God because they do not hear the word of God. People like Williams may pride themselves on their intellect, but that is useless when it comes to hearing God. *1Co 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.*

Are we going to hold to the words of Jesus or are we going to be swayed by the devil’s children who adorn themselves in their own self importance and teach contrary to the sayings of Jesus? The devil will in every sphere of knowledge undermine the truth of God. Earlier in the chapter that we are looking at (John 8) we saw the woman taken in adultery. Yes, just a woman committing adultery by herself without a man? The devil was seen to be involved in half truths and deceit poisoning the minds of men, so that ultimately they die in their sins.

What would Jesus say to this generation? I think that He would say little different. We know that most religious leaders would reject Him. How do I know this? It is because they spread lies about Him already. Lies about His incarnation, lies about His life, lies about His paternity, lies about His death and resurrection, lies about His gospel, lies about His salvation, lies about His eternal punishment, lies about how He wants us to live. Lie after lie. And perhaps the biggest lie is that they cannot see that they are lead by the devil and that their father is the devil. Make no mistake. Whenever or wherever you hear lies about Christ, you are not hearing them from a son of Abraham. You are hearing them from a son whose father is the devil.

### **God’s hierarchy of needs**

Part 18. Luk 9:59 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Luk 9:60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. Luk 9:61 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. Luk 9:62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. Also Mat 8 v 19 – 22.

You cannot plough a straight furrow by looking at where you came from, by looking over your shoulder all the time but only by looking forward to the end of the field. The affectionate, lingering backward glimpses of this life do not sit kindly in the mind of Jesus. It is a hard saying but it makes it easy for us to judge whether we are fit (well placed) for the kingdom. Don’t waste your time if you are not totally committed because that fitness for the kingdom is based upon where our priorities lie.

Jesus questions our priorities. What may seem important to us is not as important to Him. What should a Christian's priorities be in life? I think that they will vary between individuals but there will be some commonalities. Abraham Maslow developed a theory of needs in which he gives his ideas on human motivation, what drives us. "The hierarchy of needs". It's basically a pyramid-shaped model showing that human beings are motivated by different factors at different times. Some issues take precedence over others. It is often used in management training and development, I suspect, because it is aimed to advance the company needs by getting people more goal oriented.



Using Maslow's research, some behaviour management programs teach that the purpose of aggressive behaviour is to meet our unmet needs, or to draw attention to unmet needs. Caregivers are told to zealously make sure the needs of individuals served are getting met, in an effort to minimize their negative behaviour. It's a form of demand management where the spoiled child gets what they want (rather than what they need). Some individuals who have their needs met and have almost ideal environments still do terrible things. Why? Because we have hearts that are naturally inclined to selfishness. As the movie character Gordon Gecko said, "greed is good" and so we find human goals driven to realise selfish ambition.

Maslow suggested that there are six different levels of motivation (needs), with physical survival and safety needs at the bottom, then rising up through layers of social needs (affiliation, personal esteem), then on to the higher needs known as self-actualization and self-transcendence. It refers to the desire for self-fulfilment, the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming. Its about me and self as the most important thing.

Unfulfilled lower needs then, take precedence over higher needs. I recall someone once describing this to me in very basic (crude?) terms. He said that, "in Victorian England, starving wretches were not particularly concerned about the quality of their orgasms". In other words, there are some basic needs that override other things. However, Maslow is all about self, me, what I need to achieve my goals. This is what Maslow says about the hierarchy of needs; "if I may assign arbitrary (sic) figures for the sake of illustration, it is as if the average citizen is satisfied perhaps 85% in his physiological needs, 70% in his safety needs, 50% in his love needs, 40% in his self-esteem needs and 10% in his self-actualization needs" (Maslow, 1943, pp. 388-389). Maslow did not himself illustrate this with a pyramid diagram, others did. So if we were to draw a diagram to represent Maslow's hierarchy, the physiological and biological needs would require a much bigger piece of the pyramid.

How did Maslow work out this scheme? Maslow studied what he called exemplary people such as Albert Einstein, Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Frederick Douglass rather than mentally ill or neurotic people, writing that "the study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy." Maslow studied the healthiest 1% of the college student population. In other words it was a hugely biased sample, not describing the needs of humanity as a whole but rather an elite few. It is not far from the Nazi aim of defining the master race from some predetermined Arian characteristics and then condemning the rest as sub-human. You get the gist. Maslow is defining what he thinks should be normal. This is not science it is an idea struggling for breath, grasping at any straw to make it believable. It is falsehood.

Not surprisingly, Maslow is anti-Christ. He says himself, "To spell out only one implication here, these propositions affirm the existence of the highest values within human nature itself, to be discovered there. This is in sharp contradiction to the older and more customary beliefs that the highest values can come only from a supernatural God, or from some other source outside human nature itself". Maslow offers the unregenerate man a "pseudo-scientific" validation for the worship of the creature in place of the Creator. This belief implies that people are inherently good and has infiltrated the world of behavioural psychology. The world will encourage the Maslow approach in opposition to God's approach. Maslow's morality is left to the end and is the tip of the needs. This is how many "Christians" approach life, morality is a final consideration and the end justified by the means. Life is all about my needs.

Maslow's view is based upon a biased sample of fallen humanity and as one might expect, it is diametrically opposed to the word of God. Maslow starts with physiological needs (food, water etc) but God starts with something else. *Mat 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? Mat 6:32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Mat 6:33 But seek ye **FIRST** the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things **SHALL BE ADDED** unto you.* The kingdom of God, which we have observed before, is, compared to the world an upside down kingdom. The priority is morality and acceptance of God's facts.



In other words, to become what we should be, to become 'self actualised', to realise our full potential, is not the end point or goal, **it is the starting point**. It is the starting point because we cannot aspire to morality while we are in a state of sin and separation from God. We need fixing at the start because we do not function as we were created to. Seeking the kingdom is the act of discipleship, the walk of the Christian life, the commitment to Jesus as Lord. The next needs for the Christian are prioritised under two heads, *Luk 10:27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. Luk 10:28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.* Life is based upon the esteem of God and then the esteem of neighbours and this when applied issues in personal salvation.

Have you noticed how often the way that this evil world does things is an inversion of the Kingdom of God. Satan does not try to erase truth, he perverts it. For example, the temptations of Christ follow Maslow's basic ideas or perhaps we should say, **Maslow follows satan's ideals**. *Mat 4:3 If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. (Physiological needs) Mat 4:6 If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. (Safety and security) Mat 4:8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; Mat 4:9 All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. (Self actualisation).*

I will make a serious suggestion, that any system of human behavioural change, psychoanalysis, schemes which create dependency (lifestyle management, social worker inputs etc), personality

tests, programmes that control your life, stress management, depression prevention, be scrutinised carefully against the word of God. There are hosts of so called 'professionals' in jobs that never existed 100 years ago, all are taking over our lives to "improve" them. Let's look at one example.

I do not have time to be exhaustive here but I recommend Dr E S William's book on the "Darker side of Christian counselling" to open up this strange world. I will just mention Sigmund Freud. Freud set out to show that experiences, actions, and thoughts of everyday life were determined not by our conscious rationality but by irrational forces outside our conscious life (we would call this the devil). Freud believed that these forces could only be properly understood and controlled (where necessary) by an extensive treatment process which he called psychoanalysis. The aim of psychotherapy is to delve into the "unconscious" (whatever that is) in order to offer a way of escape from the murky waters that lie deeply hidden within us. Freud had a weird upbringing and a leaning to the occult and that to some extent coloured his thinking and ideas, which are wacky in the extreme.

For example Freud made the claim that girls suffer "penis envy". According to Freud, girls are dismayed to discover their genital inferiority to boys, and long to acquire a penis, first by sexually desiring their fathers and then by wishing for children, especially sons, who bring the coveted penis with them. He described an Oedipus complex in people, which made them see children as sexual beings. Boys concentrate their sexual wishes on their mothers and develop hostile impulses against their father as a rival and girls vice versa. Freud is justifying incest and paedophilia as natural activities. None of this of course has any scientific basis. It is not based upon a testable hypothesis and therein lays the problem. It is not science it is "magic".

Religion, Freud believed, was an expression of underlying psychological neuroses and distress. At various points in his writings, he suggested that religion was an attempt to control the Oedipal complex, a means of giving structure to social groups, wish fulfilment, an infantile delusion, and an attempt to control the outside world. Quote: "Religion is an attempt to get control over the sensory world, in which we are placed, by means of the wish-world, which we have developed inside us as a result of biological and psychological necessities. If one attempts to assign to religion its place in man's evolution, it seems not so much to be a lasting acquisition, as a parallel to the neurosis which the civilized individual must pass through on his way from childhood to maturity." **Religion in other words is a mental illness in Freudian thinking.** This a Darwinian view of man. Sadly, this pseudo science has entered many churches under the guise of Christian counselling and the reality is, that it is a way of avoiding confronting the word of God<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> National Institute for Mental Health By Thomas Insel MD on April 29, 2013.

In a few weeks, the American Psychiatric Association will release its new edition of the **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)**. This volume will tweak several current diagnostic categories, from autism spectrum disorders to mood disorders. While many of these changes have been contentious, the final product involves mostly modest alterations of the previous edition, based on new insights emerging from research since 1990 when DSM-IV was published.

The goal of this new manual, as with all previous editions, is to provide a common language for describing psychopathology. While DSM has been described as a "Bible" for the field, it is, at best, a dictionary, **creating a set of labels** and defining each. The strength of each of the editions of DSM has been "reliability" – each edition has ensured that **clinicians use the same terms in the same ways**. The weakness is its **lack of validity**.

I have come to the opinion that there are two major causes of problems in people's lives and where there are problems, we need to ask two questions.

**1. Does the individual have a personal relationship with Christ as their Saviour?**

**2. Is the individual walking in the light with Christ?**

If the first does not exist then the person is not a Christian and if the second does not exist they are not walking as a Christian. Christ renews the sinful mind, removes sinful disposition, guides the mind, directs our lives and gives us godly goals. The idea that some 'psychobabble' will cure a sinner is a denial of the atoning death of Christ and His healing power. It is only an attempt to justify sinful behaviour or the consequences of sin and wallow in self pity and dependency. Godless solutions to the plight of humanity create godless priorities,

The devil lives in a world of lies and makebelieve that he successfully markets to the sons of men because they are blind to the truth. When Moses went to receive the 10 commands and delayed to return, the people demanded a new God. The sad thing is that the high priest decided to help them out and make one for them. Now notice this about this man made God. It is evolutionary in origin. *Exo 32:23 They said to me, 'We don't know what's happened to this Moses who brought us out of Egypt. Make gods for us. They will lead us.'* *Exo 32:24 So I told them to take off any gold they were wearing. They gave it to me. I threw it into the fire, and **out came this calf!**"* GW. Just like that, without any intelligent design or application, it appeared. This is how men sell lies. To avoid the truth they invent a myth. They look for ways and means to live life without God and without responsibility for their actions to their Creator.

I believe that our age is marked by universal deceit and truth is in short supply. George Orwell said, "In a time of universal deceit - telling the truth is a revolutionary act." I think that we shall move into the age where honesty, truth telling and challenging the myths of society will be punishable offences and such people will be classes as mentally unstable. That would have been Freud's goal.

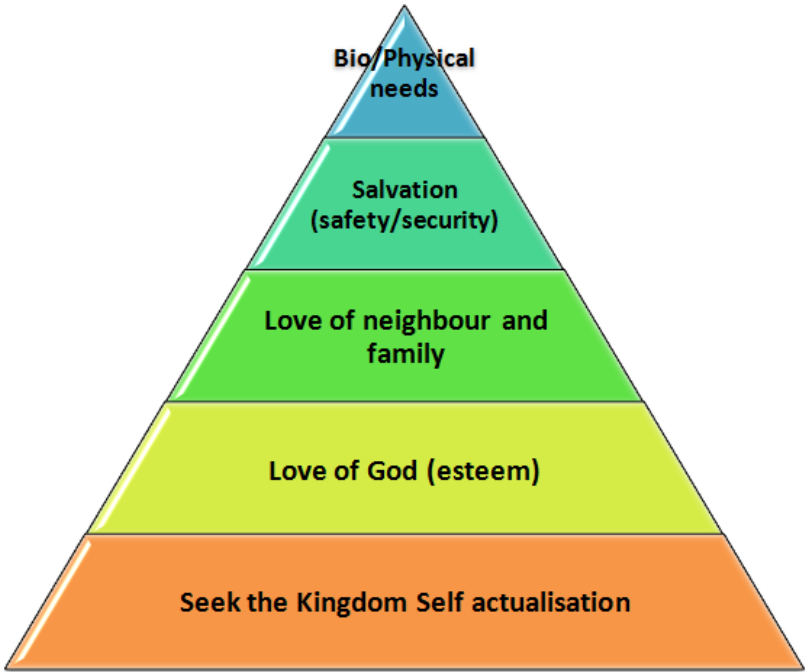
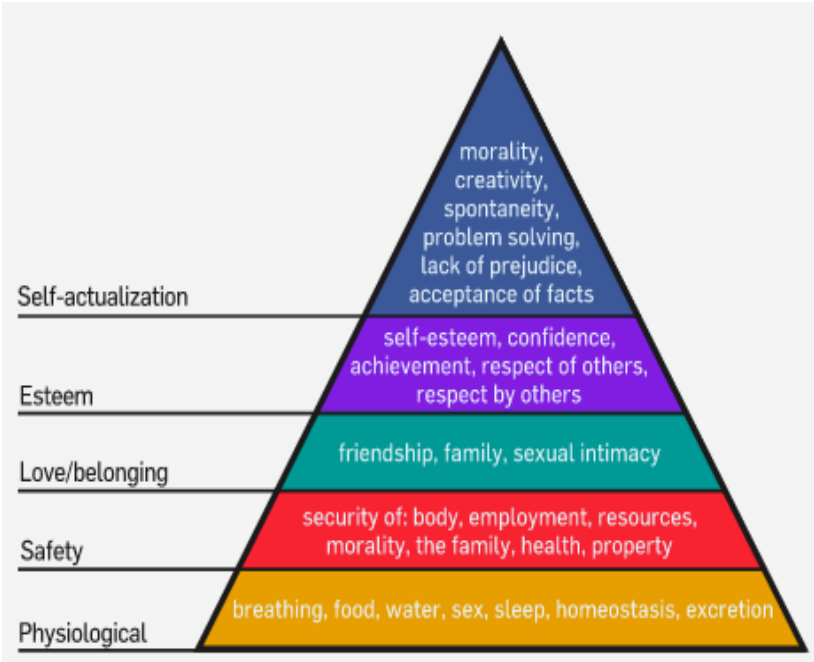
A life lived with God is a life of discipleship. It is a life directed by God not men or man's philosophy. The verses before us are dealing with discipleship. We are being shown what happens if discipleship is a priority. We are looking at people who want to follow Christ and serve Christ and how commonplace issues can get in the way. How easily we can be sidetracked from our duty, how we can be distracted by the mundane, how we can make excuses to avoid immediate action, how we might be able to do more, give more, study more, pray more, commit more, if only we didn't have all the daily chores of life to do. We say to ourselves, eventually, when I retire, I will give more time for these things but that also is a deception because if it never was, it never will be a priority.

---

Unlike our definitions of ischemic heart disease, lymphoma, or AIDS, the DSM diagnoses are based on a **consensus about clusters of clinical symptoms, not any objective laboratory measure**. In the rest of medicine, this would be equivalent to creating diagnostic systems based on the nature of chest pain or the quality of fever. Indeed, symptom-based diagnosis, once common in other areas of medicine, has been largely replaced in the past half century as we have understood that symptoms alone rarely indicate the best choice of treatment.

Patients with mental disorders deserve better. NIMH has launched the Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) project to transform diagnosis by incorporating genetics, imaging, cognitive science, and other levels of information to lay the foundation for a new classification system.

We have manufactured a whole industry whose aim is to make us dependent on their services and we gladly welcome them as an alternative to confronting life's issues with God. Maslow probably describes fairly accurately how most of us prioritise our lives. By the time we get around to the spiritual duties, having spent so much time like Martha, "cumbered about much serving" the things of this life, we have little energy or drive for the things of God. We are in this state because we did not prioritise our lives with God first. If we do not start our day with Jesus, we will hardly be likely to finish the day with Jesus. All He gets is the scraps of our life, the dog ends of our time and a sleepy prayer at the end of another day lived for self. To those Jesus says, **"You are not fit for the Kingdom"**.



## Wash before YOU worship?

Part 19. Joh 4:21 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Joh 4:22 Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. Joh 4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. Joh 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

The Samaritan woman has come to Jacob's well to collect water. This was on the land that Jacob had given to his beloved son Joseph, *Joh 4:5 Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph*, and close to where his mummified body was interred after the Israelites entered the promised land. It is said the water is of good quality because it is fed from springs, "living water". It is to the North West of Mt Gerizim, from where the blessings of God were pronounced upon the land (*Deut 27:12*). The Samaritans still hold the annual Passover on Mt Gerazim.



The question arises as to "where" people should worship. This is still a question for many today, because they do not see that worship is not about the "where", it is about "how" and "who" we should worship. Firstly, though, let us try and define worship. Worship (Προσκυνέω *proskuneō*) comes from a root meaning to kiss, like a dog (dog = *kunos*, whence the word *cynic* = dog like) licking his master's hand; to prostrate oneself in homage and worship. It is submission to the greater person *Gen 19:1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;*

It can also be an act of obedience and sacrifice *Gen 22:5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. Gen 22:6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.* In its highest manifestation it becomes the unique allegiance and service to the Creator. *Exo 34:14 For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:* The way that we worship is a compass of the heart. It shows where our lives are directed and the path upon which we travel.

**"How" we worship is important.** There are aspects of worship wherein we have freedom, such as what we give to the Lord (He loves cheerful givers), what psalms we would choose to praise Him, the promises we might make *Deu 23:23 That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth.* Other aspects of worship are prescribed by God. Let us look at one from the OT. It is a warning from History.

It is a story about two of Aaron the High priest's sons, Nadab and Abihu. Now I want to make a point that because something awful happened to these men, it should not be assumed that they were inherently wicked people and that they deliberately set out to upset the Lord. I think that alcohol played a part, because this warning occurs in the narrative, *Lev 10:9 Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it*

*shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations:* That said, I do not see that we must view this event as a drunken prank, rather an ill judged act of worship.

Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus chapter 10) decided to offer incense to the Lord. They had probably done it many times. Incense was I believe, symbolic of the fragrance of the Spirit that accompanies the prayers of the saints to God. *Rom 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Rev 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.*

As part of that prayer ritual it commands, *Lev 16:12 Then you will take a **fire pan of live coals from the bronze altar**, together with two handfuls of finely ground incense, into the most holy place.* If you went into the presence of God, the incense must be lit from the flames of the sacrificial altar. Typically, this suggests that prayer is invalid if it is not accompanied by the blood of Christ. The blood sacrifice validates the prayer and admits the petitioner into the presence of God. It is the advocacy of the OT. Why should God accept prayers when they fail to obey the prayer process? This is just what happens to these young men. They knew the rules and they broke the rules.

They offered "strange" or alien fire. *Lev 10:1 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and **offered strange fire** before the LORD, which he commanded them not.* This unauthorized fire created an immediate response. *Lev 10:2 A fire flashed from the LORD and burned them, and they died in the presence of the LORD.* GW. This "strange" fire came from some other source than the brazen altar and God threw His fire at the transgressors. The smouldering, smoking corpses were dragged out of the camp by relatives but Aaron and his other sons were forbidden to mourn. It is as if God says, "How dare you even think of mourning. These people who violated my Holiness are unworthy of remembrance".

Such a small thing you might say. Surely, flames are flames, they are just the results of combustion. Are they really that different? Does it matter what was lit, surely it was the attitude of heart and that these young men just wanted to serve? Well it did matter and their hearts were not right and it is a lesson to all who think that the Creator must accept what you offer even if it is offered incorrectly.

Forward to the NT. *1Co 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 1Co 11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* We have the same idea at work. The churches are full of Nadab's and Abihu's vying to offer strange fire to the Lord, changing the foundations of truth, rewriting the word's of God.

In the same chapter of Corinthians we are warned that prayer has its protocols. *1Co 11:5 Every woman who prays or speaks what God has revealed and has her head uncovered while she speaks dishonours the one who has authority over her. She is like the woman who has her head shaved.* GW. If such people by disobedience openly dishonour not just me but men, the angels and Christ, can we say that their prayers have any validity at all? I cannot see how they do. There are people who I would not accept prayers from, because to do so, would be for me to dishonour God by accepting that they were right to disobey God in the first place. Nadab and Abihu's prayers were worthless.



Our text warns us “**they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth**”. Some people are spiritually “thick” and it doesn’t matter what God says, they always manage to make something else of it. They have the uncanny ability to rewrite what they have heard and make a different story. King Saul was like this. He was given a very specific task, namely, to destroy Amalek and let nothing survive. Not a man, woman, child, ox, sheep or anything. Fairly straightforward you may have thought. Not for Saul. He can go one better than God. He can turn this Genocide into an act of worship. Saul thinks he can bring a heightened Glory to God out of this slaughter. Those things that God has utterly condemned, he thinks can be sanctified for worship (just as today the homosexualist community thinks that it is fit for service. No it is condemned).

Saul is a man who has his ups and downs in life. He came from a poor background and ascended to the throne of Israel and I think that he must have had moments of deep gratitude to the Lord. As his power increased, so did he in his own eyes and that relationship with the God of Israel became distorted. He became big in his own sight and that was his downfall. I do not think that Saul set out to deliberately annoy God. He is like many people who get an idea in their heart to surprise the Lord by a magnificent religious act. The magnitude of the deed itself would overwhelm the Lord’s anger, it would be seen as an act of worship not as an act of disobedience. How wrong he was.

*1Sa 15:13 And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: **I have performed the commandment of the LORD.** 1Sa 15:14 And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? 1Sa 15:15 And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. O the arrogance of the man. “I have carried out the Lord’s instructions”, he proudly announced to Samuel. Well, that marked the end of Saul’s kingship, the end of his relationship with God and his decline into the grave.*

You see, it clearly matters **how** we worship. Our best is worth nothing, if it is contradicting the express desires of God. *1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, **to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.** 1Sa 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*

If we were to ask why the churches are so ineffectual today, would we really think that it is because we are in rebellion against the word of God? We no longer worship as they did in the NT. Of course not and we would by that be exhibiting the same pride and ignorance as Saul. Does what we offer differ in any way from Saul’s offering. We have thrown out the worship of a gifted body of believers, Christians ministering to each other. We have substituted it with an orchestrated liturgy, professional musicians and a weekly religious show on Sunday. We do not believe the things that were given to us as precious truths and we have distorted them beyond recognition. I wonder if in the midst of the hymn singing, the Lord is asking, “*What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears*”. Baaaah!

**“Who” do we worship?** This is where it gets really interesting. It is where the word “God” passes through the sinful prism of the human heart and comes out the other side in a spectrum of different gods (Buddha, Allah, etc). In the heart of the believer, the pure light of God is **not** split into different concepts, it remains intact, unchanging from age to age, *Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.* The challenge for us is that our worship remains aligned towards the true God, not the one we make ourselves. *Jer 2:13 For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

We live in the age of the manufactured gods, broken cisterns that cannot be filled because they are full of holes. We have made us idols of the heart. *Eze 14:3 Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?* Martyn Lloyd Jones defined an idol as; "anything in our lives that occupies the place that should be occupied by God alone." "Anything that holds a controlling position in my life is an idol."

Perhaps that is just the place where we should always start worship? “Worship” starts with our confession of “Worthless”. Worthiness must start with our unworthiness. It is the place where we seek forgiveness from our idols. *Psa 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.* This is one of a number of Psalms known as Psalms of Confession (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). *Psa 38:4 For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. Psa 38:5 My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.*

*Psa 51:1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Psa 130:3 If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? Psa 130:4 But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. Psa 143:11 Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.*

I imagine that there are very few people who would sing a song about their sinfulness and their troubles and even fewer who would sing it in the congregation of God’s people. Can you imagine standing up in a meeting and singing about your failures? There are few who could even mumble a few words about their sin and certainly some who have never ever confessed to a fault. David goes one better and sets his confession to music taking it to new heights. How can he do this? I believe that he can do this because he knows that he is forgiven. The sin is gone and dealt with. It now becomes a matter of praise that these things can be dealt with and he doesn’t care who knows. He is living in the light of God and he is walking in it. He is worshipping in spirit and in truth.

It is only by getting sin out of the way that we can be in a position to worship in truth. That is why God had a laver made for the tabernacle. *Exo 30:20 When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD. **Don’t forget to wash before you worship.***

## A day with the Creator

Part 20. Luk 4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

I was caused to consider how the ancient Jews conducted weekly worship, if at all. Why have I called this a hard saying? I think that it is hard because we in the church have modelled a form of worship around what they think went on in the OT and NT but this lacks substance in reality. The two key words that we shall be exploring today are “Sabbath” and “Synagogue”.

There were seven festivals of the Jews. The **Passover**, followed immediately after by the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** lasting one week, during which time the Israelites ate no bread with yeast in remembrance of their haste in preparing for their exodus from Egypt. **The Feast of Firstfruits** took place at the beginning of the harvest and signified Israel’s gratitude to and dependence upon God. **The Feast of Weeks** (Pentecost) occurred 50 days after the Firstfruits festival and celebrated the end of the grain harvest. **The Feast of Trumpets** was commanded to be held on the first day of the seventh month and was to be a “day of trumpet blast” (Numbers 29:1) to commemorate the end of the agricultural and festival year. **The Day of Atonement** occurs just ten days after the Feast of Trumpets. **The Feast of Tabernacles** (Booths) is the seventh and final feast of the Lord and took place five days after the Day of Atonement.

These festivals were holy convocations, *Lev 23:4 These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.* They were periods when the nation of Israel celebrated the key events in their history. The Sabbath was another observation a convocation but not a feast, reminding them of the creation, *Exo 20:11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

The origin of the Hebrew word Sabbath is uncertain, but it seems to have derived from the verb *sabat*, meaning to stop, to cease, or to keep. The ancient Babylonian calendar, as seen from recently recovered inscriptions on the bricks among the ruins of the royal palace, was based on the division of time into weeks of seven days. The Sabbath is in these inscriptions designated *Sabattu* and was defined as "a day of rest for the heart" and "a day of completion of labour." *Exo 16:29 See, for that the LORD hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. Exo 16:29 Remember that I was the one who gave you the Sabbath. That's why on the sixth day I provide enough bread for two days. Everyone is to stay home and rest on the Sabbath."* GW.

The Jewish Sabbath was not a mad scramble to get up early, dress up, have a flustered journey to a meeting place miles away, a “hymn-athon” with songs somebody else chose, listen to someone reading the Bible and giving a talk for 20 minutes, have a quick collection, hear notices and rush home for lunch, after which the day is yours. Modern sabbatarians have lost all sense of what was originally intended to be a day of rest, not a day of meeting activities. There were no arrangements made for group meetings. The ancient Jew in his home would have had scant access to the written word of God. He would have access through what he had learned and remembered. He would have seen, like Solomon, the Creator’s hand in nature and yet despite these limitations, God would accept his observance and join in his day of rest.

Paul Kroll makes these penetrating observations.

“An interesting study is to look up the word "Sabbath" in a concordance, find all the Old Testament references and then read those passages to see how this day was kept "holy." The conclusion will be that rest from labour is what made the Sabbath sacred time, **not attendance at a worship service**. Most Israelites lived too far from the tabernacle to attend a worship service every Sabbath and there is no evidence in the Old Testament that they did. And the law did not allow them to assemble anywhere else for worship.

Nor do we find commands even for people near the Tabernacle that they had to gather for worship. The Sabbath was kept at home, by resting. There is no mention in Old Testament passages that attending a worship service on the Sabbath is a way of keeping this day holy. The way the Sabbath was sanctified, made holy or set apart as sacred was through physical rest from labour. All the Old Testament references to Sabbath observance in Israel speak to this point. There is no Old Testament theology of weekly Sabbath holiness that centres around attendance at "holy convocations.

It would be strange, then, to have one phrase in Leviticus 23:3 refer to a weekly worship service commanded for all Israel, and then claim that this was just as important as resting as a way to keep the Sabbath. It would be a mistake to assume such a teaching from a single and vague phrase in one verse when the entire witness of the Old Testament does not mention worship service attendance in conjunction with the Sabbath. There is no indication in Scripture of Israelites going to worship services of one kind or another in their local towns and villages. They could travel to worship services at the Tabernacle only for the annual festivals”

In modern Israel, the weekly day of rest, on Saturday, is marked with most spending the day together with family and friends. Public transport around the majority of the country is suspended (except in Haifa), businesses are closed, essential services are at skeleton staff strength, and furlough is granted to as many soldiers as possible. The secular majority take advantage of their weekly day of rest for leisure time at the seashore, places of entertainment and outdoor excursions. The observant devote many hours to festive family meals and services in synagogues, desist from travel and refrain from working or using appliances. It reminds me very much of how Sunday was kept when I was a child.

Moving on to the concept of the Synagogue we note that although the tabernacle and the temple were built according to God's instructions and were the place of His presence, the synagogue is generally considered the most central and the most enduring Jewish institution. Yet its origin is shrouded in mystery. **The synagogue is not mentioned in the Pentateuch**. We get the English “synagogue” by transliterating the Greek sunagoge, which means, “a bringing together”. In its earliest usage, sunagoge did not refer to a building or place of gathering, but rather to the group of people who were gathered together. The Greek word “synagogue” is used more than 200 times in the Septuagint for gatherings of people, but never for a building where people gathered. Later, as the buildings for gathering developed, Sunagogue became used of the “gathering place” as well as the people gathered, as has happened with the word Church.

We may speculate as to how this institution developed. It could have been set up in the exile where Jews had no religious platform in Babylon. It could have arisen as a result of the logistical need for the Jews to hear the law, since many were illiterate. It could have arisen because the Jews wanted to establish a base for their religion in the community. What is clear is that these buildings are not instituted by God and that even after the exile, the law was read in a public place. *Neh 8:3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. Neh 8:4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose;*

So far then, we have seen that weekly meetings under the OT, Sabbath days, took place in the home if anywhere, that there was no form of worship prescribed and that synagogues are not part of the designated system of worship under the law of Moses. You are not told how to “do” the Sabbath other than to keep it holy and do no servile work. It is a day apart to leave the world behind and enter into the rest of God. *Heb 4:10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. It is a day spent with God.*

Now let us go to our text, “**and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day**”. Clearly, going to a synagogue was not a breach of Sabbath law otherwise Jesus would not have attended. We note also that it was His custom (ethos) to do this. It was **His** custom but it does not make it obligatory on Jews. It does not say “He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as it was commanded in the law”. Legalities can be clearly stated as in this case *Mat 15:4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother:* which Jesus immediately sets in contrast to the Pharisaic tradition. It was then, His personal choice to go into a synagogue and that doesn’t necessarily set a precedent for others.

You were under no obligation from the law of the Lord to attend a synagogue and neither was Jesus. You broke no command by not going but you did break a command if you failed to honour the Sabbath and that carried the death penalty. Also, there is no evidence that Jesus attended every week. The question is, why did He go? If we look at the records of His attendance, it often controversial, confrontational and linked with healing. *Mat 12:10 And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? that they might accuse him.* The synagogue presented Jesus a communal opportunity to challenge the Jews about their religion, their beliefs and practices.

This is little different to the account in Acts where, *Act 16:13 And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.* The fact that it is a Sabbath day and people are praying does not mean that it is of significance to the Church as regarding belief or practice. That we should meet on a Sabbath or that we should have prayer meetings out of town by a river.

Christian worship is equally ill defined in the NT as Sabbath worship was in the OT. There is no statement that Christians have to go to a meeting on the first day of the week (Sunday) or that that should be a special day obligatory upon all Christians, it is unfounded in scripture. We have developed corporate worship around an institutional platform and in the process lost sight of that personal worship enshrined in the Sabbath. We may in many cases have replaced personal worship

with the corporate church meeting. The Jew spent 24 hours in his Sabbath with the Lord but I doubt if there are many Christians who spend even a fraction of that time in the presence of their Saviour in a month. Shame on us for our ingratitude and lovelessness that we find other things more attractive.

What then of our private, personal activities? Are we no longer obligated to spend time in God's presence because the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ? Are we now in such a good relationship with our Creator that we can spend less time with Him than they did under the law of Moses? That somehow we are so familiar with God and He is such an obvious part of our life that we can ignore His presence? Is not the principle of the Sabbath, the principle of getting to know the Creator in preparation for an eternity with Him? *Joh 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

I want to ask us a question. What would our religious practice consist of if Sunday meetings ceased to exist? Would our faith spin into a rapid decline or would we apply ourselves to private worship as the ancient Jews did on their Sabbath? This would of course be a reflection upon how we approached worship in the first place. If we currently make no preparation for worshipping together, it is most unlikely that we will make any preparation on our own. If our "spiritual" lives are sustained primarily through a Sunday meeting and little else in between, it indicates that our relationship with Christ, if I can call it that, has no real substance. We have developed a habitual form of worship.

We become no longer free standing Christians, we are dependents living off of a man made religious life support system. We become like those people queuing up for a free meal in the spiritual depression of our lives. We go to the religious soup kitchen every Sunday, not to take anything with us to share with others, not to strengthen the needy but to satisfy some need in us. **That is not fellowship that is dependency.** If someone kept coming around your house for free meals, never contributing to the table, it wouldn't be long before you started asking questions about what they were really interested in. We would ask what they did all week that they could not even find some crumbs of comfort to bring with them. There is something very wrong if you continually get more out of fellowship than you put in. I have little doubt that those who put more in would survive the removal of Sunday services and those who are weekly takers would not survive.

In an age where we have so many tools to develop our Christian lives, I am amazed at the lack of Biblical knowledge and understanding among people. It is obvious that they make little personal effort and if they have any interest it is fed from the pulpit rather than individual study. That is why Christians are so weak and weedy when it comes to defending the faith. Half don't know what to defend and the other half wouldn't know how to if they did. There is a verse which encourages us to, *Eph 6:11 Put on the panoply of God, that ye may be able to stand against the artifices of the devil:* Some versions use the term "whole armour".

I have said before that I believe that you make you armour and weapons and from what I see in the churches, there is not much of this going on. The Greek states had citizen armies. When they went out to battle as they did at Thermopylae against the Persian Xerxes, although far inferior in number, they were superior in strategy and weapons. Each Greek soldier had to provide his own weapons. The Spartans were brought up as fighters and it is suggested that when they went to Battle, the mother handed over the shield with the words "Come back with this shield or on it". The Greek

soldiers also provided their own weapons and these heavy infantry were called Hoplites. Hopla means arms or weapons, hence our word in Ephesians “panoplion”, all weapons.

Now if you knew that you were going to be lined up in the Greek Phalanx alongside your fellow soldiers, two things would become apparent to you. Firstly, you would appreciate the fact that you had invested in good equipment because you would pay the price of not having done this with your life. Secondly, you would owe it to your fellow soldiers to be able to hold your place in the line such that you would not be a weak link and a liability to them. When Paul brings before the Ephesians, who were of Greek origin, the images of the Greek Hoplites would be clearly understood. They would have seen that as soldiers of Christ, their weapons were not just defensive they were for the purpose of destroying the principalities and powers. No Christian is exempt that and that is why we cannot have passengers and tourists in the church army. We build that armour, those weapons, those strengths from the relationship that we have built with Christ. They are forged in the fire of Worship and Commitment.

Eternity with Christ will not be a pleasant prospect for those who can watch only for a few moments in the presence of God now. Do not confuse religious activities and gatherings as a substitute for our personal devotions. In Israel, there were only 7 organised religious events a year. Seven only. The rest of the time, religion was manifested by the way you lived your life in obedience to the law (how you walked) and your private times before the Lord. It was not a working week regularly punctuated by large meetings of believers. Is the NT to be any different? We are not told to hold regular formal meetings in large congregations. We are told to gather with believers to encourage one another. *Heb 10:25 We should not stop gathering together with other believers, as some of you are doing. Instead, we must continue to **encourage** each other even more as we see the day of the Lord coming. GW.*

Encapsulated in the word encourage are the concepts of exhortation, prayer, comfort amongst other things. This is talking about believers who meet for the purpose of strengthening each other, not sitting in rows to engage in a liturgy. It is about a body meeting to share its gifts to become stronger. It has no particular day of the week assigned to it and no particular geographic location (other than a home of a believer). Among those activities are the remembrance of Christ’s death at the Lord’s table and preparing God’s people for service in the Church. That is our corporate activity.

How long does it take to get to “know” someone? How many of you really know me? If you know anything about me, where did that knowledge come from? It didn’t just fall out of the air. If it came from what other people focused on in my life, is that a real picture? Or did you find out about me because you spent time with me, you talked with me, you watched me, you saw what I do, my interests and you spent time with me? Isn’t this what we should be doing with the Lord? We make time in our lives to get to know Him personally rather than just picking up on what others say about Him in meetings? We forge that relationship which He began in us. We visit Him more often, we talk more often with Him and as in that Synagogue in Nazareth, we let Him read the scriptures to us.

### **Hell fire and amputation**

Part 21. Mar 9:43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Mar 9:44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Mar 9:45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire

that never shall be quenched: Mar 9:46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Read Mat 18: 7 – 10, Mat 5: 27 - 31.

The message here is a warning that there are things in our lives that can consequentially land us in Hell. In some Muslim countries today, a thief will have his hand cut off as a punishment for his crime. It will certainly make it difficult for him to steal again. These verses though are not about other people punishing you but you punishing yourself. Are Christians to adopt this literally to inhibit their sinful urges. Is blindness the cure for the lust of the eyes if a man lusts after a woman (Mat 5:27)? Is the cure for gluttony cutting your throat? *Pro 23:2 And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.* This is surely one of the hardest sayings? It questions each of us about our sin. Are we sorry about it and **are we sorry enough to quit it?** How far would we go to deal with our sin?

I was told the other day, that if you leave the withered flower on the plant, that it will draw the strength from the plant and the other flowers will not develop. “Dead heading” allows the strength to flow into the new growth. It is possible that in our lives, there are things that need “dead heading” because they draw strength away from those vital areas of spiritual growth. The advice given by Jesus is, that it is better to amputate those life sapping things rather than risk hell and it is a stark warning to those who think that they can juggle eternal life and a worldly life safely. It is a warning that there are things in our lives which will drag us down, suck us into the vortex and deliver us to hell. There is too much at stake to lose if we do not clear the impediments from our lives. *Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every **weight**, and **the sin** which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

Let us define the word offend (σκανδαλίζω skandalizō). It is where we derive our word scandal. It has come to mean “public outrage” today but that wasn’t its original meaning. In middle English it meant ‘discredit to religion (by the reprehensible behaviour of a religious person)’, from the Greek skandalon a ‘snare, stumbling block’. The idea of a snare or “gin (**engine**) trap” suggests something that will catch you and hold you, possibly killing you in the end, if you are not released.

What Jesus is warning us about are those snares *Exo 34:12 Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for **a snare** in the midst of thee: Exo 34:13 But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves:* Those snares have two consequences. **1. They sever our fellowship with our Creator** **2. They consign us to hell.** You cannot live a Christian life that is mired in compromise and sin. You cannot enjoy the pleasures of sin while travelling the road to glory. They are mutually exclusive.

The nature of the snares varies. Some are quite obvious and others less obvious. We all use money but is it really a snare? *1Ti 6:9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and **a snare**, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. 1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* The snare is not the money, it is the love of the money, where the money becomes the chief friend and fuels “sensuous and foolish longings”. It can let you do things that you otherwise would not be able to do.



The rich ruler was hung up on riches. The best advice was to get rid of it, *Mar 10:21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.* Now he could have had pleasure in the use of those riches for the good of others but it is clear that he loved the abundance of his wealth *Mar 10:22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.* He was an example that you can do right for most of the time, yet be brought to nothing by one single failure. He obeyed the law up to a point; covetousness.

You are probably thinking, well, at what stage does something become a snare? Take for example alcohol. Wine is used throughout scripture, in the offerings and in celebrations. Jesus even turns water into wine (not wine into water). It was used to celebrate before the Lord, *Deu 14:25 Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: Deu 14:26 And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household.*

People have different capacities so it would be wrong to set a limit. I call this vector morality, “one glass good, two glasses bad”. That is not how it works, because the problem is not the wine, it is us and how we use it. So when does wine become a snare? Its when we become a drunkard and as we know, they do not go to heaven. It is a snare when it controls our life, it is our consuming passion, it dulls our senses, our behaviour becomes ungodly, we lose control of ourselves, we make the Gospel a laughingstock and we become a danger to others. I am sure that there are many other things as well but you get the point. It starts to take over our life and become a “god”.

A modern snare is pornography. I came across some frightening statistics the other day. 56% of divorce cases had one person who was hooked on porn. Porn is a 13 billion dollar industry and the US produces 89% of the world's pornographic web pages. The average age of initial porn exposure is 11 years old. More than 50% of porn Internet users report losing interest in sex with their partner, 40% of those who are sexually addicted lose their spouse, 58% suffer financial loss, 1/3 lose their jobs as a result of pornography addiction, severe clinical depression was reported twice as frequently among porn users as compared to non-porn users.

It is impacting religion: In a survey of over 500 Christian men at a men's retreat, over 90% admitted that they were feeling disconnected from God because lust, porn, or fantasy had gained a foothold in their lives. 51% of Pastors say Internet pornography is a possible temptation. 37% say it is a current struggle. 4 in 10 pastors have visited a porn website. Of those polled at a Promise Keepers event, 50% said they had checked out pornographic material within the past week. It is becoming a problem for the church and again we note that fornicators and adulterers don't get to heaven. *Mat 5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

Theft is another area where we can be snared. *1Co 6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* Now theft can take many forms. It can be taking something in a shop without paying for it, keeping property that someone has lost, failing to be honest when you get too much change, failing to put the hours in at work or just idling away

time and claiming pay, cheating on expenses, making false insurance claims, tax dodging etc. The greatest theft is when we rob God. *Mal 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Mal 3:9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.*

There is a principle here that transcends the Testaments. It relates to our service to God. Our failure to be giving not just of our substance but of our time. Well you say that's Older Testament, what do we do now? *Rev 2:19 I know what you (Thyatira) do. I know your love, faith, service, and endurance. I also know that what you are doing now is greater than what you did at first.* GW. Thyatira is a working church. Do you really think that their Christianity just consisted in rolling up to a Sunday service putting a few coins in a collection, singing some hymns and listening to a sermon? Do you really think that that is serving God? No, that's daylight robbery.

We have looked at some examples of snares that could be said to involve the eye (lust), the hand (theft), the mouth (alcohol) and I am sure we could think of other examples of how our members become involved in the commission of sin. What do we do about it? Is Jesus really saying that we should amputate those members involved in sin? For example should the person hooked on pornography blind himself? What do you think? Isn't that a bit extreme? Should a person snared by pornography undergo chemical castration to remove the lust? Should a person drawn to homosexuality castrate himself physically or chemically? You might answer that by reflecting just how desperate you are to get rid of the sin and get your life in line with Christ.

Jesus is implying by this saying *Mat 5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell*, that it is better to lose some of your sensory inputs, to have a desensitised life, than be connected to those things that cause you problems that will cause you to sin.

People try to spiritualise this statement of Jesus to take any idea of physical harm out of it. Yet that is the challenge. When Jesus asks the man to sell all that he has, is that just a spiritual challenge or did he mean it literally? I have looked at this hard saying over the years and tried not to face up to what it is saying. Should we take it literally? Some in the early church did. Flagellation, "corporal mortification" goes back to the early Christians who believed that the notion of bodily penance allowed control of the body and emotions in order to focus more fully on worshipping God. The idea of fasting associated with atonement is laid out in the OT. *Lev 16:29.....in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls.*

Sometimes desperate situations require desperate measures but it is not for me to prescribe them. The individual snared in sin must seek the remedy before the Lord. Just how much do they really want to get out of the snare, what desperate remedies would they take? The application of physical suffering might distract the person from their sin and focus their thoughts on God for a season but consider this. Does that really cleanse the thoughts of those sins? All sin can be committed in thought, not just in deed, and that means that the removal of the outward obstacle does not necessarily remove the inward obstacle. The driving force, for example, lust, can flourish out of plain sight, in the recesses of the mind. Like a virus continuing to work death in the individual. How do we deal with that?

Take the issue of divorce among Christians. Its frequency might cynically suggest, that it was part of the amputation of a stumbling block, the removal of a problem. According to George Barna's research institute, "Among married 'born again' Christians, 35% have experienced a divorce. That figure is identical to the outcome among married adults who are not born again: 35%." "Born again Christians" were defined in these surveys as people who said they have made "a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today" and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

Perhaps you are thinking, "This cannot be a problem in the church. Surely the moral standards of Christians are higher." There is growing evidence, that adultery is also a tremendous problem in Christian circles. One study from Christianity Today, shows that 45 percent of Christians indicate having done something sexually inappropriate, and 23 percent having extramarital intercourse. So it is clearly a snare for many Christians. As with all sin, the treatment starts with the acknowledgement of the sin. It means getting out of the denial zone and facing up to the issue.

David has this sin of adultery recorded for posterity. It was compounded by the murder of his friend, Urijah the Hittite. David's adultery with Bathsheba led to the birth of a child and all through this, David did not have the slightest conviction that he had done anything wrong. You see, it is possible to be mired in sin and ignorant of it because our conscience doesn't function. It is only when we judge ourselves by God's standards, when we step into the light of His word that we see things for what they are. *Psa 90:8 Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.*

Fortunately, David was brought to his senses by the prophet Nathan, who used the parable of the man who had his lamb taken by a rich man. David's outrage is countered by the steely gaze of the prophet who declaims, "Thou art the man". *2Sa 12:5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: 2Sa 12:6 And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. 2Sa 12:7 And Nathan said to David, **Thou art the man.*** That was the point from which David could rebuild his life. He was punished and he repented.

*Psa 51:1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, **after he had gone in to Bathsheba.** Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Psa 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Psa 51:3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Psa 51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.* You could poke your eye out, amputate your hand, cut off your foot yet still be in the snare of sin. You could poke the other eye and cut off the other hand and leg and yet still the snare is tightly wrapped around the soul strangling it. Hell opens its mouth before you and still you cannot see what the source of the problem is. **It is the relationship with your God.**

### Lest we forget

Part 22. Luk 6:27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Luk 6:28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

You will no doubt have seen the giant fibre glass poppies appearing on the roundabouts in the town where we live. These emblems of the battlefields of Europe were made famous in the poem "In Flanders fields". During the early days of the Second Battle of Ypres on 2nd May, 1915, a young Canadian artillery officer, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, was killed in the gun positions near Ypres in Belgium. An exploding German artillery shell landed near him. He was serving in the same Canadian artillery unit as a friend of his, the Canadian military doctor and artillery commander Major John McCrae. As the brigade doctor, John McCrae was asked to conduct the burial service for Alexis because the chaplain had been called away somewhere else on duty that evening. It is believed that later that evening, after the burial, John began the draft for his now famous poem "In Flanders Fields".

These giant poppies we see, are supposed to remind us of the start of the conflict called the Great War. Why on earth we should want to commemorate this beginning, rather than the end of the war, is unclear. You are hardly likely to want to celebrate the death of loved ones, rather, to rejoice that some remnant survived. Such is the thinking of our age.

The reminders are, I suppose, "Lest we forget". These words come from another poem, "Recessional" by Rudyard Kipling, which he composed on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. The phrase "lest we forget" forms the refrain of "Recessional." It introduces the reason for the entreaty, expressed in the poem, that God might spare England from oblivion or profanity "lest we forget" the sacrifice of Christ ("Thine ancient sacrifice").



"God of our fathers, known of old—Lord of our far-flung battle line—Beneath whose awful hand we hold Dominion over palm and pine—Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget—lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies—The Captains and the Kings depart—Still stands **Thine ancient sacrifice**, An humble and a contrite heart. Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget—lest we forget!"

The phrase "lest we forget" later passed into common usage after World War I across the British Commonwealth especially, becoming linked with Remembrance Day observations; it came to be a plea not to forget past sacrifices, and was often found as the only wording on war memorials, or used as an epitaph. John "Jack" Kipling (17 August 1897 - 27 September 1915) was the only son of the British author Rudyard Kipling. He was killed at the Battle of Loos in September 1915, while serving with the British Army, a few weeks after his eighteenth birthday. Kipling was reported injured and missing in action. A shell blast had apparently ripped off his face. With fighting continuing, his body was not identified. His parents searched vainly for him in field hospitals and interviewed comrades to try to identify what had happened. A notice was published in The Times on 7 October 1915 confirming the known facts, were that he was "wounded and missing". The death of John inspired Rudyard Kipling to become involved with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

I though, do not need a giant poppy to remind me of the state of the world and man's heart. I only have to turn on the News to see the horrors of Iraq, Syria, Israel, Somalia, Afghanistan, Ukraine and many others, to remind me, "lest we forget". Yet we have **NOT** forgotten the art of war, the art of cruelty, the exaction of revenge, the hatred and enmity for our fellow human beings. We have though, forgotten "Thine ancient sacrifice". We have forgotten what that entailed and what it asked of us.

If, 100 years ago, those pompous royal families of Europe, who for pretence regularly invoked the rites of Christianity for their own end, if those gilded peacocks had for one moment opened God's word and taken our text to heart, there would be no poppies on the roundabouts, no poems about Flanders fields, no war memorials listing the "glorious dead", no annual festival of remembrance, no rows of crosses, no bereaved families who were told it "would all be over by Christmas". None of it would exist.

See what the consequences are when we neglect the hard sayings of Jesus. Would it not be better for us to have heeded the hard saying than to have suffered the consequence of neglect? These words of Jesus were given, not to hurt us but to save us from ourselves. They are to deliver us from that awful hardness of heart that Jesus spoke about. That nasty remnant of the old man in us that would, if we dare resurrect him, injure all about us. It is as if Jesus says, "If you neglect these words, a worse thing will befall you".

It goes however, far beyond "loving your enemy" and "doing good". What if those people turn against us and do us violence". *Luk 6:29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Luk 6:30 Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. Luk 6:31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. Luk 6:32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.*

Harder still, the saying shouts at us. There is no limit to what we might do if we only had that divine nature in us, *Luk 6:35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.* While our creator will reward those wicked men in due season, he does not visit their dawning day with vengeance. He makes the sun to rise on both the just and the unjust, such that the weather itself does not distinguish good from bad. We are children of the Highest not the Lowest.

Is it really true then that I must just fold under the tide of violence? Does it mean that I must let people walk over me as I become a soft target for the criminals and brutes of society? Of course not. The Lord already has those in place who in better times uphold the law *Rom 13:4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.* No it is not for us to exact our revenge without due process. *Rom 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.* That should be good enough. We are not magistrates and we are not above the law.

We will get the Governments that God decrees and they may not all be nice. Yet to resist these legitimate governments constitutes rebellion against God. I read an article this week that suggested that people in Iraq and Libya were better off under their dictators Saddam Hussein and Colonel Gaddafi. These despotic rulers at least did not unduly persecute Christians. Yet when the war mongers and war criminals, Bush and Blair lied to the world about weapons that did not exist and used this pretext to change the regime, they did not bring peace but destruction on the grand scale. They destroyed the established powers, intervening in other countries sovereign rights to establish chaos. The house of cards fell and encouraged regional uprisings. The plight of Christians and other minorities has been badly affected. The recent murder of the three young Israelis sparked a “tit for tat”, tip for tap, "blow for blow" response, which has spiralled into an open warfare in Gaza. The idea that we solve problems by responding with violence is not God’s way.

Jesus set an example, that when those magisterial systems fail us, when we have no recourse to law, we have no right to rebel. *1Pe 2:23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:* We do damage to the Gospel of forgiveness if we are motivated by our own self-righteous revenge.

In the Red Cross museum in Geneva, there is a “wall of time”, recalling chronologically, wartime massacres and ‘natural’ disasters, such as major cholera epidemics since the 1860s (its inception), and the response of the Red Cross. It lists the wars and the disasters that have befallen mankind (manbad). Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history. I read that since the end of the Second World War, the world has only known twenty-six cumulated days of peace. It seems that man, far from becoming a better creature, is even more degenerate.



It is a sad reality that this situation will not change. Mankind as a species will not evolve into a better more peaceable creature. He cannot do good by nature, he cannot learn from the past because he is doomed to forget the past and he will repeat his mistakes. He will not rise above his greed and lust to seek the greater good of humanity, because that is not in the plan. *Mat 24:6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. these are the beginning of sorrows.*

These wars originate deep down in the human heart. Whence cometh wars and fighting’s among you. *Jas 4:1 .....come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Jas 4:2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Jas 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

What starts in the depths of our being, in what we call the “heart”, grows like a mushroom in that darkness and the spores explode into the world around us. The problem that manifests itself in the world around us, had its genesis in our hearts. That is the battleground, that is where we should be fighting but rather than face ourselves we would rather exact retribution upon others. We create a distorted picture that makes someone else the villain. We find it so easy to identify the faults in

others but we can see nothing wrong in ourselves. We have forgotten who we are and that we are no better than the vilest sinner on this planet.

Last month, a star runner, war hero, and survivor of 47 days at sea in a rubber raft and two years of torture in Japanese prison camps, Louis Zamperini, died aged 97. He experienced the sort of life that was the stuff of Hollywood movies and later this year, that is just what will happen with the release of the film "Unbroken". Zamperini was born in Olean, New York, to Italian immigrants who moved to Torrance, California, when he was three. He still had not learned English, and was bullied. His father, a labourer, taught him boxing, and Zamperini so enjoyed defeating his bullies that he became a young terror, in and out of trouble. Not until his older brother Pete talked him into joining the track team at Torrance high school were his energies directed into more constructive channels. He became an exceptional athlete competing in the 1936, Berlin Olympics.

In Berlin, where his room-mate Jesse Owens was the biggest hero of the games, he finished 8th in the Olympic 5000m final, but he stunned the crowd with a 56-second final lap. Afterwards, standing with a group of runners in front of Adolf Hitler, but unable to take a photo, he handed his camera to a thin man standing nearby, and Joseph Goebbels snapped a shot for him. Hitler then shook his hand, saying "You're the boy with the fast finish."

Zamperini enlisted in the army in September 1941, and after the US entered the war the following December flew B-24s from the island of Funafuti. In May 1943, his crew was assigned to search for a lost bomber, and given a spare plane thought to be mechanically jinxed. When its engine exploded, they crashed into the ocean; eight of the 11-man crew died.

Zamperini and two others survived in a life raft. They lived on rainwater, albatross and the occasional fish, and were beset by storms, sharks and strafing from passing Japanese planes. After 47 days, two of the three, Zamperini and co-pilot Russell Phillips reached the Marshall Islands and were captured. Zamperini weighed 75lbs. As he recalled: "I thought to myself, six weeks ago I was a world-class athlete. And then, for the first time in my life, I was scared."

In his first prison camp, Zamperini's renown earned him the enmity of the notorious Japanese army sergeant Mutsuhiro Watanabe, known to prisoners as The Bird. He was tortured repeatedly. "I could take the beatings and physical punishment," he later said. "But it was the attempt to destroy your dignity, to make you a nonentity, that was the hardest thing to bear."

Zamperini had been reported missing in action, and in June 1943 his parents received the telegram from the president declaring him killed. But later Zamperini was transferred away from Watanabe, to help make a radio broadcast home. When he refused to make a second, condemning the US, he was transferred to another camp where Watanabe was now commandant. After the war ended, Watanabe was listed 23rd among the top 40 war criminals sought by the Americans, but escaped and went into hiding.

Zamperini returned to Los Angeles and married Cynthia Applewhite in 1946. However, he suffered from what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder, and began drinking heavily. In 1949, Cynthia took him to a rally staged by the evangelist Billy Graham, and then to a second, where Louis was overcome and born-again as a Christian. He became an inspirational speaker and youth worker,

while working in commercial real estate, and in 1950 accompanied missionaries to Japan, where he contacted those who had tortured him and greeted them with forgiveness. He stayed active physically, saying "the war took 10 years off my life. I decided to get the 10 years back."

In 1984 he carried an Olympic torch into the same Coliseum where he had set records as a youth, and for the 1998 winter Games in Nagano he again joined the torch relay, carrying the Olympic flame past one of the prison camps where he had been tortured. By then, Watanabe had resurfaced as a successful businessman, and Zamperini wrote him a letter of forgiveness, offering to meet. Watanabe refused, but gave an interview to the American TV show 60 Minutes, saying he had treated Zamperini only as "an enemy of Japan".

How do you think, it is possible for a man to forgive another, having suffered the abuse that Zamperini did? I think that there are two fairly obvious reasons. The first is that he knew what it was to be forgiven. He knew that love and the depth of that sacrifice that had brought him into to his right mind and set him at the feet of Jesus. The second thing is that he knew what he was himself. He knew the depths of his own nature and that in reality, he was little different to those who had been his enemies and tormentors. He could hold out the hand of friendship to them. He could turn the other cheek.

Tomorrow, the 4<sup>th</sup> August 2014, we shall remember the start of the Great War exactly 100 years ago, in which the total number of military and civilian casualties was over 37 million. There were over 16 million deaths and 20 million wounded ranking it among the deadliest conflicts in human history.

The origins of that war were in the garden of Eden. The source of that war was the human heart, that challenged the wisdom of God and still does so. Perhaps, instead of 2 metre high fibre glass poppies as memorials on the roundabouts, we should instead have some large wooden crosses, to remind us what we really have forgotten?

### Self proclaimed publicans

Part 23. Mat 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. Mat 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

If I were to describe one of the most common sins of the church it is here. I would say it has been a prevailing sin in our church. We have seen people who have sat under this teaching ignore it completely and walk out on us. They have no care for the truth, only their own selfish sense of grievance that overrides any duty towards justice and resolution of sin. God's truth takes second place to feelings. Let us labour again through this hard saying and analyse what it is saying.

*"If your brother **trespass** against you".* The word trespass is better rendered sin. Sin is missing God's mark and is well illustrated by the tribe of Benjamin, *Jdg 20:16 Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss (literally not sin  $\chi\upsilon\tau\eta$ ).* The Benjaminites were always on target when it came to throwing stones. Unfortunately, many people who throw stones at other Christians are not on target at all. In accusing



others of missing the mark, they are missing the mark themselves and thus become false accusers of the brethren.

Let me explain. The passage before us today is dealing with sin. It is not dealing with issues of conscience, for example, the freedoms to eat meats or vegetables. It is not dealing with the fact that you get upset about what somebody did or did not say to your liking. It is not about keeping a Sunday as a Sabbath. It is not about what you wear or whether you buy a new or second hand car. It is not about how much you give to the Lord's work. There are "sins" that are not "SINS". This passage is about a sin and that means something that God has clearly identified as an act that is absolutely wrong. Just make sure that you are dealing with sin if you charge another.

It also is a sad reflection on Christianity that people who claim to be sinned against, those who have been assaulted by another's trespass against them are also quite forgiving when dealing with their own sins. Self-forgiveness, like self love is easy to acquire. *Eph 5:29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:* Yes, it is quite clear that we have two standards. We have the low tolerance threshold standard that we apply to others and the high tolerance threshold that we apply to ourselves. Like Judas, we can openly condemn another for generosity and yet be in the depths of covetousness without any conscience at all.

Like David, we could lust, fornicate and murder without the slightest twinge of guilt, yet condemn others for far less crimes. We could call down the wrath of God upon those sinners who do not receive us without the slightest knowledge that we do not have the right spirit. We can see, O so clearly, the microscopic splinter in the eye of another without any awareness of the huge timber that stands before our own eyes. Perhaps we have grown used to it, perhaps we have accommodated it so well? We stand at times aloof, like the old Pharisee, gazing down on the lesser mortals, thanking God that we are not like them, indeed, we are far worse. Nothing pleases us more than to identify and gossip the sins of others but studiously avoid our own failings.

If you want to know more of a person's heart, think what they do NOT speak of, what the minister does NOT preach upon. This probably shows what sin they are fighting in their lives. For although we would like to be free of some sins, we know that it would be hypocrisy to talk righteously about those things that we are snared in. That alone should guide us when we come to take offence about what another does to us. *Psa 130:3 If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?* If the Lord of heaven and earth behaved like us, we would be without hope in the world. He would arise as our sin does, daily and walk out on us. We should be left in a slough of despond. Yet the Saviour does not desert His church. *Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Unlike Christ who would build, we have seen more of those who would destroy a church rather than build it, contribute to it, suffer with it and bring peace to it. The church as a body takes a very poor second place behind the need to satisfy our personal feelings. In some respects I say, we are better off without them because they bring sorrow and division. *Rom 16:16 Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you. Rom 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, **mark them** which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and **avoid them.** Rom 16:18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words*

*and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.* Yet that does not solve the issue as to whether there has been a public sin committed in the church.

Our text is clear, if you think that you are sinned against, it is your duty to deal with it in the first instance *“go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone:”* It doesn't say that you get someone else to do it for you, in fact if someone else did that, they would be sinning, because the word does not encourage that. What does the person find hard in doing this? If it is a sin, then is it important enough to deal with in God's way? That means very clearly that the offended person must do it. Are we bothered enough to want to correct another or is it just about how we feel? Are we prepared to persevere in dealing with the sin or is it just easier to walk away from it. All of this is indicative of just how we view sin and how much we are prepared to stand against it in others.

You say *“I cannot do that, it is difficult”*. Well, I say that if you really found the forgiveness of sin at the Cross and were able to tell the Creator of heaven and earth your sins, it is not a big matter to tell a brother or sister about a sin that is not your sin but theirs.

No if the issue(s) remains unresolved then *“then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established”*. No one is condemned on the basis of a single testimony. *Deu 17:6 The person can only be sentenced to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses, but no one should ever be sentenced to death on the testimony of only one witness.* GW. The witnesses are not to be selected because they support the person bringing the charge, they are there to witness the truth. They are not to be supporters of your cause. It may be that the person bringing the charge is wrong and the matter can be dealt with and dropped.

Now, what is the case where there is a sin that you see but it is not a sin directed personally against you? Do you turn a blind eye or do you snitch to someone else in the hope that they will deal with it? You go behind the back of the sinner and tell an elder, because you do not want to get involved in the fall out from a confrontation. You wish to preserve your own reputation. When Paul becomes aware of sexual sin in the Corinthian church he moves to deal with it *1Co 5:2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.* It is our duty to deal with open sin in the church.

Let me be quite clear on this. If you are not concerned about sin in the church, you will hardly be concerned about sin outside of the church. I can tell you from the word of God that Jesus does not accept this attitude in the church, *Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.* They were told to repent or face the sword of Christ. There is no *“live and let live”* when it comes to sin. God expects us to deal with it through the blood of Christ and move on. Sin is not to become a familiar companion on our journey to glory.

I have had occasion over the years to deal with matters of sin in the church. These were not personal issues against me but things which occurred and no one else intervened. It was not pleasant, it was uncomfortable but necessary. What I can say is that it was not necessary to bring the matters before witnesses and escalate it to the church. They were dealt with *“one to one”* and that was the end of it. The problem is when things are not dealt with, they will escalate and possibly more damage will

be done. It also seems to me that where problems occur in churches, they become occasions for self-righteousness and occasions to create factions and take sides. Sometimes they become occasions to settle score over personal grievances that were not dealt with and now, they can be used against another.

Sometimes, arguments will arise between Christians. They are seldom viewed as God's working in the church because we always expect things to be peaceful. Yet that peacefulness may be a result of complacency and laziness which the Lord would wake us up from. Problems will occur in churches and these should be examined carefully to determine the Lord's will in such a situation. There may be something to be learned. For example, *Act 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. Act 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;* In the Greek, we see that it was a "paroxysm". It was a sharp confrontation.

Paul did not want to risk a repeat performance of Mark's withdrawal from the field, *Act 15:38 but Paul held the opinion they should not take this one along, who departed from them in Pamphylia and did not accompany them in the work.* Personally, I think that he was right. If you are in charge of a mission, you need to be confident in your people. I do not think that this caused any permanent rift because he asks for Mark later, *2Ti 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*

Paul had a confrontation with Peter, *Gal 2:11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.* Public sin may require public rebuke. It is good that this happened because it opened the discussion for a fundamental doctrine. That man is justified by grace through faith not works and that having come to Christ for Salvation, we do not revert to the law of works for righteousness. This event never destroyed the friendship between Peter and Paul. *2Pe 3:15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 2Pe 3:16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.* Paul was Peter's "beloved brother" not just brother.

Let us be very clear, disputes in the Church can be profitable. *Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. Act 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.* Disputes can help us to see more clearly what we should be doing. The Council of Jerusalem sorted out the dispute and came to an agreement. It did not split the church, it bound it tighter together. If it had descended into factions and personal grievances, it might have been the end of Christianity. It didn't because these people were more concerned for the truth and the glory of Christ than themselves.

The final arbiter as far as this dispute was concerned was the Church at Jerusalem and that was the end of the matter. Now note this, that the dispute started after Christians from Judaea came to the church at Antioch where Paul was, but they from Antioch came to the Jerusalem church to solve it.

Now I don't want to make too much of this, but when our text says, *"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican"*, It does not have to be your local church the you "tell it to". Why should it? All churches (gatherings of God's people geographically) should be able to arrive at the same conclusion. They all have the same script.

In fact, I would think that involving another church group would be far better for this final stage of the proceedings. It should remove any trace of bias that might exist in the church where the dispute arose (as is the case of the Antioch dispute). It might also send a message that if you do not want a wider Christian public to know what problems were being raised, you might be more cautious about raising a matter in the first place and that you might be under more pressure to solve it at the start.

One of the outcomes of not implementing our text is that loyalty between brothers and sisters in churches is greatly diminished. The church, rather than becoming a place where we build and strengthen each other, becomes a place of mutual convenience to show an outward conformity to Christianity. It becomes about us and what we get out of church, not about what we give to it. When we become dissatisfied, we walk out and go somewhere else. That should not be encouraged without due process.

If a person is a "heathen and a publican" either as a result of the declaration of the church, or by their own failure to bring it to the church, that must surely be binding on all churches if it has been conducted correctly. That person, the heathen and a publican, remains just that for every congregation. There is no refuge or respite until they repent of their sin. If God upholds that, then the very least that we can do, is to uphold it also.

### **Disciples that are devils.**

Part 24. Joh 6:70 Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? Joh 6:71 He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.

Judas Iscariot was a devil incarnate. Just how Judas interacted with satan is unclear. It does not seem that he was permanently possessed because we see two separate incidents where satan enters him, before the Passover and again during the Passover. *Luk 22:3 Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. Luk 22:4 And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. Joh 13:27 And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.*

Satan appears to play with Judas as he did with King Saul. *1Sa 16:14 But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.* Notice that the evil spirit was from the Lord (Jehovah). These creatures are limited in their power and scope by their Creator. They may come and go as when David by his music "refreshed" Saul. *1Sa 16:23 And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.* I cannot imagine that this was secular music or popular songs that removed devils. I think that it must have been the sweet Psalms of David.

Judas was chosen by Jesus, sat under the teaching of Jesus and went out to evangelise the Jews. Throughout all of this, Jesus knew from the start that Judas was a devil and that he was to perish. It was as certain as it was that Jesus would die on the Cross. It wasn't a mistake, it wasn't a bad choice and it wasn't a disaster. It was all written years before by King David, *Psa 109:6 Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. Psa 109:7 When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Psa 109:8 Let his days be few; and let another take his office.*

Jesus could have been betrayed by someone who was not a disciple or even someone who was not a Jew. There are many scenarios that might play out but this is what Jesus chose. Why? Perhaps it was a lesson to all Christians that we and the church must accept that it is not isolated, separated or immune to the satanic influence. It brings us to face a greater reality and that is the spiritual warfare that is currently raging. *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Now it is strange isn't it, that God would Himself create those principalities and powers? *Col 1:16 For by him were **all things created**, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, **and for him**:* The very objects that He fights with are created by Him and yet in His Omniscience and Omnipotence, His mighty Power, He does not destroy them but lets them continue to exist. Make no mistake, He is using them and He is in control of them, as far as they are allowed to act.

Principalities will eventually be overcome by the blood of Christ and the wisdom of God will triumph over the autonomy of creatures that are in rebellion against God. They exist in some sense as a monument to the wisdom of the Creator that says, we, you and I, cannot exist in isolation from Him, without going down to hell. The lesson is that we cannot be autonomous and we cannot have absolute freewill, if we are to be in a relationship with the Creator. Our whole being must exist in harmony with God, in obedience to God, in fellowship with God, if we are to have life as He intended. *John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it **more abundantly**.*

Since the fall, we see the wider implications of that severed relationship. We see it in the genetic decay of our species as we devolve not evolve. We see it in the inhumanity to man as we find ever more brutal ways to destroy each other. We see it in the hopelessness of souls searching among the dregs of religions that other men made, which other men now lie in the dust. They could not save themselves, how could they save others? Out of all of this decline, in the fullness of time Christ arises and with Him His church, you and I and that for a purpose. *Eph 3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places **might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God**.* We do not just minister to earthly beings, earthly lesson to earthly beings. We minister to angels and principalities. How do we do this? We teach by our obedience, as for example, in the humility of women covering their hair. *1Co 11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head **because of the angels**.* Angels attend our meetings.

God has not fully educated the angels and there are things that are not revealed to them. *1Pe 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which*

are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things **the angels desire to look into**. We are teaching principalities through our faith and conduct. Every time we disobey or falsify teaching, we are sending a message of disobedience and failure to the principalities and powers. When we disobey the word of God, when we falsify the word of God and when we deny the word of God, we are surrendering to the principalities and powers. We are handing them a victory.

The battle for Mansoul as John Bunyan saw it, is played out before heaven, as we see in the story of Job. The devil is given leave to wreck Job's life but cannot. Job defeats Satan by his faithfulness and endurance. *Jas 5:11 We consider those who endure to be blessed. **You have heard about Job's endurance**. You saw that the Lord ended Job's suffering because the Lord is compassionate and merciful.* GW. Job did not give up. Of course, the Lord could have entirely spared Job the trial. He could as the accuser said have "hedged him in". *Job 1:10 Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.* So although the devil is the tormentor of Job, there is no doubt that God threw that godly man into the arena. God sent him to the Lions. God could spare everyone of us sorrow and heartache. It is easy for Him to do this, after all, He is Lord of ALL. **Yet He does not and Jesus did not take advantage of it.**

Job realised that he would come through the trial a better person. *Job 23:10 But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.* Although Job was a righteous man and a good man, there were things in his life that needed removing. There was dross and filth that needed burning in the fires of tribulation. Like the great blocks of stone out of which appeared such beautiful works by the master craftsmen, he needed to be shaped and cut to reveal who he really was and what God intended him to be.

Just as Judas Iscariot was allowed to infiltrate the Apostles, so Satan will have his servants infiltrate the church. Why doesn't God stop this? My question to us is, rather, "why don't we stop it?" It reminds me of a cartoon that I saw. Jesus is sitting next to a man, who is asking Jesus a question. "Why does God allow all this suffering in the world?" Jesus looks at him and replies, "I was going to ask you the same question?" It is not just God's battle, it is our battle and churches should be on a war footing because this is serious business. The devil is in the churches, *2Co 11:14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 2Co 11:15 Therefore it is no great thing if **his ministers also be transformed** as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.* Make no mistake, there are devils in the churches and devils posing as ministers.

We saw his conflict in the seven churches, *Rev 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.* The devil hinders our work if we would see it, *1Th 2:18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.* Paul is ever vigilant of his enemies' devices. *2Co 2:10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; 2Co 2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

Yet that is no longer true is it? We have become ignorant of his devices. We no longer give attention to the possibility that Satan is at work in the churches. We no longer are prepared to identify his

wicked hands in the events around us. We no longer acknowledge the possibility that social ills, disease and problems of the mind may be down to “his devices”. In short we no longer believe that he exists.

How many activities does the church get sucked into that have nothing to do with its mission? How much of its strength is drained away in the pursuit of social rather than spiritual issues? Now I am not saying that we are to neglect the “believing” poor and needy and I am not saying that we should neglect the “unbelieving” poor. I am not saying that we should not care for widows and orphans. I am saying that whatever we do must be done with Jesus at the fore. It must glorify Jesus and propagate the gospel. *Mar 9:41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink **IN MY NAME**, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.* We do things in Jesus Name. Let us remind ourselves that George Muller set up the orphanages, not with the welfare of orphans as the primary objective. He did it as an object lesson to Christians that God could be trusted and the He was a God of Miracles. Jesus was at the front of the Orphan Mission.

William Booth offered dignity and hope through his Salvation Army. His mission was to rescue the perishing and provide a way out of the mire of poverty. He saw Jesus as the deliverer and it was through the Gospel and godly principles that led his mission. When he provided his care to the suffering, it included the gospel and every night, in every refuge, there was a religious service. It was all about Jesus. When William Booth taught his fellow ‘soldiers’ in the Salvation Army certain key principles, one of those he emphasised continually was the importance of being able to genuinely influence people towards faith in Christ. *Col 3:17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* If we are doing anything for our Lord it must be asked **in HIS NAME**. *Act 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: **In the name of Jesus Christ** of Nazareth rise up and walk.*

If we pray anything it must be in HIS NAME for an answer, *Joh 14:14 If ye shall ask any thing **in my name**, I will do it.* Now people will say, I did that but I didn’t get an answer. Be clear, IN MY NAME is not a magic incantation, a formula that works through the words. When we baptise IN JESUS NAME we are doing it by His authority. When we ask the Father to do something in the NAME of Jesus it is something that is in accordance with the will of God, such that we become ambassadors to act for Him. This is not working in the dark. IN MY NAME, is conducting God’s purpose for Him, by His authority. *2Co 5:20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.* We are in tune with God.

I think that today’s Christianity is out of tune with God. What is happening today is that the devil is reshaping the works of the church, by diluting the Gospel. He is taking us out of the sphere of God. Our works have to be inclusive, non-homophobic, non-judgemental, hiding the light under a bushel, to avoid offending other religions, tiptoeing through political correctness, avoiding upsetting minorities and of course, never quoting scripture, **that is you still believe it**. How can any of this be IN JESUS NAME? Where is the concern to rescue the sinners from the gaping jaws of an eternity in damnation? If people will not accept it IN JESUS name, then I have no conscience about that.

I have been made aware recently of a well intentioned man, Andrew White, the so called vicar of Baghdad, who is on a quest bringing together key religious leaders of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths, for peace and reconciliation in the middle east. In the Alexandria declaration they state, “In

the name of God who is Almighty, Merciful and Compassionate, we, who have gathered as religious leaders from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities, pray for true peace in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and declare our commitment to ending the violence and bloodshed that denies the right to life and dignity. He has changed his tune of late, and stated last week, "It is a terrible thing to wish, but I now believe that military action of some sort is necessary". It reminded me of a line in the song "Star Trekking", "We come in peace, shoot to kill". He wants peace for his group by doing exactly the same, as the people he wants to kill, for a religious advantage.

Now if Andrew starts speaking the words of Christ to these people, it is possible that some may believe but it will also cause division. We need to learn a lesson from history and that is that God does not compromise the Faith. You cannot synthesise with other religions. It is like Moses going into the Promised land and saying to the Hivites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, "My brothers, why don't we all try to live together in peace? Why don't we start a reconciliation party?" Why not, here is why not? *Deu 7:4 For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.*

Our purpose as Christians is to propagate the Gospel of Salvation reconciling the world to Christ, supporting the Christians primarily in the Church and *6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.* Everything that we do must have that banner of Christ in front of it, not hidden away ashamedly at the back of it in the baggage. The devil would love to have it that way but Christ plants His banner in the forefront of the battle against principalities and powers. And everything that we do must be **IN JESUS NAME.**

### **Its all about JESUS**

Part 25. *Joh 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. Joh 5:40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*

The background to our text is another confrontation with the religious leaders that stemmed from Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath and later forgiving the man's sins. It leads on to a statement of Jesus' Divinity which incited a response, *Joh 5:18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.* Jesus then begins to explain that relationship and the consequences for humanity.

Our text is a dogmatic denial of all other religions as a way to life eternal. *Psa 127:1 Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it:* You have two choices. Reject these words as the ramblings of a madman or take them at face value. Come to me if you want life, Jesus says, *Joh 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* This verse cuts the root of all other religions. Jesus the resurrected Son of God, calls us to a personal relationship with Himself. This is impossible unless He is alive today. That is the uniqueness of Christianity. All other religions have left writings but you cannot have a relationship with the founders of those religions because they are dead. **Jesus is alive.**

Our verse today states that the only **Absolute** truth does not lie in some ancient books, scrolls discovered in caves, illustrated manuscripts bound in great libraries. Those writings may contain "maps" that direct people to the truth of God but that truth ultimately resides in a person, Jesus Christ. The idea that the Bible, bound in its polished leather, carried to meetings each week,



displayed to all as a badge of religious integrity, the idea that that book is somehow of itself the giver of life is wrong. *Joh 5:39 You study the Scriptures in detail because you think you have the source of eternal life in them. These Scriptures testify on my behalf.* GW.

If we ever thought that the more bible knowledge we obtained, the more we understood, the closer we would be to God, then we were fooled. If we could recite the book by heart, if we could reference each verse with the speed of a computer, yet we would be no closer to God. If that is so, then why were we told, *Deu 6:6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: Deu 6:7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.* What is the point of this religious education? It was as an "aide memoire", something to remind men of their duty, *Deu 6:12 Then **beware lest thou forget the LORD**, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.*

If I may use an analogy, I would say that the Holy Scripture, our Bible is similar to DNA. It is information. It can do nothing on its own. For DNA to release the wonders of life within it, it must be moved upon by those creative chemicals, enzymes that make life possible. The word enzyme comes from the greek word for yeast which in turn comes from a word meaning to boil up. If the Scripture are mixed with the yeast of the Spirit, then they can start the life building process. *2Co 3:6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but **the spirit giveth life**.* How does that life appear when it is released? It appears as Christ in us. Jesus is revealed to those and in those, where the word of God is made alive, Christ is formed in us. *Gal 4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until **Christ be formed in you**.*

I do not think that it is possible to become a Christian without that word working within us. That life starts with the word of God and continues with the word of God, as we saw clearly in the parable of the Sower. That is why it is put upon us to preach that word *Rom 10:8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, **the word of faith, which we preach**; Rom 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* People who have a Christ that did not emerge from that word have a false Christ. Those who claim to have become alive through that word of God and do not follow it after, must consider what it was they believed in the first place. Why on earth, if you started with total trust in that word, would you discard it or falsify it afterwards?

Now, there is a vast difference between knowing your duty and personally knowing the object of your duty. I can know the rules of citizenship without personally knowing the ruler of the land. Therein lays the difference. The Jews had steeped themselves in the law of Moses. They were pickled as it were in the spices of Moses and yet for all of that knowledge, when the object of that knowledge arrived in the flesh, they could not see Him. *Joh 5:46 For **had ye believed Moses**, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?* Do you see what had happened? They had read Moses, they had learned Moses but they had not BELIEVED Moses. The truth within the words of Moses had not taken root by faith. So distorted was their understanding of the Messiah, that when He arrived He was unrecognisable and they sought to kill Him. The leaven of the Spirit had not worked in them.

It is, I suppose, no different from the modern religious people who read the opening verses of Genesis and fail to see that Jesus is the Creator. They take Him out of the frame and replace Him with evolutionism. Those same people will read to their congregation about Mary giving birth in Bethlehem and in the next breath deny the Virgin birth, the Sonship of Christ, the forgiveness of sin through His blood and then the deity of Christ. Surveys have shown that significant numbers of the clergy have rejected fundamental truths of Christianity. For example, those who do not accept the Virgin Birth:

- American Lutherans 19%
- American Baptists 34%
- Episcopalians 44%
- Presbyterians 49%
- Methodists 60%
- Church of England (Anglican) 27%
- Church of Scotland 37%

For many, there is a complete disconnect between the word of the scriptures and the person that they describe. You can read your bibles until you go blind but if you do not come to JESUS it has all been a complete waste of time. If it never led you to Jesus, never took you to the foot of the cross, never explained the forgiveness of sin and never opened your mind to heaven, it was a waste of time.

Jesus in this hard saying is encouraging us to get to know Him. Jesus is not saying to those Jews that the scriptures are of little or no value and that they should just be listening to Him. Those scriptures have a unique purpose and are totally different from all other writings as we have seen. Just how we use them is probably the deeper question? For example, we may use them as the Pharisees used them, as proof texts of how righteous we are, that we are good law abiding citizens who take immense trouble to keep up our appearance, externally that is. What we do in private and in secret may be another matter all together. We may use scripture to show how doctrinally smart we are, how clever we are. It keeps us one step ahead of the crowd and we can always find an excuse why we don't have to obey the word but they should. We use it to become superior Christians.

We might use scripture to comfort us in our distress and make us feel good. The Bible becomes like a medicine cabinet. We dip in it when we are sick to find words of comfort. We don't like taking some of the medicine because it doesn't taste nice but there are some potions, like "laying down in green pastures" and pills of "I am with you always" and the elixir of "God is love" that we are most addicted to. Others use scripture like a workshop manual where you service your spiritual life and aim to keep it all tuned and running smoothly. Some use scripture as a cordial. They take regular glasses each day because it makes them feel good, a bit like the occasional sherry. For others it is used as a daily workout, reading a few chapters here and there but with no real purpose other than to grow big spiritual muscles. If they are not careful, the workout becomes lopsided and they grow huge arms while retaining skinny legs. They are well schooled in some doctrines and entirely lacking in others.

Another user is the "flip plop" user. They flip open the Bible and plop their finger on a text and use that to guide their actions. It's a bit like roulette, where you roll the ball, spin the wheel and wait for the ball to fall on a number (a text) and that gives you your answer. There is a version of this that I

would describe as Russian roulette. I heard a story that the first text that emerged on a “flip plop” was “Judas went out and hanged himself”. The next “flip plop” hit the text, “go thou and do likewise”. Not very smart.

So you see what I mean? There are many ways that we use the Bible and it is mostly for our own benefit and sometimes that includes finding a text with which we can smite another Christian over the head. There are even some Christians who believe that God gave the English nation a special version of the Bible, a translation commissioned by the homosexual King James 1<sup>st</sup>, the Authorised Version and if you do not use this, there is something wrong with you. I imagine that there were many Jews that Jesus spoke to, who used the Bible (The OT as it was then) in the manner that we have described, just as many religious people do today. However you use that Bible, the most important thing that it must show you is Jesus, for without finding Him, you are forever lost.

How would you describe the Bible? If I asked you for a one line description of the Bible what would it be? “The Bible is a canonical collection of texts sacred in Judaism and Christianity” says one description. Another says, “The Bible is the account of God's action in the world, and his purpose with all creation”. The one I like best says, “the Bible, is the source of truth, the standard for meaningful life, the revelation of Jesus Christ, the key to true freedom and liberty, and true food for man's soul”. I would put forward a simpler definition than that. I would say that **the Bible is a book about Jesus**. Whatever the Bible tells us to do, whatever it is as a source of truth, whatever it lays down as the standard for a meaningful life, can only be realised once we have found the Jesus of the Bible. It is all about Jesus.

I will say it again. The first thing that we must find in the Bible to unlock any other blessings, is Jesus the Christ. If you give a Bible to anyone, make sure that they use it to find Jesus first, not to become a smart bible bashing Pharisee. The scriptures, Jesus says in our text, “witness” of Me. Scripture is literally a martyr for Christ. The word martyr is derived from an old Greek word for hand (mare), because witnesses held up their hand when giving evidence. The Bible says “I hold up my hand that Jesus is the Life”. Jesus is everywhere in the sacred pages from Genesis to the Apocalypse.

Time does not allow an exhaustive illustration of what I have said so I will give a few examples. The creation is the work of Christ, the Word of God. *Gen 1:3 And God **said**, Let there be light: and there was light.* The Word proceeded from God and created the heavens and the earth and that WORD was Jesus, as John said, *Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Joh 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* Moses wrote of Him.

Paul writes of Jesus, *Rom 3:24 Christ Jesus;...Rom 3:25 whom God has set forth a **mercy-seat**, through faith in his blood, for the shewing forth of his righteousness, in respect of the passing by the sins that had taken place before, through the forbearance of God;* In this singular verse, Paul opens up the whole subject of typology. By typology, we mean, the revelation of Christ by other emblems, such as when John the Baptist says, *Joh 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* In this verse, the sacrificial system of offerings is linked to Jesus. Lambs, goats, doves, pigeons, Oxen, all were types of Christ. Moses wrote of Him.

Jesus is in all the offerings, *1Co 15:20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.* Christ, the firstfruits of the great harvest ascended to glory at Pentecost because this was when the offering was made *Lev 23:16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.* Moses wrote of Him.

Paul's statement in Romans links the infrastructure of the tabernacle to the person of Christ. The altars, the lights, the incense, the showbread, the coverings and so on, all derive their meaning from the heavenly reference point of Jesus. *Heb 8:5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as **Moses was admonished of God** when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.* Moses was making an earthly model of something glimpsed in heaven. Moses wrote of Him.

Jesus was "that prophet" that Moses spoke of, *Deu 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;* He was to be a character of the stature of Moses and be recognisable as such. *Joh 6:14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.* Moses wrote of Him. Of course, it was not just Moses who wrote of Jesus. Jesus is everywhere in the scripture, it was just that Moses started the ball rolling.

Jesus explains this to us when He walks on the Emmaus road with His disciples after the resurrection. *Luk 24:27 And beginning at Moses and **ALL the prophets**, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures **the things concerning himself.*** The scriptures are all about Jesus. If you want to get the best from the Bible, find Jesus in it, look for him. Pascal, the Christian philosopher said, "It ought to be the habit whenever discouraged or in need of guidance to first call out to the Lord before calling out to anyone else". *Son 1:7 Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest thy flock, where thou makest it to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that is veiled beside the flocks of thy companions?* Yes, the relationship with Jesus is not just a friendship, it is a love story. **The Bible is a love story and a love letter to you and me from the Creator.**

### **The Divine magnet**

Part 26. *Joh 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. Joh 6:45 It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*

I can recall, in the early days, when coming to terms with the new life in Christ, that there were many discussions, even arguments concerning whether we had started the relationship with Christ or whether God had started it with us. The verse before us was indeed a hard saying. It appeared to teach, that if God had not come to me first, then I would never have come to Him. That also suggested, that if I was not in control when it came to finding Christ, how was I likely to be in control of anything else. I was an automaton, a machine without any freedom and a mind without freewill.

These apparently opposing views, namely that you had free will or you didn't have free will were historically linked to two doctrinal views, those of the Calvinists and those of the Arminians. Arminianism is a teaching regarding salvation associated with the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). The fundamental principle in Arminianism is the rejection of divine predestination (the

doctrine that all events have been willed by God) and a corresponding affirmation of the freedom of the human will. John Calvin (born Jehan Cauvin: 10 July 1509 – 27 May 1564) taught "Unconditional election", asserting that God has chosen from eternity those whom he will bring to himself not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people; rather, His choice is unconditionally grounded in His mercy alone. God has chosen from eternity to extend mercy to those he has chosen and to withhold mercy from those not chosen. Those chosen receive salvation through Christ alone. Those not chosen receive the just wrath that is warranted for their sins against God.

The supporters of either of these views, like Cavaliers and Roundheads would slog it out, throwing Bible verses at each other. Yet in the midst of all of this, I failed to see my own human arrogance to even think about questioning this scripture. Although only one line long, our text stands like a great wall between life and death. You cannot pass by or around this wall. It only opens to those who are **drawn** through into life, not that we break through by our own inventions. It keeps out all invaders who would say, I have found a way to God without Him drawing me. Those people are like the character "Ignorance" in Pilgrim's progress, who is one of the last cautionary tales that Christian and Hopeful encounter before arriving at Mt. Zion. Ignorance makes it all the way to the Heavenly City, only to be sent to hell because he did not enter at the Wicket Gate (narrow gate) and does not have the right certification **of election**.

To think that a person considers he is able to reach out to the Cross and be saved when his mind is at war with God, is a blasphemy. Why would he? *Rom 3:10 The Scriptures tell us, "No one is acceptable to God! Rom 3:11 **Not one of them understands or even searches for God.*** CEV. That such carnality would ever desire such a thing as salvation, while trapped by the prince of the power of the air, is a lie. He cannot escape unless he is rescued. He cannot be rescued unless God breaks him free. Yet we mortals think so much of ourselves, that we consider that we stand shoulder to shoulder, with the Creator at the start of our discipleship. Yet the more we learn, the smaller we become. Eventually we do not look across, eye to eye, we have to increasingly look up. Perhaps that is why it is so difficult to see God, because He is so Great?

*Psa 92:5 **O LORD, how great are thy works!** and thy thoughts are very deep. 1Ch 16:12 Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth; Psa 105:5 Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth;* It is with the growth of that knowledge of our God and Saviour, that we are brought to the point where we almost disappear in the vastness of His Universe and power. We ask with David, *Psa 8:4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?* I think that this shrinking in our own eyes is a measure of spiritual growth, another of the paradoxes in this "upside down" kingdom where the least is the greatest. We grow but we grow smaller.

Such is the silent working of grace, such is the still small voice that it is no wonder that we think that it was us who called to God. No, I think that we were just answering His call. We are responding to God's question to us to "BE SAVED". When we cry with the Philippian jailor *Act 16:30 .... **Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*** We are merely responding to God's command to us, *Isa 45:22 Look unto me, and **be ye saved,** all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.* That is when I ask "What must I do", that is when I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And as 15 year old Charles Spurgeon was advised, in the Artillery Street Chapel, that snowy winter's morning in January 1850, "All you have to do is LOOK".

The preacher began thus: "This is a very simple text indeed. It says 'Look.' Now lookin' don't take a deal of pain. It aint liftin' your foot or your finger; it is just 'Look.' Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. "But then the text says, 'Look unto Me.' Ay!" he said in broad Essex, "many on ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some say look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, 'Look unto Me.' Some on ye say 'We must wait for the Spirit's workin.' You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, 'Look unto Me.' "

How did we get to that position where we received that call? It was because we were drawn, as our text tells us. It was by the love of God, an everlasting love, a timeless love that He roped us to His purpose in Christ, anchored us to the Cross and drew us to Himself. *Jer 31:3 The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.* The ropes may have seemed to burn us as they drew us and we no doubt struggled as a fish on a line but He did not cast us loose. For some souls, they were dragged through the briars and thorns of life, they were cut and bruised, scarred and burnt but eventually they were brought home.

Paul says it clearly in the epistle to the Romans, *Rom 5:10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.* We were at enmity with God but through Christ He reconciled us and more than that, having expended such grace upon us, He will surely save us to the end. *Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

That "everlasting" love is something that we seldom consider. "Everlasting" speaks not so much of the magnitude of that love, although it is beyond imagination. It speaks of the extent of that love. It is everlasting, it is of an incalculable length and durability, it exists beyond time. As the Psalm of Moses sings, *Psa 90:2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.* Notice that it is not from "beginning to end". When we talk of the everlasting love of God to us it is a love that is forever with Him, without beginning or end. It lives with Him forever.

To appreciate this, I want to examine the details of God's love in His providential care for His children. I want to show that He is ever there, in all the changing scenes of life. I want to show that God is truly in the detail of our lives and that detail is ultimately for our good. *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* Yes, all things have a purpose and there is a time for each purpose. *Ecc 3:1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:*

*Psa 139:16 Your eyes saw me when I was only a fetus. Every day of my life was recorded in your book before one of them had taken place.* GW. Our days are perfectly numbered. We arrive at the appointed time in history and we depart precisely on the day determined. My race, stature and physique were planned and there are no mistakes in creation. *Exo 4:11 And the LORD said unto him,*

*Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?* These are not events that occurred when God took His hands off of the wheel, so to speak. These were written in the same book as you and I. Richard Dawkins the atheist recently suggested that Downes syndrome foetus should be aborted. 'Abort it and try again. It would be immoral to bring it into the world if you have the choice.' This is the morality of the concentration camp. If you abort apparent defects, you open the door to anything and everything and in the process destroy God's handiwork. They are though not defects, God's works are perfect for His purpose. Perfection can exhibit differences.

Our details are not lost with God. *Mat 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. Mat 10:30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.* Everything about us is important with God. You may not think much of yourself but believe me God does and He remembers your fine details. That is why the resurrection will work perfectly. He knows us so well that He knows our needs before we do. *Mat 6:8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.* That greatest thing that we need, Jesus, is in turn graciously revealed to us in due season. *Gal 1:15 But God, who appointed me before I was born and who called me by his kindness, **was pleased to show me his Son**.....* God draws us to that moment of the divine introduction. Meet my son. I have the pleasure of introducing you to the Saviour of the world. It is a proud moment for God also.

Can you imagine what incredible planning God has taken to bring you to be revealed in your time and to bring you to the cross at the predetermined time. How that millions of these individual life plans all interweave across time and history. Each as certain as the other. From the gametes of Adam and Eve, the human race emerges in all of its complexity, yet with perfect order. Not in some respects dissimilar to the two cells that start us off, from which 37,200,000,000 (37.2 trillion) cells emerge (there are 50 billion fat cells in the average body, and 2 billion heart muscle cells). All of this from 2 cells. It is as if there is a message in our own bodily design about the structure of humanity itself. *Act 17:26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; Act 17:27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.*

In this vast and complex universe, the Lord foreordained that we should be His children *Eph 1:5 Having **predestinated us unto the adoption** of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.* This should be a cause of great rejoicing for Christians yet there are those who find this somehow hard and unfair. They do so because the other consequence is, that there are those who are predestinated to damnation. Some would soften this and say that God has no part in it and that they go, because of their own sin. They do, but that also part of God's plan.

God loved Jacob and hated Esau not for anything that they had or would do in life, because He had already made that decision. *Rom 9:11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to **election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;**)* We are in no position to question the how and why of this and that is as far as we can take it. *Rom 9:20 Who do you think you are to talk back to God like that? Can an object that was made say to its maker, "Why did you make me like this?"* GW.

Why then evangelise when it is after a manner of speaking all a foregone conclusion? Firstly because we are told to and secondly because we do not know who will be saved and hear that call. This is the sower at work. This is all part of the “drawing” to Christ. There are those who will not hear and go their way to damnation. They will go willingly, they will often go mockingly, even in the hour of their death they will not turn. It matters not one whit to them, whether God predestinates or not. Election is in their hands, they would say and they choose not to come to Christ. Those lost are willingly and wilfully lost and at the same time have no excuse.

I think that the precious doctrines of God’s grace and His Sovereign love for His children are some of the greatest comforts that we can have in life, when we have been found by Christ. It puts my destiny in far more capable hands than my own feeble, fallible and finite hands. His predestined adoption does not guarantee me a life without trials and tribulations. It does not guarantee me a faultless and sinless life either. But it does guarantee me the ever open arms. *Rom 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:9 **Much more then**, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*

I now learn the meaning of God’s purpose in reality as it works in my life. I can now accept what happens as both planned and beneficial to me. *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Rom 8:29 For whom he did **foreknow**, he also did **predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Rom 8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also **called**: and whom he called, them he also **justified**: and whom he justified, them he also **glorified**.*

That effectual call of Christ that drew me to the cross, now reveals itself as a golden chain with unbreakable links of foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification. Once begun, it will inevitably come to the last precious link in Glory. Amen!

### **Worshipping in a black hole**

Part 27. Mar 7:6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

I don’t know whether you, like me, found the institutional forms of religion difficult to understand? I did because they bore little resemblance to the way things were done in the Bible. I remember at Sunday School being taught about the disciples and the people of Israel and in the pictures we were shown, they all dressed the same as everybody else, with the exception of the Priests and Pharisees. The Apostles too, just looked like ordinary people and dressed like ordinary people. A stinky old fisherman could become a man sent out by Christ, as an Apostle. He didn’t need to dress differently.

Somehow, in the intervening centuries, things have changed. People who wanted to be religious leaders distinguished themselves by the way they dressed. They adopted strange new titles and rebranded themselves as “Reverends”, “Vicars”, “Rectors”, “Archdeacons”, “Archbishops”, “Popes”,



“Cardinals”, “Primates”, “Canons”, none of which were given to Christians in the Church. You will say, surely it doesn’t matter, it is not important, its just a way of honouring someone in the church, what’s in a name anyway? We should keep moving with the times, grow, develop, embrace technology and improve the standards and quality of worship. Surely you don’t expect us to live like they did in the first century, so why should we express ourselves in worship like them.

Let’s examine this with an analogy. Years ago there was a family who owned a beautiful vineyard and made wine that was very popular in the region. They also made bread from the wheat that they grew in their fields. The patriarch of the family told his sons that they should take his products into the wide world to let other men enjoy what they enjoyed. What made them special was how they made the wine and the bread and that is why it was so popular. As they go out into the world his sons develop the growing market. Business was good and the cottage industry thrived. It operated like a franchise and men continue to produce the wine and bread just like the patriarch had asked them.

Some of the sons saw a way of expanding the market by changing the way the product was made. They argue that the cottage industry doesn’t really fit the idea of a global brand and they think that they can expand the market more quickly by centralising the control process. They also have reformulated the way the wine and bread are made so as to bring down the costs. It is less about the product and more about the business. They no longer use the simple vintners and bakers because they don’t fit the new image and they don’t produce the profits because the ingredients they use are too expensive. The new managers are going to industrialise the process and build wine factories and commercial bakeries.

The profits, rather than going into creating vineyards and growing fields of wheat, now go into building the factories. These factories become the face of the brand. The wine must be good because who would invest in such places if the products were so bad?

The grapes used in the original wine are changed as did the process of fermentation. The wheat in the bread was mixed with other products to bulk it up. In some factories they add wood and clay but the finished product still looked like one of the original loaves. Instead of taking years to produce good wine, the new managers have found a way to make it in months. They have also brought the price down. Most people couldn’t remember what the original wine tasted like anyway and they were content to drink this wine, thinking it was the same because it used the original label. The same happened to the bread. They all had their favourite manufacturers whose products were now distinguished by the design and labelling of the bottle and the packaging of the loaf. No one bothered to go back and compare it with the original wine and bread which still had a few suppliers.

Everyone thought that they were still eating and dinking the same product that the patriarch had introduced. The sales teams from the factories told everyone this was the case and they believed them. The factories by this time were all a little different from the originals, not just in the way they were built but also in to way the products were made. It didn’t seem to matter anymore about the original product as long as everyone was producing something like it. This gave some of the managers a great idea. They would all join together and agree that their products were all essentially the same thing so that this would cut out any competition between them and they could all live comfortably together. So the ecumenical wine and bread company was formed.

Now, isn't that how Christianity developed? The early Church expanded and developed to meet the challenges and demands of the age. Then they stopped worshipping in their own homes and because they had outgrown them put up special buildings. They wanted to impress their faith on people and so they put up magnificent buildings (religious factories) that could be seen for miles around. These buildings grew larger and spread far and wide around the world, eventually becoming as large as sports stadiums. They used their creative skills to effect in the design of glass windows, statues, architecture and all to the glory of God. They formed choirs and wrote special religious music, requiems and oratorios that drew people in. They trained so that they could speak more eloquently and preach marvellous sermons. These larger expressions of Christianity needed new orders of management and government, surely? Enter the vicars, archbishops and popes.

And what about those who decided that they wouldn't change? What about those like the Amish and the Mennonites who got stuck in the past and failed to adapt to a changing world and technology? Are they less Christian for all that? Because some Christians refuse to have a television, live simply, dress modestly and do not indulge or follow in the so called pleasures and fashions of the modern age, does that make them wrong?

In our parable, the winemakers developed traditions. Traditions (Paradosis παράδοσις) are merely things which are passed on or given over. We might talk of the traditional way of making wine, which means the handing down of how they were originally made. They had developed ways of doing things. The vintner went with progress just as we might argue that Christianity developed new ways of doing the old things. What is wrong with that? The Apostles had their own traditions *2Th 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after **the tradition which he received of us.***

The Bible is clearly not against tradition *2Th 2:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and **hold the traditions** which ye have been taught, whether by **word**, or our **epistle**.* Christian oral and religious traditions are condoned, so why all of the fuss about the way churches do things differently from each other? Isn't that just the variability that comes in with religious freedom and that is how all these institutions developed? Now hold that thought. When you look at all the religious institutions, can you really say that they are developing? Look at them. They are all frozen in the past, Catholicism in the medieval period, Anglicanism in the 1600's, Methodists in the 1700's, Baptists in the 1800's. They all got stuck in a time warp just as much as the Amish and Mennonites and they too have their religious uniforms. They are pushing an ancient traditional view of their own making into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Old factories?

The question then becomes, do their "traditional views" find its support in the Christianity in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. In a recent debate on Creationism, Ken Ham made an interesting observation. He said, that in regard to, for example, the strata in the Grand Canyon, he would be in agreement with the evolutionist Bill Nye about the structure and composition of the layers but he would have difficulty in agreeing the origin and formation of them. Sometimes in religion too, we think we are looking at the same thing but the reality is we are not. For example, baptism, a common word amongst the varieties of Christianity means different things. In Catholic, Anglican and Methodist traditions it is applied to infants and carries with it the power to regenerate the soul and forgive sin.

They have developed a form of words to accompany this practice “We call upon thee for this Infant, that he, coming to thy holy Baptism, may receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration. Receive him, O Lord, as thou hast promised by thy well-beloved Son.... WE receive this Child into the Congregation of Christ's flock, and do sign him with the sign of the Cross.... SEEING now, dearly beloved brethren, that this Child is regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's Church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits..” There you are. That is a tradition of that church and the question is, does that tradition accord with God’s word or is it an invention of man? Jesus said, in our text, **“Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition”**. Is this the case?

Infant sprinkling is not doing an old thing in a new way. It is not doing an old thing at all. One theologian observed that, “if infant baptism (sprinkling) was in the Bible, it was written in later by men”. I think he is right. Faith always precedes baptism. *Act 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.* Here then, in christening, is one example of the things that Jesus speaks against. It is undermining the teaching of God. It is sowing false hope, it is giving a man a hope of glory without any inward change. It is doing something that even Jesus did not do, that is give salvation without repentance. As one of Spurgeon’s sermons intoned, children are brought to Christ not a font.

It is not my intention at this time to list the many alterations to the clear teaching of scriptures. You will find them if you look for yourselves and there is no question that some changes have seriously affected the faith of men. It doesn’t matter how nice, how kind, how religious these people appear, they are just actors in God’s eyes. Hypocrites. They pay “lip service” which is verbal expression of agreement or allegiance, unsupported by real conviction or action. The heart and lips must move in synchronisation. The heart cannot be distant if it has been renewed by the Spirit.

Here is the warning in this hard saying. **“Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition”**. What matters in institutional churches is maintaining their distinctive identities. It doesn’t matter what God has said because they can override that. They can to all intents and purposes pretend to acknowledge Christ but when it comes to the practical word of God, putting what God said, into practice, there it stops.

Ray C. Stedman said, “...the institutional church is essentially a nursery for overgrown spiritual babes. Because it has habituated God's people into being passive receivers, it has stunted their spiritual development and kept them in spiritual infancy”. People do not develop individual growth to question what they are being taught. They capitulate to the institution and sell their souls to the leaders who are blind guides. This is why very few Christians become capable of doing anything for Christ. They have been described as “pew fodder”.

Paul says that we should all, that is all without exception, be capable of contributing to building the church. If you have sat under ministries for years and have not got to the point where you can contribute to building god’s people, it seems to me that it has been a waste of time and that it will continue to be a waste of time. *Eph 4:12 Their purpose is to prepare God's people, to serve, and to build up the body of Christ. GW. Eph 4:12 For the repairing of the Saintes, for the woorke of the ministerie. Geneva. Eph 4:12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ESV.*

Learning without any desire to apply the teaching, lip service, is hypocrisy. Worship that is acceptable to God, is worship that is defined by Him. We are taught here that empty, vain worship, consists of those things which emerge from the traditions of men. These have no value in God's eyes and they are detrimental. Worship without the word of God is worship in a black hole.

With apologies to Richard Feynman, I conclude. "If it disagrees with scripture it is wrong. In that simple statement is the key to Christianity. It does not make any difference how beautiful your doctrine is. It does not make any difference how smart you are, who made **the doctrine, or what his name is – if it disagrees with scripture it is wrong. That is all there is to it.**"

### **Making Mammon work for you**

Part 28. Luk 16:9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. Luk 16:9 Jesus continued, "I'm telling you that although wealth is often used in dishonest ways, you should use it to make friends for yourselves. When life is over, you will be welcomed into an eternal home. GW.

Perhaps like me, you have seen much more depth in the Gospels as we have focused on these "hard sayings" of Jesus? It had occurred to me that we perhaps do not give the Gospels the attention that they deserve and that we might focus more on the Pauline teachings of the epistles as being more relevant to the Church. The Gospels make nice reading but we do not dwell on them long enough to extract their message. That may be a result of the way we learned them in Sunday School, as nice stories told by nice people. Our text today may be typical of that. We read it, agree with it and then pass on, without its message impacting upon our lives. It becomes "wise words" but at the same time irrelevant words. Words that cannot possibly be important in our day, because if they were, we would surely see more Christians doing the words? Do not be fooled, the Church in our day is but a shadow of itself. It bears little resemblance to the Church of the first century.

We might say that this text is Jesus advice on how we should use mammon or money. "Mammon" is just the Syrian word for money, and it is called "unrighteous" or "unjust" because, those to whom our Lord was speaking had probably made their money by injustice, not that I find that money is ever righteous money. Riches are also deceitful and can fly away in an instant. This verse dismisses at a single stroke, the covetousness of any who say, there are other things I can do for people apart from money. It is true that money isn't the only thing that can help people but if this is so, why be encouraged by Jesus to use Mammon to make "friends"?

It is a task imposed upon us whether we like money or not. Yes, being a Christian is **not** just about taking all the good things that God gives to us. It is not a one way transfer living off of the benefits of God and neglecting all else. We are not as we noted last week (Ray C. Stedman) institutionalised by the Church as "a nursery for overgrown spiritual babes. Because it has habituated God's people into being passive receivers". It is also about how we respond to those gifts of God. *Jas 2:15 Suppose a believer, whether a man or a woman, needs clothes or food Jas 2:16 and one of you tells that person, "God be with you! Stay warm, and make sure you eat enough." If you don't provide for that person's physical needs, **what good does it do?** Jas 2:17 In the same way, faith by itself is dead if it doesn't cause you to do any good things.*

When you pray, do you often ask the Lord to “bless” people? What does that mean? “Lord bless them”, because you cannot or you will not? Does it mean, “Lord bless them, do something for them” because it then means that I will not then have to do anything? Does it mean “Lord take away any obligations from me”? “God be with you” and “Be blessed” are about as much use to a starving man as a stone.

We are trustees for God and these words of Jesus are a command. Yes, this isn't an option it's a requirement *Luk 16:9 And I say unto you, **Make** (ποιησατε G4160 Strong's reference, V-AAM-2P = Aorist active imperative second person plural, Robinson's Morphological Analysis Codes) to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.* It is the same as in John's gospel, the wedding at Cana. *Joh 2:5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, **do it** (ποιησατεG4160 V-AAM-2P).* We might translate it, “I tell you, **make it so!**” Just as those men at Cana were told to do what Jesus said, so are we here told to do it, make it so. No? You don't believe we have such a duty? Then Join the “I never knew you” queue and keep your head buried in the sand. I find these old comments from Marcus Dods interesting.

“We may not have consciously wronged any man or defrauded any; but if we have omitted to consider what was due to God and man, the likelihood is we have more money than we have a right to. The name, indeed, “unrighteous mammon,” is sometimes sweepingly applied to all wealth and material advantages, because there is a feeling that the whole system of trade, commerce, and social life is inextricably permeated with fraudulent practices and iniquitous customs—so permeated that no man can be altogether free, or is at all likely to be altogether free, from all guilt in this matter.

Take any coin out of your pocket and make it tell its history, the hands it has been in, the things it has paid for, the transactions it has assisted, and you would be inclined to fling it away as contaminated and filthy. But that coin is a mere emblem of all that comes to you through the ordinary channels of trade, and suggests to you the pollution of the whole social condition. The clothes you wear, the food you eat, the house you live in, the money you are asked to invest, have all a history which will not bear scrutiny. Oppression, greed, and fraud serve you every day. Whether you will or not you are made partakers of other men's sins. You may be thankful if your hands are not soiled by any stain that you have wittingly incurred; but even so, you must ask, What compensation can I make for the unrighteousness which cleaves to mammon? How am I to use it now, seeing I have it? Our Lord says, “You are to make friends with it, who may receive you into everlasting habitations.” “

Mammon is unrighteous as a whole because the system whereby it is employed is driven by the root of evil, the love of money *1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* In turn covetousness becomes idolatry. *Col 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and **covetousness, which is idolatry:***

How dirty is our mammon? HSBC has also been caught up in allegations of handling illicit funds. The global banking giant was recently fined 1.9 billion USD by US authorities for failing to maintain anti-money laundering controls that saw cash from drug cartels, terrorists and pariah states laundered

through its branches. The new Chairperson of the BBC, Rona Fairhead, is being sued for her part in the scandal. Global Witness, who campaign to prevent natural resource related corruption, claim that Barclays allowed suspect money to be moved from Equatorial Guinea by the President's son, Teodorin Obiang, into an Barclays account in Paris. Chances are that your pension pot is propping up some arms deal in the third world, exploiting low paid workers making your favourite trainers and keeping you comfortable at the expense of the poor of the world. Mammon is contaminated just as every bank note in the UK is literally contaminated with cocaine within weeks of entering circulation. Police have stopped testing notes for traces of the drug in criminal investigations, as the contamination is so widespread.

Yet in spite of this, our Lord says that we can do good with money. I imagine that many Christians, having absorbed the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, find a conflict here. In that place they are told, *Mat 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* It also reiterates what is said here in Luke, *Mat 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. **Ye cannot serve God and mammon.***

That said, this text is not about serving or being a servant to money, it is about using mammon to serve God's purposes. More than that, it is about using it for good. The old Jewish writers tell us of a certain avaricious Rabbi who was very anxious to invest his wealth to the best advantage. A friend undertook to do this for him. One day the Rabbi asked the name of the investment from which he was assured he would receive the highest interest. His friend answered, "I have given all your money to the poor." That is one way of using mammon for good.

I cannot recall any Christian who wanted to gain riches for the sole purpose of using them for the Lord and that giving was the business of the company. I am not saying that there have not been some very great givers in the church. There have been many large hearts in the church. Charles Spurgeon funded numerous services to the churches from the income from his writings. He funded an orphanage, a college, almshouses, a book fund for ministers, a colportage society, Sunday School for the blind, Pastor's aid society for poor pastors, yet he never drew a salary from his congregation. Spurgeon even had the equivalent of a food bank, "The ordinance poor fund". It centred on ministering to its own members, distributing food and goods to the poor members of the church. In the 1870's this society gave £800 worth of aid a year (£100,000 today). They eventually increased this fund to around £4000, yet in this charity he did not have sympathy with the lazy, "who will eat till they sweat and work till they freeze".

Perhaps because we do not see much need about us in the west today and perhaps also, because we pay a large part of our tax to fund social welfare, personal giving and the use of our money is the leftovers from our self serving. Once we have satisfied ourselves, then we may sit back and consider other needs. Giving is not off the top of our income, it is off of the bottom. The fact that Jesus even has to tell us how to use "unrighteous mammon" shows how far off the path we are.

The story preceding our text is about stewardship. The steward had failed to manage his master's goods and realises that he has been found out. *Luk 16:1 And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had*

wasted his goods. *Luk 16:2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.* There is still a chance that he may redeem himself and he starts to collect the debts at reduced rates.

Let us not distance ourselves from that steward and say that it does not apply to us. That we have not cheated our employer, we have not been slack in business, we have always been honest and reliable, so this doesn't apply to us. Why? If we behaved as well with the things of God as we do with our earthly employers, then we might agree. It is clear however, that we do not. I think that this steward may be meant to represent us. We have a life in which we are entrusted with God's gifts. What we have is by His grace alone. *Deu 8:18 But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is **he that giveth thee power to get wealth**, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.* While it is perfectly right that we should use that wealth to provide for ourselves and our families, we also have a duty to our Christian brothers and sisters.

What shall we say when we are asked to give account? When we stand before our poor brothers who had nothing compared to us? If we use wealth like the man who set his heart on his own care we may end up losing everything. He worked until he had a wonderful retirement plan and a well funded pension. He could now take it easy, or so he thought. *Luk 12:20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? Luk 12:21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not **rich toward God**.* How much should you give? Zacchaeus gave half his substance. *Luk 19:8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the **half of my goods I give to the poor**; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. **The rich young ruler needed to give it all.***

It is in a manner of speaking a form of currency conversion. Although we shall not need money in heaven and cannot take it there, we can convert it in the Bank of Faith and what we use it on will be remembered in the halls of glory. It will if possible bring greater cheer to the residents. We can use it now to make friends but what particular friends does the Lord have in mind? Does He mean that we use it to become a popular philanthropist, a Bill Gates of the age. For sure, that man has done a lot of good with the money he got from the computer industry and no doubt many are grateful for his enterprises. Yet when he joins many of those beneficiaries in Hell, as he will if he does not find Christ, he will see that there was something missing in all his giving and there will be no rejoicing or welcoming committee.

I do not though think that it is meant here that we should make unrighteous friends of unrighteous mammon. That we should use it in earthly ways simply to be popular with sinners. The reason that I take this view is that I do not think that those people will be in the eternal home that I go to, so they could not welcome me. The only people who will welcome us are the followers of Christ. If they are not there to welcome you be very afraid because you have arrived in another place. NO, I think that mammon is to be used for godly purposes and primarily for God's people. That is the only way that you will be welcomed by your use of mammon, that is if you used it. Jesus says that there will be people who will welcome us because of our giving and also no doubt some will have no welcoming party. I imagine that many will arrive to a very poor welcome committee because they made no friends at all.

As another Christian observed (R. Winterbotham), “We may still decide, perhaps, to live up to our income, to live according to our rank, to maintain a certain style, and so on, but we will not be such contemptible hypocrites as to pretend that this is the path of Christian wisdom. The principle which Christ lays down we shall keep before our eyes, and we shall pray that it may sink little by little into our hearts, until it begin to bear fruit in our lives—the principle, I mean, that every penny spent on self is wasted, **every penny we can learn to part with is saved because laid up with Him.**” Stewardship prepares us for greater trust. If you couldn’t do this, you are a “one talent” person who buried his responsibility and it will do you no good. *Luk 16:11 If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?* How we manage mammon in the here and now has eternal consequences.

### Who will you really serve?

Part 29. Mar 9:38 And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. Mar 9:39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. Mar 9:40 **For he that is not against us is on our part.**

There is something about denominationalism that resembles tribalism. Tribes, like denominations have a lot in common with sports supporters or other groups that see themselves in a peculiar light, such that their team, their race or their tribe is the best or at least, worthy of support. Catholics see Protestants as rivals and have over history had times where their differences were expressed by violence. The Baptist tribe or team depending how you view them, the Methodist team, the Anglican team all have their team shirts and their club history that continues to make them rivals in the denominational league. What Baptist would encourage someone to become a Methodist? The Christian religion has become a competition with its own league table. I may seem to lack charity but state truth when I say that many churches are in a very low league. Where I live, there are two “Christian” groups that meet in separate school halls, adjacent to each other. I wonder who their gods are and which one goes where?

There are many football fans that cannot kick a ball, just as there are many, if not a majority of denominational team supporters who haven’t the slightest idea about their religion, what the origins and beliefs of their teams are. They just happened to grow up supporting that team, wearing the team shirt, going along to the matches on Sunday. If they had been in another family, they might have had a different team loyalty. I went to a Baptist Sunday school with the consequence that I never had any problems relating to the Baptist team. I also had some connections to the Anglican team and so I never felt too uncomfortable with them. The Methodists were a different matter. I didn’t know about them so they were a rival team and probably, in my young mind, not to be trusted. So much of this religious loyalty is based on ignorance and prejudice. This in turn can spiral into violence and sectarianism.

The fault lies in each individual and how he or she has developed their allegiance to a particular group. So much of this loyalty is bred by peer pressure and family loyalty. If it was good enough for my dad it is good enough for me but is it good enough for God? Implied in our loyalty is that everyone else is not to be trusted and not to be followed. Only we have the right faith, the right belief, the true God and it has been just that sort of blind belief that has led millions to war and millions to an early grave. We have to be the top team. It is not enough just to beat the opposition;



we have to stop them altogether, we have to annihilate them. The great humiliation that the cannibal could inflict on his enemy was to eat him and defecate him.

*Mar 9:38 John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone forcing demons out of a person by using the power and authority of your name. We tried to stop him because he was not one of us."* GW. Because this "unknown" soldier of Christ was fighting principalities and powers and yet was not one of the 12, provided justification, in the bigoted eyes of the disciples, to stop him working in Jesus Name. They, THE 12, they were the chosen ones, they alone were worthy to do the works of God and no one else was good enough.

It didn't matter that the streets were crawling with the demon possessed. It was not the least important that men should be made whole and in their right mind, that good should triumph over evil. It was nothing to do with loving a neighbour, it was all about rank, position or as Richard Feynman put it, "Epaulettes". What mattered were their self made hypocritical rules about who was the top dog! At this stage they are a disgrace to religion but I am sure that there have been a few of us who have been there, all "good" team players.

The other aspect of this is even more sinister. It is that men think that they have the right to control what God does and how He distributes His power. People swallow this every time they go to an institutional church and the man trained in the "magic" rituals makes some pronouncement over them. These men have special ritual powers conferred on them, because only they can 'baptise', lead 'communion' and teach. They are no different to freemasons who have their own secret rites of passage. You can only work the religious "magic" if you have been through the secret circle of training. These religious leaders now become God when they say, for example, "I now pronounce thee man and wife". Only God can do that. And He never delegated it.

Transubstantiation is the teaching that during the Mass, at the Catholic consecration in the Lord's Supper, the elements of the Eucharist, bread and wine, are transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus and that they are no longer bread and wine, but only retain their appearance of bread and wine. The catholic "priest" controls this process and he turns the bread into Christ, in his hands. The priest now is the creator of God through his own hands. God is no longer sovereign, He is a servant. He is like the Genie in the bottle who is summoned by the owner, rubbing the vessel. Did it never strike you as stupid that a Genie with so much power could be confined in a bottle? That is how men treat Christ. He is wheeled out when the "magic" starts and put away afterwards.

I saw recently a Catholic ritual where the Pope held a service to declare two past Popes "saints". The current Pope was seen kissing two ornate gilded glass vials containing the blood of one dead Pope and some skin from the other dead Pope. After a short ritual and reading, lo and behold, there were two new saints. This is where I have a problem. Firstly, there is no Pope in the Bible, secondly saints are saint before they die and thirdly, all Christians are saints, *2Co 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia.* Here in Catholicism is another example of an exclusive club that makes its own rules. In another unexplainable ritual, I saw that the Queen's (Commonwealth Games) Baton Relay had been blessed by the Bishop of St David's, the Right Reverend Wyn Evans, as part of its fifth day touring Wales. Last week a memorial service was held for the dogs killed in the Manchester dog home fire. What planet are they on?

Now lest you say that I am falling into the same trap as the disciples, “we forbid him, because he followeth not us”, let me make a point by quoting the rest of the text, *Mar 9:39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part.* What, I ask, is supposedly being done “in the Name of Jesus” in the examples I used? It has nothing to do with the name of Jesus. It is nothing that Jesus told us to do. It is the invention of men. It is so bizarre that it makes Christianity look like it was born in an asylum. It is mumbo jumbo in fancy dress. Pantomime dames playing religious charades in a “Punch and Judy” circus show.

Now, when religion becomes exclusive, it becomes controlling and the ultimate way to control the people is by becoming God to them, developing unquestioning loyalty and unwavering belief in the team and in particular the team manager. At that stage, you can invent all the paraphernalia, the whistles, bells, smells and uniforms, white collars, crosses and rings, because no one will question you. You can see this played out in the recent cults of Jim Jones and David Koresh where people followed their mad leaders into death and another triumph for evil.

Of course satan did not want the disciples of Jesus to cast out the devils from the people. Evil wanted to maintain its stronghold and continue to flourish and the disciples were willing accomplices to the satanic plan. It was no different to Peter who wanted to stop the Crucifixion.

The original sin was in the first place, the desire to be as God. This was the inner thought, the inner deceit of the heart. *Gen 3:4 "You certainly won't die!" the snake told the woman. "God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened. You'll be like God, knowing good and evil."* GW. The thought was sown and the untouchable fruit that had in it the seeds of death, was worth risking life for. The die was cast, the quest for divinity started. If I can be my own God, then what need have I for the Creator God? God has only been deceiving us because He doesn't want us to be like Him. The devil has been using the same line ever since. We are co-equal with God says the devil.

We give thanks that God is not bound by men's thoughts and neither is He bound to explain His actions. *Joh 21:20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.* It is none of your business just keep you eye on me. God will place His Spirit and His power on whom He will. This is well illustrated in the time of Moses

*Num 11:25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease. But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!*

The Lord will not be dictated to when it comes to pouring out His Spirit, as if His cup is so small that it contains but a drop. He can open the heavens if it pleases Him. There were others who received the Spirit but were not among the 70, Eldad and Medad and they too joined in the prophesying. Is this not to humble our arrogance that we think that we alone have the favour of God? *Rom 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

I think that this was a seminal moment for young Joshua after the Exodus. Joshua was probably in his 20's and he had put the older man Moses on a pedestal. Moses by now over 80 years of age was after all a legend in his lifetime. The young Joshua was an understudy, learning leadership for the time he would take over from Moses. He was like a guard dog looking after his master's interests, he was on Moses team and he would make sure that Moses got the glory. If there was any chance that a cult of personality was beginning to develop, it was here. If there was any chance that outsiders would destabilise Moses position, they must be stopped. And so like those disciples of Jesus, young Joshua says, "Forbid them?"

Moses corrects his myopic vision. It was not Moses desire to limit the prophets. No. What a nation it would be if all of the people of God were prophets? A nation of prophets, why not? A church where everyone did something rather than a church full of passengers. The lesson to Joshua was, you are a fool to follow a man and a bigger fool to follow a group of men. Your duty lies elsewhere *Num 11:29 But Moses asked him, "Do you think you need to stand up for me? I wish all the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them."* GW.

Moses had grown as a man. He had come to see what was important in life. Moses was a traveller in time and had seen the greater picture. He had met Jesus, *Deu 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;* (*Joh 6:14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*) Moses knew now what was important and it was not him, it was his Lord God. He would not see the church stunted, limited by weak men or factions based on jealousy rather than truth.

I think that this moment gave Joshua a new perspective. Around him the people had been complaining about the food God had given them. The bread of heaven was not enough. God in response sent quail by the thousand and for their sin the people died by the thousand. *Num 11:19 Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; Num 11:20 But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?* Yet the feast was accompanied by a plague. *Num 11:33 And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.*

Next, Joshua saw Miriam, Moses sister smitten with leprosy for her arrogance, *Num 12:9 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. Num 12:10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.* Joshua was left in no doubt as to whom he was dealing with. A Supranatural being of immense power. So when he takes the task of spying out the promised land,

he is in no doubt that it can be taken but he and his companion Caleb are alone in that belief. Because of that, they alone outlived the others to make that journey into Canaan. *Num 14:30 Doubtless ye shall **not** come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.*

If ever there was a lesson that few people are saved it is here. For all the religious followers, only two families out of 2,000,000 people entered Canaan, the Promised Land, of those who left Egypt. In that large congregation there were only a few believers who worked together, the rest were in denial about the promises and power of God. No doubt most people would follow the majority because minorities can never be right, or can they?

I am not advocating ecumenical movements or compromise when I say the faithful should work together. The strength of Christianity does not reside in some centralised organisation here on earth, some mega-church or institution. It lays in that common trust in the Creator who delivers us from evil. Its charter is the scripture and that which is not in that charter has no place in the church. *Rev 22:18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: Rev 22:19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.* Yes this is talking about the prophecy of the book of the Apocalypse but I believe it applies to all scripture, *Deu 4:2 Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.*

As part of our Christian discipleship, we should be working together to rid the churches of the falsehoods that have been introduced by men. We strive for unity through a common faith, not a compromise or lowest common denominator. We seek not to elevate man, protect or project the leaders and promote cults of personality. Our duty is to our Creator.

It takes strong Christians to hold the line. *Deu 3:28 and charge Jehoshua, and strengthen him, **and harden him**, for he doth pass over before this people, and he doth cause them to inherit the land which thou seest.* YLT. Is it something for just leaders or should we all be case hardened? Most Christians would have a less troubled life if they wore some decent armour. Many are covered in marshmallow and you can pierce it with a blade of grass. These Christians are weak and cannot endure hardship. These are the ones whose faith is shaken by the passing of an ant. The Christian who is one with His Lord can absorb the punishment in his hardened character. He has no questions to ask about what his Lord does or does not do. He follows Him into the heat of the battle.

What would Moses and Joshua have said the “Archbishop” (sic) of Canterbury who declared this week that he “sometimes has doubts in his belief in God”? Justin Welby, a man who sways in the winds of doctrinal change, double minded and unstable in all his ways? A despicable man of straw and jelly. Unfit to lead a Sunday School with such a lack of understanding of the Creator, yet placed by his acolytes as the leader of the team. Blind men with a blind leader. He would have been lucky to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water in the camp of Joshua.

As Joshua closed the book of his sojourn here, he challenged his people. *Jos 24:15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.* Well, who will you serve? A denominational god of man's making or the Creator of Heaven and Earth?

With Paul we say, *2Ti 1:12 ... for I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

### **The Beatitudes: Lessons in discipleship**

Part 30. Mat 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: Mat 5:2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

In order to understand the "Beatitudes", we must see them in their context. They sit at the head of what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount, the longest recorded Sermon of Jesus. It is so full of truth that I doubt whether the listeners remembered a fraction of its content the first time that they heard it. It is pastoral in its direction, that is, we hear the great Shepherd's voice as he warns and guides His flock. Above all, it is full of hard sayings. It challenges Disciples, it asks more of their lives than they are perhaps currently giving and it delivers a blow against the hypocrisy of idle discipleship.

Let us for simplicity, see two aspects of this sermon that will guide us in our understanding. It lays out **first of all**, in the opening blessings, the nature of the disciple, **the Character** of the person who calls themselves a Christian, the inner distinguishing traits or marks of one who makes a claim upon the Kingdom of Heaven. These inner characteristics will become known in **the second aspect** of the sermon. This aspect focuses on **the Conduct** of the disciple, how they interact with the world around them and how that Christian character outworks itself to others.

We might also say that the Sermon on the Mount is an exposition of the heart of the commandments. When asked what was the first and greatest commandment, Jesus replied, *Mar 12:29 And Jesus answered him, **The first of all the commandments** is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: Mar 12:30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. Mar 12:31 And **the second is like, namely this**, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

The Beatitudes are in a manner of speaking, how we accomplish the **first command**. We love God by being what he wants us to be. In ourselves, we have that Christian character, which by its very definition is blessed. My poverty of spirit, meekness, thirst for righteousness, all direct my heart, soul, mind and strength to love Him above all else, because that is what He wants me to be. The second part of the Sermon, leads us to see how our conduct outworks to love our neighbour in the **second command**. *Mat 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*

I do not believe that these “Beatitude” traits are in us by nature. Whatever we may perceive as poverty, meekness and purity of heart in those people who are not Christians, they are not the traits that Jesus mentions here. There is no good in the natural man and we must not assume that the appearance of what some might call “Christian virtues”, in the ungodly, have any substance in Christ or any lasting value. It doesn’t matter how much a so called good a man may do or good a man may be, it does not earn him any reward, if he never did that in Christ. If the good works are not in Christ they are lost works. *Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* It must come from being **IN CHRIST**.

Now, we may not all have embraced fully these Beatitude character traits and conduct but they are and should be our daily goal in life. They are not options or choices. We should not view them as the possession of certain higher minded or more committed Christians than ourselves. Additionally we should not see them as choices, “pic’n’mix” virtues that we can select or discard. For example, one person has a great poverty of spirit but lacks mercy, another has a great hunger for right but has little purity of heart. No, they are all to be absorbed into that singular Christian character which reveals Christ to the world. Our goal is to secure each and every one of those character traits and in turn practice them. I will ask you that you try and read them every week and at least once a week until you remember them, for you and I must have them all.

Looking back over my years as a Christian, I have seen so many people rushing off to do a “work” or develop a calling so soon after being saved. Young men make a dash for a Bible college and claim a calling to ministry. The idea that any personal preparation is necessary is completely missed. The idea that a man can serve God’s people without first having shown his capability in practice is alien to the scripture (1 Tim 3:1 ff). The idea that we can adequately convey the gospel without having worked the gospel into our own lives is equally true. There is the need for each and every one of us to become what we desire others to become, otherwise it is hypocrisy. The danger is all too obvious. *1Co 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* We must be leavened by the Gospel.

It is my belief is that the reason we find the conduct required of us as disciples, so hard, is because we lack the characteristics of the disciples. Get the Beatitudes grafted into your Christian character and the outworking, the conduct, the way we deal with our neighbours, will fall into place. The difficulties we find with neighbours are often rooted in the difficulties we have in developing the Christian Character. The Beatitudes will help us overcome that obstacle.

As we set the scene for our study on the “Beatitudes” or “blessings” we observe that they were primarily for the disciples not the multitudes. *Mat 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.* There is another and I am sure that there were many occasions, when Jesus preached this message to multitudes, such as in Luke’s Gospel where He taught on the plain, *Luk 6:19 The entire crowd was trying to touch him because power was coming from him and curing all of them. Luk 6:20 Jesus looked at his disciples and said, “Blessed are those who are poor. The kingdom of God is theirs.*

For now and I think, for the first time, these pearls of the kingdom are revealed to the disciples, the inner core of followers. The detail, that they were delivered on a “mountain”, the so called sermon on the mount, may direct our attention back to that ministry of Moses, which too started with the

delivery of God's word from a mountain. Similarly, these blessings are an encapsulation of ideas just like the Ten Commands. Let me explain. The 10 commands or 'law words' on Sinai do little to explain the underlying concepts. They need defining, for example, the 4<sup>th</sup> command, *Exo 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy*. To understand that command, we need to define Sabbath and holy. We need to define the boundaries of Sabbath and also the sanctions (punishments) for breaking it. As we see, Sabbath was not just a weekly event and in the event Israel went into captivity for breaking the land Sabbath.

The 10 law words are brilliant summaries, 'aide-mémoires', a table of headings, the apodictic law, from which we can delve into the wider meanings of the commands. I believe that the same may be said of these "blessings". They encapsulate Christian principles that are expanded upon in many other places in scripture. You may ask why there are only 9 "blessings" (some find only 8) here and I would say, perhaps deliberately so, such that we did not start treating them like the 10 laws. I have often noted with interest, that in many old churches, "steeple houses" as George Fox the Quaker quaintly described them, there are on the walls, sometimes placed facing each other, the table of the Laws of Moses and the table of the "Beatitudes". They stand in antithesis to each other, yet they are in reality complimentary.

I would say that one (Law) illustrates the basic rules of life and the other (Beatitudes) illustrates the attitude that should accompany that life. One illustrates the basic requirement for a life lived in harmony with God, that is a righteous life (The Law), the other (The Beatitudes) indicates the inner nature of that life lived in harmony with God. Not that we can be righteous by ourselves or of our own power. Jesus overcame that problem, *Rom 3:22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:* That law found its goal in our union with Christ, *Rom 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*. Now, that leaves us in a position where we must live that new life, putting on the new man, becoming the new creature in Christ Jesus. It is here, I suggest that we begin to see the relevance of the "Beatitudes" as they unfurl our new character and each trait is a "Blessing". Being a Christian disciple is being a blessed person. **A person beloved of God.**

I must illustrate this word **blessing** so that we get an idea of what it means. We use it nowadays more as a farewell greeting. We say "stay blessed" or "the Lord bless you" as we part from people. Do we know what we are saying? Do we understand the meaning of blessing. On the verge of entering Canaan, after 40 years in the wilderness, Moses reiterates the principles of the law. In a dramatic illustration, he separates the tribes into two groups and tells them that when they enter Canaan, they are to stand and shout at each other from the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim. What were they to shout? They were to shout blessings and curses. *Deu 27:12 These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; ..... And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse*. Why? It was because blessings would accompany obedience and curses accompany disobedience. Let the promised land hear it and obey.

If you read the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of Deuteronomy, you get an idea of the meaning of blessing. *Deu 28:12 The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow*. Blessings are the good things of God, the benefits, the bonuses, the kindnesses, the niceties that flow from a harmonious relationship with Him. **The curses are the exact opposite.**

Blessings are the good things of God. A brother writes to us when he gets something and he says, “I believe great will be the joy of our believers to be receiving these blessings from you”. Blessings are perhaps not just good things, not just the sweet icing on the cake of life but the glacé cherry that sits on the top of the icing.

So here in Matthew 5, Jesus reveals to us the blessings that go with the faith, the cherries on the cake. Do you ever want them? Are they optional extras to you or are they essentials? If you want them, you may have to change your life style but that is all part of being a disciple. I can pass over these sayings very quickly, nod my head and move on and miss a chance of a lifetime. I can by neglect render my Christianity totally void. Who would not want as blessings, the Kingdom of Heaven, to be comforted, to be filled with righteousness, to inherit the earth, to obtain mercy, to see God, to be a child of God, to have a great reward in Heaven?

With these precious promises laid before me, I must give them due consideration. I must not run past these verses as I might and advertisement in a shop. I must not view them as I would the images flashing past me as I drive along a road, holding them briefly in my mind then discarding them to receive the next image. I must stand before each and every one of them and stare at them. I must know their meaning and apply it. I must get to the bottom of what is being said to me. I must make sure that I have the exact and perfect key of understanding to unlock the promises.

To get these blessings, I need to develop certain attitudes. I would say that this is the process of mental renewal, *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* It means, that when we become Christians, we need a new “mindset”, we need a new “world view”, we need a new attitude, because we have just come from a very dark place, we have just arrived from Satan’s kingdom. *2Co 5:17 Whoever is a believer in Christ is a new creation. The old way of living has disappeared. A new way of living has come into existence. GW.*

Now notice how the “blessings” are directed to you. It is not “Thou shalt be poor in Spirit”, “Thou shalt be merciful”, “Thou shalt be pure in heart”. Of course, if you are not, you will not get the associated blessings. I am sure though, that I have heard more than once, the Christian life being laid out by Moses modern day followers. Trying to make me obliged in some way to accept these “blessings” in a legal way. No impure heart shall see God and that is a fact but it is not stated like this, “Thou shalt be pure in heart in order to see God”. We are not incentivised by legal requirements because they just do not work but also because we are in a new dynamic with the Creator.

When your children are young you direct them with do’s and don’ts, thou shalt and thou shalt not. You do not expect to do that when they are older but you use different language. You encourage by explanation and example, because you trust that they have grasped the basics of life and they want to be someone who can be responsible in their own right. The Beatitudes show how much we have grown and how responsible we have become.

As we prepare to dive into these blessings of God, let us conclude this introduction with a thought. What kind of world would it have become, if that element that had called itself Christian, had taken upon itself the character and conduct set out here? Would we have seen the rise of the Institutional church, the development of a religious hierarchy, the rise of denominations, the idea that war can



settle ideology, that the way to deal with those who differ is to horribly mutilate and burn them, Capitalism and greed as economic motivators, that God's word is mutable and that He changes the rules because humanity is evolving? Would we have developed science, education and commerce in the same ways? Would we be so worldly, spending our days in self-service rather than the service of others? The Beatitudes will test not just our faith but how we view and influence the world in which we live.

### **The Beatitudes: The happy beggar's inheritance**

Part 31. Mat 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

I reiterate that the Sermon on the Mount is delivered to the disciples, the close followers of Jesus. A Christian is by definition a disciple *Act 11:26.....the disciples were called Christians **first** in Antioch.* A disciple is also, by definition, a learner or pupil. What does this mean in practice? You can call yourself a Christian but it is meaningless unless you are on the discipleship curve. Discipleship is the practicality of Christianity. Discipleship is the outworking of Christianity. Discipleship defines and identifies your Christianity not Christianity defining your discipleship. Disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. It does not say Christians were called disciples.

Discipleship puts the flesh on Christianity and we can see what Christianity should be by the nature of the true disciple. If you think that you can be a Christian and not take any interest in your Christian duty, make no effort to learn of Christ and no effort to bring your life into subjection to Christ, in short, not be a disciple, you are mightily deceived. No, you are neither a Christian nor a disciple. It is not sufficient to make a commitment to Christ and then live a life of no commitment to Christ. Parents should take note here and not be fooled by a well meaning interest in Christ that goes nowhere. As if a mere interest itself, inoculates against the working of sin.

I give you Charles Spurgeon's opening comments on the Beatitudes.

"A ladder, if it is to be of any use, must have its first step near the ground, or feeble climbers will never be able to mount. It would have been a grievous discouragement to struggling faith if the first blessing had been given to the pure in heart; to that excellence the young beginner makes no claim, while to poverty of spirit he can reach without going beyond his line. Had the Saviour said, "Blessed are the rich in grace," he would have spoken a great truth, but very few of us could have derived consolation there from. Our Divine Instructor begins at the beginning, with the very A B C of experience, and so enables the babes in grace to learn of him; had he commenced with higher attainments, he must have left the little ones behind. A gigantic step at the bottom of these sacred stairs would have effectually prevented many from essaying to ascend; but, tempted by the lowly step, which bears the inscription "Blessed are the poor in spirit," thousands are encouraged to attempt the heavenly way."

Let us try and paint a picture of this person who is "poor" (πτωχός ptōchos) in spirit. The word poor comes from a word meaning to crouch or cringe. It gives us the idea of a person alienated from his fellow men, debased and lowly. It is this same word "poor" that is used to describe Lazarus as a "beggar". *Luk 16:20 And there was a certain **beggar** named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of*

sores, *Luk 16:21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.*

Now Lazarus was poor in the sense that he had little means to support his life. I am not saying that this is the poverty that we are dealing with in this Beatitude. I never see that being poor is regarded as a blessing. I do not see that by giving all our wealth away, artificial poverty, is meant here either. Neither debasing our bodies, spending a life in splendid isolation, taking vows of silence, chastity and poverty, a life grovelling in a cloister and made as painful as we could bear. No, this is not poverty of spirit, it is self seeking pleasure, it is the individual seeking fulfilment in their own ideas of religion. Many people choose religion because it satisfies a selfish need in them. No, the poor in spirit is a spiritual beggar, crouching before his Creator, his hand outstretched in a request for a merciful gift of Divine grace. It is not his intention to remain empty as if this experience was sufficient of itself. It is not his intention to lie in the gutter of spiritual despair. Not at all. It is by experiencing this poverty that he can overcome it and be filled, rich beyond imagination.

We might immediately respond against this idea by saying, well, how can Christians be beggars?" Is not the Christian to be filled with the spirit? *Eph 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;* Does not the scripture say that we are rich in Christ? *Php 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.* Is it not written that we can be filled by God? *Eph 3:19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.* How then is it possible that we should think to become beggars? Isn't that lowering the bar, selling Christianity short, dumbing down as we might say today, the great truths and the triumphant glory of God in Christ?

How often do you see a religious conference that would take as its theme, "Becoming a spiritual beggar". No, it is hardly attractive. We concentrate on "The Victorious Christian life", "Spiritual fulfilment", "Powerhouse Christianity", "Successful Christian living" but the idea of becoming a spiritual beggar does not occur to us. Yet here it is in the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the spiritual beggars, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven".

If men do not work, we are told, then they should not eat, *2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.* The whole Christian ethos, which has been called the Victorian work ethic, is that in life you do not get something for nothing. Diligence, hard work, independence, innovation, service, self sufficiency, over production to help the less fortunate are characteristics of the Christian. I did not once see beggary as a virtue, yet here it is. The Saviour Himself, encouraging us to become spiritual beggars that we might become exceedingly rich.

If we embrace this word, we might begin to get excited in our souls. It is telling me, that I can become incredibly wealthy. I can inherit a whole kingdom by becoming a beggar. How does that work? Well, we have observed many times already that God's ways are often counter-intuitive. Servants become masters, the least become great, when you grow, you grow smaller, children not adults are the example of faith, if you put righteousness first in your life the other things fall into place. There is something counter-intuitive in this verse that must make us pause and think.

Let us as we explore this, consider firstly what the blessing is. We might think that it is the Kingdom of Heaven. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven". I am not saying that Heaven is not a blessing but there is no way that we get to Heaven by becoming spiritual beggars, through some work of ours. We get to heaven because of Christ's atoning work. *Eph 2:6 God has brought us back to life together with Christ Jesus and has given us a position in heaven with him.* GW. We are not being encouraged to perform some aesthetic ritual, some spiritual quest, ordeal or crusade to get to heaven. It is not about getting to heaven, it is about being a citizen of heaven for we are already seated in the heavenly places, *Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and **made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:***

We are I think, doubly blessed, because not only do we have heaven by the grace of Christ, we are blessed by poverty of spirit, by becoming spiritual beggars. We are blessed when we become those people, so consciously lacking in the things of the spirit that we constantly crave the things of the spirit. We sit like Lazarus but outside of the House of God, begging the merest crumbs that might fall from His table. We are running on empty.

Our text does not say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for they **shall have** the Kingdom of Heaven", as if it was the reward, in the future. No, it is now, "theirs **IS** the Kingdom". It is by being in this state that we appreciate the imminence of our eternal home. *Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* These people saw no future here on earth, they realised that they were passing through and they looked for better. They were, I believe, poor in spirit.

I would compare this spiritual poverty with earthly wealth, the Laodicean disease. *Rev 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:* The Laodiceans sat in comfort and luxury but they could not see their wretchedness in the sight of God. We can be so full of the world that there is not room in our lives for the spirit of God. For some, they may juggle the two and make room for God on Sunday or the odd few minutes in the week but that is it. Part time disciples. If we are citizens of Heaven, as indeed all who are in Christ are, we shall develop these characteristics of poverty of spirit. Not just that, but we shall develop all of the characteristics of the Beatitudes. We shall become meek, mournful, merciful, hungry and pure.

Being a spiritual beggar, is I think about being empty of self. The spiritual beggar has a lot of room for the spirit of God and a lot of hunger for the things of God. Take two bottles and pour the contents out of one. Only one of those bottles can now be filled. There is no room in the other to add anything. It has no space left. The full bottle hath need of nothing. That I would say describes the state of many who consider themselves Christians. They find it hard to make room in their lives for the things of God and they are not seen as a priority. Some think that they can have this world and the next as the foolish person said "all this and heaven too". No, you cannot serve two masters.

We live in the age of the cult of self. Obsessed with who we are and wanting to tell the world about us, our achievements, our lives, #ME@SELF, twittering our lives into the ether. The trivial pursuit of self at the cost of the demise of Christ in us. We must increase and our Facebook must find our disciples to follow us. A person I know and who should know better, has nothing of Christ on their

Facebook page. Its all about them and where they go. The most important thing isn't there at all. That is just how the world wants us to be, running with the Turkeys, not soaring with the Eagles.

Until we learn to pour our own lives down the drain and make room for Christ in us, we shall be not comprehend the Christian life. Paul counts his natural life only fit for the lavatory. *Php 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and **do count them but dung**, that I may win Christ.* It was a characteristic of God's people in all time, that they looked for better than this world offered, as we read in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews of Moses. *Heb 11:26 Esteeming **the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.***

What then do you discard of your life? Anything with "personal" stamped upon it. Personal goals, personal ambition, personal achievements, personal property, personal values, personal beliefs and so on. The original sin was about having a life independent from the Creator. We have to get back to what we were created for, to serve God. Our goals have to be replaced with God given goals, God given ambitions, God given achievements otherwise they are all worthless. In the end, if it was all about you, it was a Facebook life.

This is then the mark of the true disciple, the true believer, the real Christian. They are obsessed with Christ to the extent that their natural lives have little value here and that this world is not worth a "hill of beans". The prospect of death, the departing from this present evil world holds no fear for them. They have the Kingdom of Heaven now. They are already dead in as much as they have lost their life here. *Joh 12:25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that **hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.** Mar 8:35 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, **the same shall save it.***

When we turn to the cross, we understand the nature of our death. *Gal 2:20 **I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.** Rom 6:5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man **is crucified with him**, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* Think about what this is saying. When Christ died on the Cross, it was not in isolation from those He redeemed. We died with Him on the cross, because if we didn't, if we were not put to death with Him, how could we possibly be raised with Him. *Rom 6:8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that **we shall also live with him:***

There you are then. The disciple who becomes a spiritual beggar, realises that he doesn't have a life until he has Christ filling it. When he recognises his own poverty he can be truly filled. He can say with the Apostle Paul, *Php 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* He can also with Paul, rejoice in his infirmities, nay even take pleasure in them. *2Co 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for **when I am weak, then am I strong.***

There is another characteristic that I would suggest marks out the spiritual beggar. He is a happy beggar. Too often, Christianity is portrayed as a lemon sucking, hand wringing, charity shop clothed,

bigoted bunch of “Les miserables”. Joy went out of the window the day they started to follow Jesus and if they ever smiled it was because they had wind. No. When a man has truly found his place before God he is happy beyond measure. *Php 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord **alway**: and again I say, Rejoice.* If you are blessed, you should be happy, you should be joyful, you should have a smile on your face. If you cannot embrace this giving up of self, then you are like the man who couldn't give up his wealth. *Luk 18:23* And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. That man was miserable at the thought of giving up something he loved for something far better. If we are the same, regarding giving up our lives, we too will be miserable beggars, not blessed beggars.

### **The Beatitudes: Happy mourners**

Part 32. *Mat 5:4* Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

We have spoken about the relationship between being a disciple and being a Christian. You cannot be a Christian if you are not a disciple. Now I need to raise a question here. Do you have to be born again, born of the Spirit, converted, regenerate, baptised, all of these things at once, to be a disciple? I would suggest that you do not. There is a starting point where you follow, believe and hopefully repent, get baptised and embark on the path of discipleship. I have also said elsewhere that I do not think that the disciples were converted until after the resurrection. They have the hard hearts of the natural man and even give expression to satan's plans (Peter and John). I believe that somewhere along the path of discipleship, Christ became a different reality

This did not happen to all Jesus' disciples, as many gave up following Him. *Joh 6:65* And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. *Joh 6:66* From that time **many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.** There was a mass defection as people turned their backs upon Christ. I have seen this many times. People that have made a commitment, have been baptised, people that I have prayed with, been in a congregation with, spoken of Christ with, then one day, suddenly, they have walked away. All interest has evaporated. As I have reflected on these people, I have wondered what did they experience?

You would have been hard pressed to see anything in their lives that marked them out from other Christians. Yet something was not right. They were stony ground, weedy ground Christians and it may take years for this to be clearly seen. Initially, they had embarked upon the path of discipleship and rejoiced in salvation. They had believed that Christ died for their sins, followed on in baptism, begun attending worship, they read their Bible, they began to study scripture and suddenly it stopped. They lost the drive to push on and other things became more important.

Christianity is often described under the analogy of a run or trek (τρέχω *trechō*). *1Co 9:24* Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. *1Co 9:25* And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. *1Co 9:26* **I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:** *1Co 9:27* But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. Paul does not give us the idea that discipleship is sedentary, that we sit in comfortable indolence until Christ returns, growing old gracelessly. Discipleship is dynamic and it is a daily workout. We are trekkers.

*Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and **let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*** It is a passion for eternal life, a race for true life and the certainty of the goal, the finish line, is only there if we are in the race. The “saved” will run the race to the end, the saved will be diligent, the saved will make their calling sure. The saved will be disciples for life and that is why we have the exhortations to make certain of our calling.

*2Pe 1:9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 2Pe 1:10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, **give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:*** That is discipleship. *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*** That is discipleship on the move, a divine workout, the dynamic relationship.

Now I have laboured this thought because it puts our Beatitudes in another light. The Beatitudes are beautiful attitudes that we must adopt to be disciples. If we do not work on these, if we neglect them, if we walk away from what our Lord desires, we are lost, castaways and finished. The Beatitudes are blessings because they will confirm the nature of the Christian and encourage us in the race. That word race, by the way, ἀγών agōn, is where we get the word agony from. It’s a hard contest and there is pain along the way. The point is, you can make no claim to Christ without a personal response to Christ and the commitment to discipleship and change.

In our text, *Mat 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted*, there is pain and joy. There is mourning comforted. We might think that this mourning is associated with our own personal losses, the loss of loved ones and the aching void that that leaves. Certainly, Jesus will comfort us in these *Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.* Death, sorrow, tears only exist in this Universe, they have no place in the new Heavens.

I came across an idea the other day that when (*Joh 11:35*) *Jesus wept*, He was weeping at the thought of Lazarus being brought back to this life from a happier place. Jesus bore the burden of knowing the nature of this world and the task committed to Him *Isa 53:3 He is despised and rejected of men; a **man of sorrows**, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Isa 53:4 Surely he **hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:** yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.* We indeed may mourn but it is He who bears our sorrows.

I do not think, however, that the “mourning” in our text, is the mourning associated with our personal losses. Many people do not suffer these personal losses or perhaps not until late in life and so mourning does not affect everyone in the same way. Yet we are told here, it is a blessing to mourn, so what are we mourning over? What can we, as disciples have to commonly mourn about? That is the question.

Mourning can be a very selfish affair. It can also be a very hypocritical affair. People at one time hired professional mourners to make funerals ultra solemn occasions. We can put on a mourning face but

inside we can hide our true feelings. I have no doubt that the Lord is not encouraging a mere outward, mourning, a pretence of mourning. No, it is something that we must feel in the very depths of our being. There must be a genuine sadness, a burden and sorrow for something in our lives and in the world in which we live, because as disciples, we are undergoing a great change. We are adapting to our new life, we have moved out of a devilish kingdom. Therein lays the difference between the disciple and the worldly man.

The worldly man blunders on through life. He talks about having a “good time”, which often consists of poisoning himself with excess alcohol, banging his eardrums out with loud music, picking up a sexually transmitted disease, drugging himself into a stupor, risking his life for some adrenalin rush, killing himself or others needlessly by his own selfish action, indulging himself in whatever pleasure his body demands. He is selfish and spiritually rotten to his core. He wants to be successful and rich because that enables him to have a “good time”. He cares little for other people but will occasionally salve his conscience by putting money in a charity box.

Worldly men do not solve problems peacefully because violence is part of their father’s character, their father, as we know is the devil, he was a murderer from the beginning. No, if other people will not follow their worldly belief, they will bomb, batter, bludgeon, maim, murder, maul anything that lies in their path. What is the difference between the Islamic state fighters and the Governments ranged against them? Answer, no difference whatsoever. They are all riddled with sin, each and every one the same and all fighting satan’s battles, until they are all permanent victims of the long war against the Creator.

This is one of the big hurdles that men must overcome on the way to glory. It is the admission that they are sinners in the sight of God. I have seen people get very angry when confronted about their sin. They take it as a slight against their character even to suggest that they are bad people, that they have broken the laws of God, that they are in open rebellion against their Creator. They are perhaps like people whose lives are suddenly shaken by the diagnosis of a terminal illness, whose first reaction is denial and secondly, the empty hope that it will miraculously go away. They do not like their comfortable lives shaken with bad news.

Get this straight in your thinking. If a man (or woman) does not have a conviction of their utter sinfulness, what need do they have of a Saviour from sin? None whatsoever. *1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that **Christ died for our sins** according to the scriptures;* The disciple knows this for a fact but it also has another affect upon him. It makes him sorrowful, it makes him mourn, it makes him truly repentant for his rebellion. This is what we call godly sorrow. *2Co 7:10 For **godly sorrow** worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.* This is I believe what our text is talking about. It is a turning point in his life and our lives. It is where discipleship becomes very serious.

I would go further and say that if a man has not had the poverty of spirit and not mourned about his sin, he is not a true disciple and he is not a Christian. He is a person who is totally insensitive to what he is in the eyes of God. He is a corpse, dead in trespasses and sins. The believer, to the contrary, has been awakened out of his stupor. He sees the wrath of God bearing down upon him, he sees his total inability to rectify his relationship with his Creator, he is fully conscious of his guilt before his God, he

is convicted and he despairs of his wretchedness, as Paul describes in the Seventh Chapter of Romans, *Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

The answer is very, very simple. *Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. Rom 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:* There, for the first time, out of the storm clouds of despair is the glimpse of the sun. The mourner begins to feel that warmth of comfort, he begins to feel blessedness of forgiveness. We can if we have experienced it, feel the relief, the consolation, joy and happiness of forgiveness. We are blessed.

Yet I think that our text is not meant as a single one off, one time consolation. It is not something that we should pass by and not return to, as if we have no longer any dealing with sin in our lives. Far from it. We have the duty: *Eph 4:22 ye are to put off concerning the former behaviour the old man, that is corrupt according to the desires of the deceit, Eph 4:23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind,* YLT. Just as the butterfly must shed his old skin before he can fly, we have to deal with the remnants of our nature. It will still try and rise against us. We shall still be tempted and often fall into sin and we shall if we are true disciples return to mourn and be comforted. You see, Christ came to forgive our sin, forensic justification, but He did not remove our sin. He did give us power over our sin and the means to fight it but we will still bear the curse of death. We shall die. God does not renovate this life, he remakes it in glory and we are sown in death to be raised in a new body.

*1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* There is our text in another form. The believer knows he is a sinner in this life and he genuinely confesses it. He is a mourner who confesses his sin. It is because he is a mourner that he may have the comfort of forgiveness and cleansing. Now, there are some who get very despondent about this. They grieve to the point that they see their personal sin, their failure as a sign that they are poor disciples. The devil comes along and says to them, that they are a rotten example of Christianity and that they should stop trying and give up. Sometimes they may commit a sin and they think, I can never come back from that, I can never ask for forgiveness for that.

Well you can. In that verse in John's epistle, there is a three letter word that says it all. Yes, **the word ALL.** ...*cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness.* When we are drawn to failure, that is the time to run to God not away from Him. Let me illustrate this in closing. We see this in the life of Asaph, in Psalm 73. He was drawn back to the world and became jealous of it. *Psa 73:3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Psa 73:4 For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.* He could see only the disadvantages of being a disciple. It was a tough life, especially when every one of those around him were enjoying healthy and prosperous lives. They didn't need to put themselves on a rack.

Asaph was delivered when he went into the presence of God. When he moved his viewing angle, when he stopped looking at life from a worldly perspective. It became crystal clear. *Psa 73:17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.* Asaph felt bad about his attitude. He was mournful about his thoughts, *Psa 73:21 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. Psa 73:22 So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*



That attitude, I believe, is the attitude that disciples have when they mourn. They cannot watch the news, read a newspaper, listen to a broadcast without having a deep sense of sadness about the world in which they live, the sin in which they are mired and the hopelessness of the lost without Christ. Yet, as they turn to see their true destiny, they are comforted, they can rejoice, they can be happy, because they see the blessings of their relationship. As Asaph observed *Psa 73:17 Only when I came into God's holy place did I finally understand what would happen to them.* GW.

### **The Beatitudes: Who wants the Earth anyway?**

Part 33. Mat 5:5 “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the Earth”.

We are confronted with another of those counter-intuitive statements that are so characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Earth is not gained by violence, it is not taken by armed hordes, for it is written here that one man alone may inherit it if he is a meek man. What men have fought and destroyed each other over for generations, is here, apparently, given to the meek or the humble. Some people have been described as so heavenly minded that they are of no Earthly use but we must be reminded that we have not finished with the “Earth”.

The question is however, “What is our relationship with the “Earth” and what do we mean by “Earth” in the context of this blessing”? In the Model prayer we are encouraged to pray for God’s will to “be done on Earth as it is in heaven”. We are encouraged to broadcast the Gospel to all nations on Earth. We are not to hide ourselves from the issues of life because we have a heavenly calling and a better hope. We are the only bible that many people will read and we have a task to show the world **who** we are made of. Yet do we really want to inherit this Earth if we have been given the Kingdom of Heaven, isn’t that a retrograde step? If I have Heaven why on Earth should I want the Earth?

We find that our text has ancient origins in the Psalms of David and it is a truth that has lived with the Church for generations. *Psa 37:11 But the meek shall inherit the Earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.* The same Greek word for “meek” in Matthew is used in the LXX Greek version of the Older Testament. We may also infer from the original Hebrew word for “inherit” that the word implies the possession (inheritance) of the land (אֶרֶץ 'erets = Earth). *Lev 20:24 But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land (Earth), and I will give it unto you to possess (= inherit) it, a land (Earth) that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people.* The word “Earth” or land, can also refer to the ground or a territory, hence the Earth of Canaan.

The promise to the people of God was that they would possess Canaan by dispossessing the Canaanites. They would inherit the Promised Land but it would be on the condition of obedience to the Lord. If not, they would be dispossessed like the Canaanites. *Lev 20:22 Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out.* This raises some questions about the nature of the inheritance that Jesus is speaking about. What does He mean by “shall” inherit the Earth? We saw that the poor in spirit already have the kingdom of Heaven but the meek **SHALL** have the Earth, as if it were a future blessing, not a present blessing? Why Heaven now and Earth later? Why not Earth now and Heaven later?

Let us join these disciples as they walk the Galilean hillside following Jesus.

Put yourself in the seats of these disciples gathered around the Messiah on that mountainside. It is the year 3791 by Jewish reckoning. They do not look back as we do from 20 centuries of Christianity and Christian teaching to interpret what they are hearing. They have no idea about Christianity. They have no real idea about the Crucifixion of the Messiah. They have no clear idea of the gentile nations becoming a participant in the kingdom of God. They do not have the Gospels or the Epistles to feed into their interpretation. They have no portable Bibles to thumb through as they listen to Jesus. They only have the Older Testament to guide their faith and that they hear in the synagogues. They sit and they look back on their history and they see the failure of the nation and its disobedience that led to incarceration in Babylon. They look back on a weakened nation that sank into the servitude of the Roman Empire, under whose yoke they now sit. **What went through their minds when they heard that the meek would inherit the land?** They, the once great Nation of God's chosen people reduced to servants of a heathen empire.

We might also ask what their concept of the Kingdom of Heaven would have been? In their Jewish minds, Heaven was the home of the Creator, the place beyond the Earth. *Psa 33:13 The LORD looketh from **heaven**; he beholdeth all the sons of men.* At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon invokes the God of Heaven. *1Ki 8:43 Hear thou in heaven **thy dwelling place**, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name.* Joshua knew the God of Heaven. *Jos 2:11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is **God in heaven above**, and in earth beneath.*

John the Baptist had been preaching about the Kingdom of Heaven *Mat 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* When Jesus speaks to the disciples, it is the first time that He is recorded using this term **Kingdom of Heaven**. It is not used in the Older Testament. Another interesting observation is that the term "Kingdom of Heaven" is peculiar to Matthew's Gospel and only occurs there in 33 verses. The other Gospels use the term "Kingdom of God".

I believe that the terms Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God are interchangeable. They are synonymous. Compare: *Mat 13:11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of **the kingdom of heaven**, but to them it is not given.* And: *Luk 8:10 And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of **the kingdom of God**: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.* The question is, why use different terms? Does Matthew have a different audience in mind when he uses this term "Kingdom of Heaven"?

We could digress considerably from our study to examine this in detail but I will try to be brief. What we call Matthew's Gospel has no signature from Matthew. It has been attributed to Matthew, the tax collector, sometime in the second century. It is a bit like the Epistle to the Hebrews that is often attributed to Paul but lacks any signature to that effect. Papias, quoted by Eusebius in his ecclesiastical history (vol 1 Kirsopp Lake p297) says, "Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language and everyone interpreted as he was able." Eusebius however wrote two centuries later and

his information is a result of traditional belief. Eusebius also records that Matthew had first preached in Hebrew (p251).

In the absence of any definitive external explanations to identify who Matthew targets as his readers, we consider the internal evidence. Unlike Mark, he never bothers to explain Jewish customs, such as oaths, alms and fasting, in the Sermon on the Mount. Mark inserts comment that would be unnecessary to a Jewish reader. *Mar 7:3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. Mar 7:4 And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Mar 12:18 Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection;*

The author of the Gospel of Matthew, more than the other synoptic writers, explicitly cites Old Testament messianic prophecies as having been fulfilled by Jesus, something that the Jewish readers would understand. Unlike Luke, who traces Jesus' ancestry back to Adam, father of the human race, the writer of Matthew traces it only to Abraham, father of the Jews. Because of these things, Matthew has gained the reputation as a Gospel with a focus towards Jewish readers.

There is a teaching which I regard as utterly untrue and is associated with falsifying a difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. The false teachers of this suggest that "... Matthew was written primarily to the Jews, and deals with Millennium teachings and uses the term "Kingdom of Heaven", whereas the other Gospels that mention the "Kingdom of God" are dealing with the church age.....the "Kingdom of God" is here now in Spiritual form, but "the Kingdom of Heaven" is going to come after the Millennium begins in the future". They claim that since Matthew is written to the Jewish Nation, it is talking about a future period after the "Millennium" (from Revelation 21, the "thousand years") and that the current church age is referred to as the Kingdom of God. What are those people taking?

It is this sort of teaching that has driven a wedge between Jews and Gentiles and created the false hope of a future restored earthly nation of Israel. Well, the Jews and the Gentiles were all one in Christ in the New Testament. The Olive tree had some Jewish branches broken off and some gentiles were grafted in but the tree remained growing (Romans 11). The Church is composed of Jews and Gentiles and they share the same message and the Kingdom of God is the same as the Kingdom of Heaven. You check the scriptures for yourself, don't just believe me.

The blessed poor inherit the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew and the Kingdom of God in Luke. *Luk 6:20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.* They are the same. *Mat 13:31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The **kingdom of heaven** is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Mar 4:30 And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the **kingdom of God**? or with what comparison shall we compare it? Mar 4:31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:*

So why does Matthew use the term Kingdom of Heaven to his Jewish readers? I will suggest this reason. It was to lift their minds beyond the idea that God's Kingdom was limited to a tract of land in Palestine. It was to lift their vision above the idea that the promised land was on Earth. Paul uses this

analogy in the first book of the New Testament *Gal 4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. Gal 4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. Gal 4:26 But **Jerusalem which is above is free**, which is the mother of us all.*

I believe that the Jewish disciples are being taught to lift their eyes beyond this earth to the heavenly Kingdom of God or as Jesus says, the Kingdom of Heaven. This also has a bearing on the concept of an Earthly inheritance. Was Jesus really lifting them up to heaven one second and casting them back on earth in another second? Were they being taught that they would again inherit the land of Israel if they would be meek? Certainly, it was an idea that some held. *Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* To which Jesus replies, *Act 1:7 ..."You don't need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls.* CEV. In other words it is none of your business and it makes no suggestion whatsoever that it will be restored or that it was stated in prophecy.

I am sad for those disciples who hold to this idea and have an earthly hope. It was never so with the patriarchs. God never gave Abraham the promised land on earth as Stephen observes, *Act 7:5 "Yet, God didn't give Abraham anything in this land to call his own, not even a place to rest his feet. But God promised to give this land to him and to his descendants, even though Abraham didn't have a child.* Abraham possessed it by faith but it wasn't here. *Heb 11:13 All these people died having faith. They didn't receive the things that God had promised them, but they saw these things coming in the distant future and rejoiced. They acknowledged that they were living as **strangers with no permanent home on Earth.*** GW.

There was nothing here in this world that the OT saints wanted. They passed through this life as strangers and pilgrims looking to something better, the reality of the greater promise in Christ. Would you really want to inherit the Earth, this land? Why, I have already been given Heaven, why should I want this Empire of dirt? Why should I want this cursed planet? Will I shed a tear when it is dissolved? No! The Earthly kings will mourn Babylon but we will not. *Rev 18:9 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning.... Rev 18:24 And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.*

No, we do not rejoice to inherit this present corrupt Earth, we rejoice at its fall, *Rev 19:2 For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. Rev 19:3 And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.* No we do not inherit this Earth, we inherit the new Earth, *Rev 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*

In the Beatitudes we are being led to our new home and to see what manner of characters we should be in that home. In describing that home we are presented with different images of it. It is a Heavenly Kingdom, a place to be Comforted, an Inheritance, a place of Fulfilment, a place with seats of Mercy, a place to see God, a place with our Father, a place of Reward and a place of Rejoicing. A place that is a Palace.

My point has been to show that when these young disciples sat at Jesus feet, their institutional religion was collapsing around them, corrupt, arrogant, blind and ignorant, run by a hypocritical elite who were in bed with their oppressors, they were expectant of something better. The Old Judaism hadn't delivered their expectations. The Nation had failed and had suffered the consequences. They were open to revival and it comes in a wave of challenges. It is not just about outward obedience to laws. It is a challenge to the hearts of men, laying out the character of the subjects of the King. The Blessings that come with the right character.

It is about change, not just a change of heart but a change of vision, lifting the eyes to Heaven. **The kingdom of Heaven is the promised land.**

### **The Beatitudes: Humility gets the lot**

Part 34. Mat 5:5 "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the Earth".

We have suggested that the Earth or Land that is inherited is the reality of that earthly inheritance of Canaan, that is, Canaan was only a type or shadow of Heaven. We now look at another characteristic of the inheritors, meekness. I am sure that we all have our ideas about what may constitute meekness or humility. Charles Dickens characterised false humility in the person of Uriah Heep, in the novel David Copperfield. Heep is a fawning, dishonest and pretentious villain, constantly reminding people of his "umbleness" and his "umble" origins. He does so to gain approval and favour as someone who is a servant but inside he is a scheming monster. Obadiah Slope, the chaplain to the Bishop of Barchester, in the Barchester Chronicles, is another duplicitous character projecting false humility. Such obsequiousness has perhaps unintentionally come to define humility in the minds of some.

If there is one Christian virtue that has been mercilessly parodied to undermine Christianity, it is humility, or rather false humility. It is the hypocritical humility of fawning churchmen, effeminate, weak, smiling whingingly through insincere eyes, hiding their wicked ulterior motives. This depiction of Christianity as insincere, duplicitous, cunning yet hidden behind a veneer of humility is a common portrayal. Bible quoting, Bible bashing, black hearted, self-righteous hypocrites, who all the while want to convince you that they are really meek, mild, lowly gentle, humble "Christian" souls. Sadly, there may be some truth in that because Biblical humility, Biblical meekness is not well understood even by true disciples.

There are many definitions of meekness. The word itself is derived from the Old Norse word for soft or mild. From thence the idea of a tame, docile, submissive and compliant individual is drawn, the person who always does what he is told and never says "boo to a goose". The person who is happiest away from conflict, the person who is more led than a leader. The undemanding, quiet person who will never set the world on fire, always pleasantly "nice", cooperative, self effacing and harmless. It seems to me that this is quite achievable if we just switch off our minds and go through life doing what other people tell us. The person whose annual report is bland but acceptable, a steady individual who never rocks the boat and will never be promoted because he lacks drive. Is that Biblical meekness?

The first illustration I give you of the Biblical characteristic of meekness is taken from the lives of Joshua and Caleb. They were two soldiers and they were confident that with God's support the land of Canaan could be taken. The other spies did not. *Num 32:11 Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me: Num 32:12 Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD.*

Churches today are full of cowards who flinch and run at the sight of conflict. They are afraid to uphold the faith once delivered and they weaken it with compromise. They cannot hold the truth of God without compromising it. They are like the contemporaries of Joshua and Caleb, of whom it was said, *Num 32:9 For ..... they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which the LORD had given them.* They just saw the big problems not how **BIG** their God was. They never told their problems how big their GOD was. We can live a powerless life because and the truth is, we do not trust God to honour His word. Our unbelief is accusing God of being a liar, because we are saying that what He promises, He cannot deliver.

Not so Joshua and Caleb who inherited the earth or land of Israel. *Num 14:24 But my servant Caleb, because he had **another spirit with him**, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.* The characteristic that defined these men was that they "fully" followed the Lord. It might be said of them, as it was of Abraham *Rom 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; Rom 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.* They walked the world with God, without a shadow of a doubt. I am suggesting that this is at the heart of true meekness, because it was the trait that enabled them "to inherit the land". It was that unquestioning belief in their God and willingness to believe that the impossibilities with man are the possibilities of God. It is as Jesus said, *Mar 10:27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.*

Now you may ask is this relevant to the Church in the NT, to which I say, absolutely, yes. *1Co 10:5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 1Co 10:6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.....1Co 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.* The Greek word for "example" is type. They were types which served as a warning to us in the Church. I have noticed how arrogant these unbelieving fools become, the more they try to undermine the word of God. They are incapable of humility before the Word.

Another example of meekness, is Moses. I think dear Moses gets a bad press and is often viewed as a hard unyielding character. This is probably because we associate his name with the Law and thus the characteristics of the law such as its harshness, with the man Moses. Let us not be unfair to Moses because it was God's law not his law. Moses was the messenger and we have a very damning habit of shooting the messengers.

Moses is a compelling figure because he possesses human faults. We use Moses because his biography is one of the most complete in scripture. He is passionate and impulsive. Descending from Mount Sinai, Moses knows ahead of time that the people are worshipping a golden idol, because

God has warned him of this fact. Upon seeing the people, Moses angrily breaks the stone tablets inscribed with God's laws. God seems to value this passionate quality in Moses, for Moses is an effective mediator between God and the Israelites. He prays with a sense of urgency, unafraid to ask God to refrain from divine retribution and willing to accept the blame for the people's actions. His earnest attention to the present situation and to God's demands earns Moses the opportunity to speak with God face to face. Yet his passion remains his weakness. God commands Moses to produce water from a rock by speaking to it, but, irritated with the people's complaints, Moses hits the rock with his staff. This act of negligence bars Moses from entering the very promised land to which he has guided the Israelites for almost half a century. (Sparknotes).

The scripture records this. *Num 12:1 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. Num 12:2 And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it. Num 12:3 (Now the man Moses **was very meek**, above all the men which were upon the face of the Earth.)* Moses was not just meek, he was very meek. Since the Scripture records Moses as a meek man we need to examine his life to determine what meekness means and what meekness does not mean.

This issue with his brother and sister was not so much Moses choice of wife, but that Miriam and Aaron put themselves on par with Moses. They thought that they were speaking as equals to Moses but Moses did not defend himself. How can he without seeming to be arrogant? The Lord had other ideas. Speaking against Moses was speaking against God. *Num 12:8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?*

God's choice of Moses as His representative is again one of those, humanly speaking, counter-intuitive events. The choice of an 80 year old murderer, a man with speech problems, lacking eloquence, an outcast from his nation, an Israelite raised by the Egyptian enemies, the choice I say of this person, to liberate a nation and lead it, is not one ordinary men would normally make. Moses is hardly Presidential material as he starts his new role as father of the nation, yet he is God's choice and that is the point. *2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.* Moses was a perfect choice because in this rough hewn earthen vessel God could display His Divine accomplishments. Moses was very special to the Lord.

The encounter at the burning bush was the seminal moment in Moses life where he received his calling. Even at 80 years of age it was not too late any more than it was to make Abraham a father at the age of 100 years. We might say that when they had lost their prime and the passions were reduced, they were more useable. As the testosterone levels fell and there would be less of them in view and more of God to be seen in their lives. The more difficult the scenario, the better it is to show God's power. As Elijah continued to pour water on his sacrifices and the situation became more impossible to ignite, it was with God a better display of power. Elijah might have as well been pouring rocket fuel on the sacrifice the way it exploded. I think that Moses learned great trust in that encounter with the God of Israel at the burning bush and from then he accepted his role willingly and unquestioningly. That was his meekness.

If Moses role meant bringing judgement and execution to the disobedient (Sabbath breaker), standing alone against idolaters, speaking out against sin, bringing down the destruction of God on the nation of Egypt, he did not flinch, he did not waver and all of this was part of his meekness. His meekness was his submission to the will of God in the face of huge human opposition. He feared not what men would say against him. He was a true servant of God. He could stand and stand alone and apart from his contemporaries because in reality, He knew the power of standing with his Lord.

Yet for all of his meekness, Moses was still a frail human and his anger against the people whom he had interceded for, burst through and it cost him the right to enter Canaan. *Num 20:8 Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and **speak ye unto the rock** before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. Num 20:9 And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. Num 20:10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? Num 20:11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod **he smote the rock twice**: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. Num 20:12 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*

We can be angry as long as we do not sin. *Eph 4:26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath*: I think it was not so much his anger but his action. His anger led him to sin. In smiting the rock he was typically hitting Christ. *1Co 10:4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ*. He had only **to ask for** water but instead, he turns the anger he has towards the people against Christ. It is a lesson for us all that when we are frustrated with the Lord's people we should not turn our anger against God. However, although Moses did not enter Canaan in life he did in death *Luk 9:30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Luk 9:31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*.

There is however, only one who can boast His humility and that is our Lord Jesus. *Mat 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Mat 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and **learn of me**; for **I AM MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART**: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Mat 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*. There are a number of thoughts to be drawn here but importantly, we should ask the question why has Jesus put these two virtues (meekness and lowliness) in the context of those who labour and are burdened? Why not learn about diligence and perseverance, perseverance and courage, or resilience and resourcefulness as a means of alleviating burdens, instead of meekness and lowliness?

We must observe that in the life of Jesus, anger, boldness, sorrow, outspokenness, forthrightness, rebuke, strength in the face of opposition, were all perfectly compatible with His meekness. We can never say of Him that there was the slightest weakness of character in any of His dealings and that in all things that He ever did were perfectly consistent with his mediatorial role, that mystical role of the incarnation whereof He said, *Joh 8:29 And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for **I do always those things that please him***. If only we could say that of our lives?



I will suggest a reason why these qualities of “meekness and lowliness” are the qualities associated with the relief of burdens. We disciples have a great capacity for dragging our burdens around with us. I imagine we look very much like Bunyan’s Pilgrim with his sack of burdens on his back. As the hymn writer Scriven said, “O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer”! If we look at the sequence in the verse we are told:

1. Take my yoke upon you and LEARN of Me.
2. I am meek and lowly of heart.
3. You will find REST.

My suggestion is that if we **learn** biblical meekness and lowliness of heart, which is the submission to the will of God, we shall be in that position of being **yoked** with God. If we are in that position, we shall have placed our burdens in another perspective. We shall find rest. The origin of the burden will remain, possibly because the reality of those things is not removed by this yoke. It does though, lift the load of them and makes them bearable. It makes us learn of the suffering of Christ, because, in sharing our burden, we are also sharing His burden. *Mat 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* I do not think that Jesus is saying that He will carry our burdens through life while we walk beside Him. He is saying that we have burdens that we can share and ease through sharing.

This is, I believe what Paul had in mind when he wrote, *Php 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;* Meekness is not a natural attribute and Biblical meekness is a Divine attribute. It is seen in the lives of those who have placed their entire life into the hands of their Creator and who, however imperfectly, strive to live in obedience to Him. **Meekness is the quality of spirit of those people who come under the yoke of Christ.**

If we honestly and truly have our lives under that yoke, there are a lot of things we would not do or be involved with, because we know that we could not stand in those things with Christ beside us. There is company that we would not keep, things we would not indulge in, because Christ would not have us there. People who wish to unyoke from Christ to engage in other things deserve the consequences.

My suggestion in conclusion is this. It is that true meekness is not a weakness of character; it is strength of character, drawn from a close relationship to the Lord. It is the character of a person who will not compromise the truth of God in the face of opposition, one who will not try and find a compromise position with those who deny the word of God. Joshua and Caleb did not try to find a compromise with those who feared to enter the land. They did not say, let’s find somewhere else to go, let’s take it in a few years, let’s go back to God and ask Him to take the land by some other means.

Further, meekness does not suppress the other passions of a man, righteous anger and indignation, boldness, sorrow, outspokenness, plain talking, forthrightness of speech, admonishing wrong, strength in the face of opposition. Meekness is the characteristic of the strong man, not the weak man, because the man is made strong through his faith in his God. He knows that the Power he walks with far exceeds anything else in the world about him, so he has no fear of men. He is humble

before his Lord not before the opposition of men. The Disciple does not bow meekly to unrighteousness, he bows meekly before his God.

Meekness, I suppose, might be summarised as knowing exactly where you should be standing in relationship to God and man. It makes us super-conquerors and as Joshua and Caleb have already found out, they inherit the Land.

### **The Beatitudes: A good famine**

Part 35. Mat 5:6 “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled”.

We need to define “Right” as there are many ideas as to what is right and what is wrong. Different religions have different ideas about “Right”, so I will make an assertion that should enable us to filter out the false ideas. To do so, let me make a very clear and dogmatic statement at the start of this ministry. I make it without apology. It is that all of the world’s religions are run by corpses except one. All of the world’s religions with their ideas of how we should relate to “god”, how we should conduct ourselves, how we should worship, what is right and what is wrong, with one exception are the result of the delusions of mortal men whose remains now lie buried in the dust of history. They are corpses. No doubt these leaders and prophets, bar one, were well meaning but being well meaning does not excuse being ignorant. For all their guesses about how life worked and for all their illusions and ideologies, they did not come close to knowing the Creator. These gurus and prophets are dead and in the dust, incapable of overcoming death despite their advice on how to live. Yes, the cheek of it is that they advocated a way of life that ultimately left them dead and their followers treading the same road. Death! How often has it been said that the road to Hell is paved with good intent.

What are we to make of the views of these religions that speak so confidently of the life to come, yet with none of their leaders having come back to tell us, except one? The Mormons and their three tier celestial heaven, where those who went through special rituals here, stay married forever. The Buddhists, who think that after numerous deaths and reincarnations, you are freed of death and enter the state of Nirvana. The Hindu, whose reincarnations reflect their behaviour in past lives. It is the view of some Muslims that paradise is a sensual realm with the companionship of 72 virgins. Stretched before us is a smorgasbord, a buffet of delights, to entice the weary traveller through life to pitch his pole with them. The downside is you get a bad deal if you don’t join them.

Your eternity, is then, based upon the words of people who never visited the places that they enticed you to go to but they are sure God told them it is real. They never came back to prove that they were right. All, except ONE and that is the uniqueness of the Christian religion. *Joh 3:11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. Joh 3:12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*

Christ came from Heaven, *Joh 3:13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.* The incarnation of Christ is completely different from any other human conception because Christ pre-existed His incarnation. Christ also died and came back from the dead, *Joh 10:17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down*

*my life, that I might take it again. Joh 10:18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.* The centrality of the incarnation and resurrection of the Lord Jesus cannot be overemphasised. Those who deny these truths depress Christianity to the level of other man made religions. Why men should like to portray our Lord as still being nailed to a cross only serves to show their lack of belief and experience that He is alive. Our uniqueness lies in our Leader having come from Heaven itself and having power over death. Jesus KNOWS what He is talking about.

There is also a point that is often overlooked here by religious thinkers and philosophers and that is whether by nature, we can actually think objectively, clearly and neutrally about the universe in which we live. The idea that natural man can observe, in an unbiased and objective way, what he sees around him and that there is nothing that will cloud his thoughts, is false. That there is nothing that would make his observations wrong and that somehow he can judge what is "Right" and true is a lie. Yet there is, you see and it is sin. Sin has clouded judgement and in His Wisdom, the Eternal and absolute Divine wisdom, God has made it impossible to know Him, except through Christ. *1Co 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* The CEV puts it well, *1Co 1:21 God was wise and decided not to let the people of this world use their wisdom to learn about him. Instead, God chose to save only those who believe the foolish message we preach.*

You cannot reason your way to eternal life, salvation or most importantly, the knowledge of God. The sinful man just doesn't get it. *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* Man cannot by nature determine righteousness.

We should not hasten past these verses without considering this point. No science, philosophy or religion can by its own reasoning arrive at the knowledge of God. We cannot retro-engineer knowledge to take us back to a point where we discover "God". Like some "Big Bang" experiment to find a god particle. It is also very likely, that all the physical universe in which we live, is such a construct, that the human mind is incapable of fathoming out, because God has, in His infinite wisdom, made it, so that the natural man will never understand it. The natural man's attempts to grasp and explain the origin of the Universe and Life are all at odds with the revelation He, the Creator, has given man. Man cannot or will not see the hand of the Creator in it, which is perfectly in agreement with scripture. Also it a warning to us disciples, that we too should not think our partially renewed minds can understand it much better. I think we shall all be surprised when God reveals the truth to us.

I remember some years ago seeing a table "magician" at a dinner. In front of my eyes, he folded a small travel brochure and as he unfolded it, it had turned into a £20 note. I didn't see the join, how did he do it? I could have believed that it was indeed magic. I saw what he intended me to see, yet I was not in the least able to understand what he did. I imagine that we too, as mortals, fail to understand how God works His miracles and doubtless many of our explanations will fail because our unrenewed minds deceive us. It is not for us to try and explain God's mysteries. He never asked us to find out how He did things, only to believe that He did them.

The world's religions and religious thinkers, then, try to impose their own religious experiences on the hungry multitudes that look for some hope in this miserable world. Men see what they are told is God, a version of God, through the vision of another man's mind, a mind clouded by sin. Someone else's idea of God and heaven knows, many people have ideas about that. To these religious thinkers we ask the question the Lord put to Job, *Job 38:4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.* Of course if you weren't in on the beginning, how do you claim to know so much about it?

We would be well justified to ask, why if God is so keen to reveal Himself to men, why do it to just one or two people, the so called prophets and religious leaders? Why not show yourself openly to all men, as the disciples said, *Joh 7:4 For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world?* Do we really want to see God through another man's mind or do we want to see Him for ourselves? That is in fact exactly what has happened, for Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, revealed Himself to mankind. Each and every believer meets God for himself. We do not meet through the mediation of another sinful human being. *Joh 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?*

For man to know God, the Creator, He, the Creator, must reveal Himself to us and in us and that, as we know and accept, was in the person of Jesus Christ. Emmanuel, God with us, The Mighty God, The Prince of Peace, The Everlasting Father. Our acceptance of this truth has a number of foundations. Jesus died but rose again and was seen by hundreds of people. The experience of the believer is that this Jesus is alive because through the experience of His forgiveness He is working in their own lives. The transformational power of His Holy Spirit is in the life changes that we experience and experience in common with each other, are testimony that HE lives, unlike the corpses of the other mislead religious leaders.

Now, the idea of an absolute righteousness is only possible, if we live in a created Universe governed by the Creator of that Universe. A universe without a Creator is a universe without meaning. It is a thing of itself making no demands on those creatures that evolve out of it. It is a place where things may happen but at the same time, a place where it is meaningless to say that "this value is above that value". We cannot say that one thing is more right than another. That the life of a fly is less valuable than a man, or that it is bad to kill the weak, that taking other peoples property is wrong, that sex is anything other than a means of reproduction. It is life in a utilitarian universe in which my arbitrary values have as much meaning as anyone else's arbitrary values and at the end it is all meaningless. When people make moral statements and judgements, statements about what is right and wrong, do ask them where they get their values from.

Let us now attempt to define Righteousness. What do we mean by those words as Christians, Christians I say and not the world's children? Right-wise-ness or righteousness is the Divine attribute, simply put, of being right. *Psa 119:75 I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right. He is right in EVERYTHING*, right in judgement, justice, works, purpose, faithfulness, wisdom, love, mercy, and so on. Righteousness is in a sense the sum of the purity of perfections of the Creator. It is perhaps why the manifestations of God are often shown under the image of the purifying fire. *Exo 3:2 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. Rev 1:14 His head*

*and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a **flame of fire**; Rev 1:15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.*

We, the creatures, to the contrary, do not have the righteousness of God. We make pretence but in comparison it is a filthy rag. *Isa 64:6 But we are all as the unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as a **menstruation cloth**. And we all fade as a leaf, and like the wind our iniquities take us away.* LITV. We cannot come near to those Divine perfections as fallen creatures because sin has separated us from God. The Apostle mourns this separation with a cry from the heart, *Php 3:9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: Php 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*

There was Paul, the archetypal Jew, striving to understand and learn the Torah. Pharisee of Pharisees, Hebrew of Hebrews, circumcised the eighth day, a man schooled in the minutiae of the Rabbinic teachings, a pillar of self-righteousness and for all of this, he comes nowhere near the righteousness of God. He, as a new creature, no longer wants that sort of humanistic righteousness that his peers so much admired. It is a valueless pretence and since his eyes were opened to see Christ, he wants to see nothing else and he wants to know nothing else. Christ has hollowed him out and in his emptiness, having counted all things loss he intones, *Php 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but **loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord**: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but **dung**, that I may win Christ*, he wants to know Christ and be part of the life of Christ.

It is here that we must distinguish between the religious freeloaders who see Christ solely as a source of personal gain and those who want an intimate relationship with Him. I say this because many come to the cross because they want to escape hell, want the forgiveness of Christ, want the benefits and gifts of Christ but do not want to be rooted in Christ as did Simon Magus. Like the seed on stones and among thorns, they receive with joy but wither as there is no depth of relationship with Christ. There is no curiosity to know more about this incredible person who entered our world to deliver us from it. No continuing wonder that the Creator should extend His hand into this vile world to rescue us from ourselves. In fact, as time progresses, their relationship becomes a ritual observance around communion and a weekly service but outside of that, nothing much goes on. Those early days of enthusiasm are but a distant memory.

The disciple will not stop at the first encounter with Christ. He becomes addicted to Christ. He cannot have enough Christ and he is never satisfied that he has enough. His hunger and thirst are insatiable. He goes from day to day seeking to know more, to build more, to grow more and to be closer to his Lord. He needs at least his daily "fix" of Christ and yet even more than that. It becomes the most important thing in his life. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness, not the mere knowledge of right, but right personified, Christ and the righteousness of Christ. You see, if you hunger and thirst after righteousness you are hungering and thirsting to know Christ. *Php 3:9 .. a righteousness .....* *which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*: Paul is showing us that the righteousness of God is ours through faith in Christ. The hunger for righteousness will only be satisfied by Christ.

I would also suggest that as we, day by day, hunger and are filled, so, day by day, in our desire for Christ and His righteousness, we shall be filled. Not once or twice but many times. We shall rise up to digest the meal prepared for us. We shall assimilate that spiritual protein and we shall grow. If you are not growing, if you remain a baby in Christ, what are you feeding upon?

As we grow, we shall hunger again and we shall be fed. *Joh 10:9 I am the gate. Those who enter the sheep pen through me will be saved. They will go in and out of the sheep pen and find food.* GW. I asked a question in a previous ministry if there was anything in our lives that we could not walk away from in 30 seconds? Is there anything so important that would delay us from the presence of Christ? If we are not in the frame of mind where we could truthfully say that there is nothing that delays me here, then I would suggest that our hunger and thirst is not real. It is imaginary.

### **The Beatitudes: Twice blessed**

Part 36. Mat 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain **mercy**".

William Shakespeare illustrates the quality of mercy in the Merchant of Venice, through the lips of Portia.

"The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes. 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest. It becomes the thronèd monarch better than his crown. His scepter shows the force of temporal power, the attribute to awe and majesty wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings, but mercy is above this sceptered sway. It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings. It is an attribute to God himself and earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice".

"Strained" is a Shakespearean term for "forced or constrained"; it means mercy must be freely given. Mercy is not obtained by holding a gun to the head of the giver. They are merciful because it is in their nature to be merciful. It is indeed an attribute of God Himself. Sometimes Mercy is confused with Grace but there is a subtle difference. I like this definition: Mercy--**not getting what you do deserve** (withheld punishment) and Grace--**getting what you don't deserve** (unmerited favour). Mercy is the unmerited favour of God whereby He shows forgiveness to those who are totally deserving of His wrath.

Where better to start illustrating Mercy than in the Tabernacle of the Older Testament and in that golden type of Christ, the Mercyseat. The Mercyseat was the covering, the lid of the chest or ark of the Covenant (Ex 25 v 10 ff). The Mercyseat was a single sheet of pure gold with two Cherubim of beaten gold at each end. That this is Christ is shown clearly from Paul's letter to the Romans, *Rom 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Rom 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a **propitiation** through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;* That word "propitiation" is translated "Mercyseat" in the letter to the Hebrews, *Heb 9:5 And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the **mercyseat**; of which we cannot now speak particularly.*

The word propitiation (ἱλασμός hilasmos) means atonement or expiation, the word Mercyseat (ἱλαστήριον hilastērion) means the expiatory (place or thing), the atoning victim. The idea contained

in this is of a sacrifice that expiates or atones for sin. The Hebrew word for Mercyseat ( כַּפֹּרֶת kappôreth) is also used in the word Yom Kippor, day of covering or day of atonement. *Lev 23:27 Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.* There is no doubt that when Paul talks of Christ as a Mercyseat, he has in mind the concept of atonement. Jesus is our Mercyseat; "Approach, my soul, the mercy seat, Where Jesus answers prayer; There humbly fall before His feet, For none can perish there" (John Newton).

One of the functions of the Mercyseat, was to act as a cover for the ark of the covenant. It covered the tablets of the law which formed the basis of the covenant or agreement with God. *Exo 34:28 And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables **the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.*** The Mercyseat shields us from the glare of the law, it protects us from the curse of the law, it delivers us from the penalty of the law. The law was a killer and Christ stands between us and the law, *Rom 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.* That is mercy.

Have you noticed how many times in Jesus' ministry that there were people who wanted to apply the rigours of the law against their fellow man? *Mat 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? Mat 9:12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Mat 9:13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, **I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:** for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* There are plenty of Pharisees around today and they just thrive on pointing out where you go wrong. Its not about showing how you went wrong or how you can get back on track, its just about the fact that you did wrong.

I am not saying that you should become a liberal and for the sake of peace not tell people their faults. Of course we should, *2Ti 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine,* and you should confess your own faults, *Jas 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.* The point is, that for some, they have no interest in your restoration, your improvement, your spiritual welfare, your betterment. For these people, the law is a tool that they use to hit people in order to make them feel superior and better than the one they beat.

And if we feel this attitude welling up in our hearts, we should be alarmed to the fact that mercy has long since departed from our lives. We are like that Pharisee who delighted to show people how he prayed, *Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus **with himself,** God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.* His prayers were liturgies about his own goodness and what a fine person he was. When he says, " I thank thee that I am not as other men", it is as if he is saying, "I am glad I am just like you, I am so good, I am a divinity". The publican, as we know, wept for mercy, because he knew just what state his life was really in. The person who cries for mercy is more likely to be the person whose character shows mercy.

Above all, mercy is an attribute of God which exhibits Christ. God's mercy and Jesus Christ walk hand in hand. There is no true mercy without the presence of Christ. If as believers we were asked to give an illustration of Divine mercy, what would we use? Would it not be the cross of Christ. Isaac Watts wrote, "See from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down! Did e'er such

love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown?" He was right that love and sorrow flowed together yet it was far more than that. In His wisdom, the Creator could have doomed His whole creation as a failure. There and then, the heavens could have been rolled up as a scroll and humanity declared as irredeemable. Yet if that had happened, this quality of mercy would have remained hidden.

As Shakespeare observed of mercy, "It is an attribute to God himself and earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice". Justice declared that mankind should throughout their generations, die for their sins and the original sin of their forefather Adam but mercy intervened. The cross of Christ is the monument to mercy. It is a Mercyseat, a place to meet God's forgiveness. *Joh 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: Joh 3:15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* It was an echo of the Older Testament. *Num 21:8 And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.*

The sinner, who is weighed down by his sin, has a place of mercy. He cannot work his way there, he has nothing to exchange but his sin, he cannot get mercy by living a good life, he has no other to "Look" upon and live than the Christ. *Tit 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.* His salvation is not far from us, *Rom 10:6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? The whole Divine plan comes to fruition at the cross. Psa 85:9 Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. Psa 85:10 Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

There is the challenge of our verse. "**Blessed are the merciful**". Can you and I do that or do we just want to bring judgement down on the heads of fellow sinners? Seeking redress can sometimes be used as an excuse for self-justification. It is little short of taking revenge, getting the pound of flesh, what you think is owed to you rather than letting it go. Certainly, mercy on the Divine scale is hard to achieve but we are never the less, encouraged by our text to exhibit mercy.

There is a story which you are all familiar with and it goes by the title "The good Samaritan". It was given in response to a lawyer's question neighbours. "**Who is my neighbour?**" I do not know who caused this story to be called the "good" Samaritan. He is not good he is compassionate, *Luk 10:33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, he felt for the poor wounded traveller. He didn't just bind up his wounds and continue his journey. He didn't just take him to an Inn and leave him there. He treated him, took him to the Inn, stayed with him overnight to make sure that he was getting care, paid the Innkeeper to look after him and said that he would pick up the remaining tab when he returned.*

Who was the neighbour? The lawyer saw it for what it was. He that showed **MERCY**. *Luk 10:37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.* Mercy is here shown in practical terms, not turning a blind eye to others needs, not leaving it to someone else. It was a person who was ready to be compassionate, not to his family, his friends, his brothers in the church but to someone who was a complete stranger. *Mat 25:35 For I was an hungred, and ye*



*gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Mat 25:36  
Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

Jesus is showing that we too can be like the Merciful Samaritan if we take the trouble to go through life with our eyes open and stop making efforts to avoid the needy and get involved with others. Merciful people help others. Mercy in practice is about doing something for someone else that doesn't deserve it, for people we don't know. If we are to become the "merciful" of our text, it is not a passive attribute. You can think about mercy but you can at the same time avoid BEING merciful.

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees, *Mat 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* Do you see that? Do we **DO** mercy, "these you ought to have **DONE**"? Mark this in your bibles so that you do not forget it. The previous beatitudes were passive characteristics. They were internalised. You could be poor in spirit, mourn, be meek, hunger and thirst after righteousness without even getting out of bed. You could develop these qualities in the privacy of your own lives. Mercy is different, it is an active quality. You cannot be merciful and just lie there. You have to do something outside of yourself. You have to make the effort to get out of bed to do this. Let us ask ourselves are we actively engaged in being merciful?

Watchman Nee makes a good observation about modern Christianity. "Many of our ills today stem from the fact that we are content with a merely objective acceptance of doctrine. We seek an outward, mental light on the scripture, but stop short of the inward application to experience.....it is a case of feeling all is well if we are conservative or orthodox in our doctrine and give mental assent to this and mental dissent from that". I will go further. Not only do we stop short of inner application to experience, we do not apply the teaching outwardly in our lives. We have arrived at a time where our faith lacks works. Faith is reduced to merely being theoretically correct in our doctrine but we are no less dead.

We may believe in mercy as I am sure many Christians like us do but we are not sure how we can practically become merciful. Listen again to Jesus' reply to the Lawyer, *Luk 10:37 And he said, **He that shewed mercy on him.** Then said Jesus unto him, **Go, and do thou likewise.*** The Literal Translation puts it more accurately, *Luk 10:37 And he said, **The one doing the deed of mercy with him.** Then Jesus said to him, **Go, and you do likewise.*** He really didn't just show mercy, he **DID** it (ποιέω ποιεῶ).

If we have difficulty understanding our relationship to the world about us, if we cannot see who our neighbour is, if we do not know how to become a merciful person, then only look to the Merciful Samaritan. When we start to view our fellow man with the eyes of God, we may just be learning mercy and her sister, compassion. Mercy is helping the helpless, the hapless and the hopeless, not the lazy, the listless and the lethargic.

Why do you "obtain" mercy? What does it mean? You have already received mercy because you have found Christ. This is often given as a reminder in the opening of the epistles, *2Ti 1:2 To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I*

think that the point is, that when you begin to exhibit mercy, you begin to understand the heart of God. You obtain mercy in it highest and most beautiful form.

Yet you will never truly appreciate mercy until you start to exhibit it. You will never truly obtain mercy until you start to do it. You may understand the meanings of mercy, you may be able to quote the definitions (Mercy--not getting what you do deserve), the texts and illustrations but fall short in practice. *Mat 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; Mat 5:45 That ye may be the **children of your Father which is in heaven**: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* Can you really be a child of God without showing the mercy that has been shown to you?

### **The Beatitudes: From the other side of time**

Part 37. Rev 22:21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Our New Testament finishes with these words of blessing, that Christ's grace will be with all of us. How will we look back on this life when we have arrived in His presence. We shall literally be out of time. *Rev 10:5 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, Rev 10:6 And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that **there should be time no longer**:* Time will no longer exist and we shall live outside of time. Clocks do not work in heaven. I cannot imagine what that will be like but I think that it will give us a new perspective on immortality.

I raise this idea because one day, the beatitudes will be fulfilled in our immortal souls. We shall know what they truly mean and what it feels like to be in possession of them. *1Co 13:10 But when perfection comes, the things that are not complete will end. 1Co 13:11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, and I made plans like a child. When I became a man, I stopped those childish ways.* ERV. Yes once we were "babes in Christ" but we started to grow up. As we grow in the natural, our attitudes change and our knowledge grows. It is the same in the spirit.

The subject came up after our last meeting about how young people seem quite careless about the home. In our youth, when we were told to do things, we found excuses to delay or not to do them. Parents are there to clean up after us, cook, clothe and wash for us. The attitude is both careless and thoughtless. We felt that work was an imposition. We felt that we were doing our parents a favour to eat the food they had laboured for. We felt a certain equality although we contributed little or nothing to the household. We expected presents, holidays, pocket money and a safe warm place to live. All for free. If we earned money we didn't willingly offer or share it with our parents.

Can you imagine what it must be like for a person who has nothing? Imagine that you woke up one day on the pavement, alone, not knowing anyone, not having parents or relatives, nowhere to live, nowhere to go. No money, no bank account, no documents, no identity. All alone in the world with absolutely nothing. What would you do, where could you go? How would you get established? How would you lift yourself out of that nightmare? How lonely would you feel as an outcast of the world?

I am trying to make a point. It is that our lives now are part of a chain of blessings that started when we were young. We probably never gave it a thought, we just took it all for granted. All of the things that we inherited day by day, shaping our lives, shaping our security, our identity, our education, our

home-base, our financial support, the opportunities and care, which we took for granted. Perhaps much more than that, how often did we despise it? We arrive at where we are today, not just by ourselves but as the consequence of a support network that stretches back way before we were born. Did we ever give that a thought?

We were not unlike the prodigal son. *Luk 15:11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: Luk 15:12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. Luk 15:13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.* He had no respect for his father's labour that had set up an inheritance for him and perhaps his grandfather and those before him. He didn't care for the effort, thoughtfulness, love and care that had gone into that great gift. He blew the lot in a wild lifestyle. He indulged himself until it was gone. Easy come, easy go and there is more where that came from.

Then there were also those words we found hard to say, "Please" and "Thank you". We expected what we got and gratitude was not in the vocabulary. Gratitude to people who did things for us was non-existent. How many times did we sit down and write a thank you note for a thoughtful birthday present, that our relatives could ill afford? Did we ever thank our parents just once for the sacrifices they made for us? Our selfishness also showed in the way we shared or rather did not share things with others. Oh we say, looking back, that's not me, I am not an ungrateful person. Yet we carried this into our Christian lives, in our lack of gratitude for our daily gifts, whether individually or in families, we fail to remember to give thanks and say "grace". Does "Common Grace" mean we can be as thankless as the unbeliever because God causes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust.

I think that there is much in Christianity that mirrors our childhood. For example, the low level of gratitude when we accept the sacrifice of Christ. Its as if we are doing God a favour to accept it. It can be like eating those vegetables we didn't like the taste of and we grudgingly swallowed. Yes it would do us good but we could only take their word for that. For others the reluctant acceptance of the greatest gift in the universe is an act to please God rather than benefit us. Have we ever really expressed our love and gratitude for the supreme sacrifice of the Son of God or was it just a nodding acceptance? "Amazing love! how can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?" (Charles Wesley). Have we ever had amazement, have we gasped at what we have been given? There are "Christians" out there who would probably have more joy, delight and gratitude if they found a new car on their drive, than if Jesus turned up on the doorstep.

We had an unwillingness to change our attitudes that we carried through into "Christianity". We do not like to respond to what we know we should do, **immediately**. Yet there is in us the desire to see others respond immediately. Respond on the spot to the Gospel. Why not ourselves the same? Then there were all the new rules and regulations we got with our new found faith. We didn't like rules and regulations as kids and it is pretty clear that most people do not like the rules and regulations of Christianity. The Bible has become the "Little read" book. Did you sit down and read your Bible between the last meeting and this one? If the answer is no you are not alone.

Of over 2 billion Christians in the world, less than 30% will ever read through the entire bible. The fact is over 82% of Christian Americans only read their bibles on Sundays, while in church. Another survey suggested that only 19 percent personally read the Bible every day. That suggests that so called "Christians" do not think that the scriptures are relevant to their daily lives. Of course, today you can listen to a Bible instead of reading, yet it is more than that, it is about studying the word, 2Ti

*3:16 Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live. CEV.*

Well, you can argue that there was a time when people didn't have a Bible and the only time that they heard God's word was in a church meeting. That there was a time when most people couldn't read anyway, so did that stop them being good "Christians"? It did. The religious leaders could teach anything because the people couldn't argue against them. Arise William Tyndale. "One day, a visiting priest, openly attacked Tyndale's beliefs. Tyndale replied "If God spare my life, before very long I shall cause a plough boy to know the scriptures better than you do!" This was not an idle boast. Tyndale knew how he was going to put an end to the priests' evil ways. He was going to translate the Bible into English, so everyone would be able to read the Bible for themselves. Then the priests, who had probably never read it once in their life, would be for it.

When we start on that road to life, it should concern us to know the rules of the road. Like natural children though it does not appeal to our nature and we like to rewrite the rules to suit us. Yet we are advised, *Pro 6:20 My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Pro 6:21 Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.* The Bereans were a group of believers who set us an example, *Act 17:10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. Act 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and **searched the scriptures daily**, whether those things were so.*

There is a danger that we adopt a minimalist "Christian" life. A life where we do enough to get by, just as we did as children. Trying desperately hard to do enough to avoid punishment but not enough to do a thorough job. Just enough "Christianity" to get by and satisfy our weak conscience that we are still on the team, despite a complete lack of commitment.

It is here when we look back on our lives from outside of time, that we shall notice something remarkable. That Jesus was always with us. *Mat 28:20..... lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.* The ISV puts it more accurately, *Mat 28:....."And remember, I am with you **each and every day** until the end of the age."* Every day, Jesus was with us, even though we might not have wanted to acknowledge Him or give Him space in our day. Every day with Jesus can be a reality.

We shall also see something else and that is, what we thought were our efforts at change and goodness, were in reality God's work in us, not our own. *Php 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* As we look back on this life, I am sure that we shall see the Beatitudes from a different perspective also. We could only obtain those qualities because God retro-engineered them from the end point. He made what we were to become, from the starting point of our discipleship.

So, it was not my efforts at poverty of spirit that gained me the Kingdom. *Mat 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**.* It is God, having placed me in that Kingdom in Christ that will draw those virtues out of me. We might even rewrite that scripture to read, *Mat 5:3/9/10 **Possessors of the kingdom of heaven** are made poor in spirit **and persecuted for righteousness**.* It is those experiences of life that were necessary to bring me to that Kingdom. *Pro 16:9 A man's heart deviseth his way: but **the LORD directeth his steps**.* As Joseph looks back over his life, he concurs with us, *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto*

*good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* God's "end game" was the starting point of Joseph's odyssey (a long wandering or voyage usually marked by many changes of fortune). Joseph was created, raised, debased, exalted all for that day.

The day will come when we shall truly know that Divine comfort, *Mat 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.* As we look back on it, we shall see that we had to become mourners to appreciate the comfort. It was not our Lord being cruel to us, it was necessary to be like that, to ever appreciate His comfort. *Mat 5:4 The comforted shall be mourners to appreciate the comfort.* We had to be made to mourn. Again we shall see that it was not our works that led to the comfort, it was a Divine thread cast out from eternity as a life line, tied securely about our lives that pulled us to glory. *Jer 31:3 The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.* Yes, and that love drew us through some painful places as well, to knock the sharp edges off of us, yet it was still love and we shall say then with more confidence, *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

I trust that you see the point that I am making. We are, in our Christian lives, working backwards, in a manner of speaking, from God's goal for us. You can do that when you are the Creator and not constrained by time. And here is another point. I do not believe that the Lord intends us to be anything less than perfect in glory. I do not think that people will be allowed to exist in a half restored fashion. An incomplete work, half baked, half finished, botched together. No, it will be a perfect work and in that spirit we should strive harder to work out our salvation, recognising God's work in us. We should use that goal Christ has for us as an incentive to make more effort.

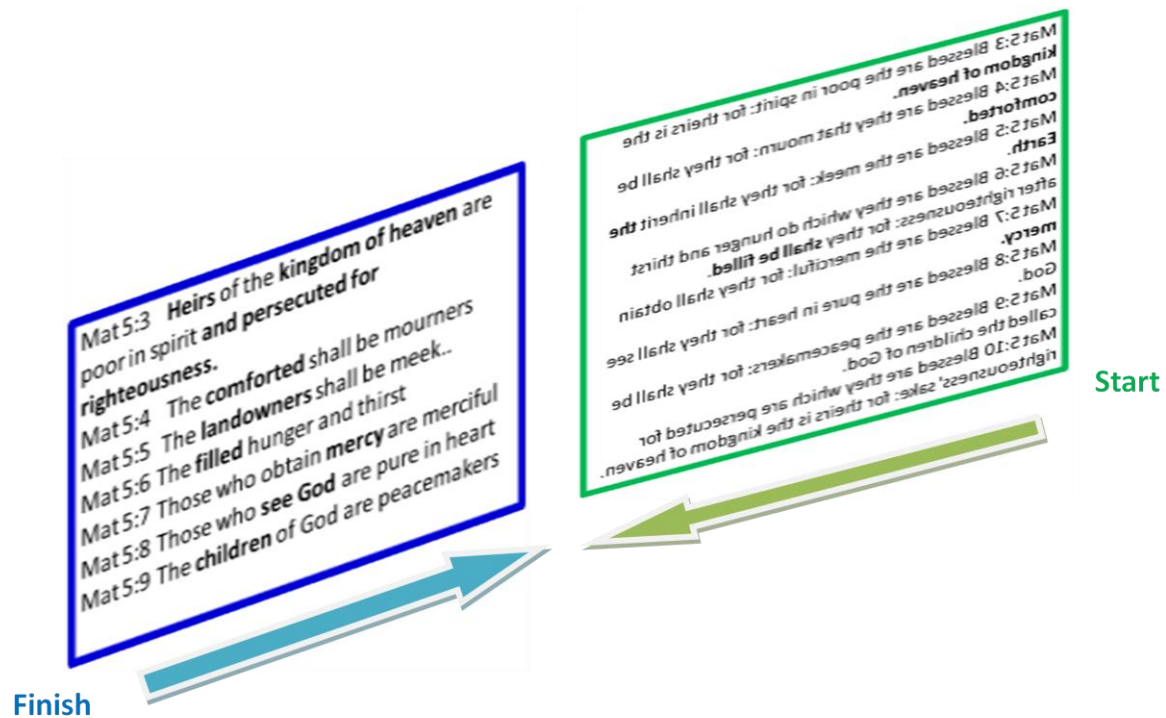
We can apply our line of thinking to the other beatitudes which from the point that God operates could be stated, *Matt 5:5 The landowners shall be humbled,* *Mat 5:6 The filled are made to hunger and thirst,* *Mat 5:7 Those who obtain mercy become merciful,* *Mat 5:8 Those who see God are made pure in heart,* *Mat 5:9 The children of God are peacemakers.* When looking back, standing beside Jesus, seeing God, the children of God, having obtained Mercy, we shall see how these ends to which we worked were also the incentives that continued to draw us.

There is a line in the film "Paper Moon" where the character Moses Pray says, "I got scruples too, you know. You know what that is? Scruples?" to which the orphan Addie Loggins replies, "No, I don't know what it is, but if you got 'em, it's a sure bet they belong to somebody else!" This is true of us. If we have any virtues, they belong to someone else, the Lord Jesus and rather than depressing us, that thought should lift gratitude from our hearts.

When Jesus, on that Galilean mountainside, sat down with His disciples and broke the news of the blessings, the Beatitudes, it was a soul menu to be desired, yet it was nothing that they could concoct on their own. I wonder how Jesus looked about on each one there, seeing their eternity stretch out before them? He looked at Peter, the trials that he would face as the Crucifixion neared, how he would betray Him, how he would go on and carry the Gospel, meet Paul and eventually his own death. Each day of Peter's life was planned for him, each step to be taken before the next, no shortcuts allowed. Yes, He would be with Peter every step of the way, although there would be days when Peter would not see Him or look for Him. Then there would be the reunion in glory.

Here is John, seriously listening, much in need of a soft heart but it would come. John who would take care of his mother, John who would be given the Revelation of things to come and many years of life; He would be with him also, every day until they met face to face in glory. Perhaps those glimpses were the things that kept Jesus going. The end product of His Divine labours made it all orth while. *Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; **who for the joy that was set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

**We will look back with Him and see that it was none of us and all of Him.**



### The Beatitudes: The cataracts of the heart

Part 38. Mat 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God”.

We return to one of those passive attributes, a state of being, something that we cultivate in ourselves, rather than what we do to others. Purity of heart is, I think, implied in the verse but it is not an accurate translation. Young’s Literal version puts it better, *Mat 5:8 ‘Happy the **clean** in heart--because they shall see God’*. There is a Greek word for pure (πῦρ = fire, πυρός puros) and it relates to the purifying, consuming property of fire. The word used in Matthew is katharos (καθαρός katharos = clean). We know the word as it is used in cathartic and catharsis.

In the LXX, the word katharos, clean, is used as follows, *Gen 7:2 Of every **clean** beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not **clean** by two, the male and his female*. This is ritually defined cleanness. The word is also rendered blameless and pure, as well as clean, *Gen 44:10 And he said, Now also let it be according unto your words: he with whom it is found shall be my servant; and ye shall be **blameless***. *Exo 25:11 And thou shalt overlay it with **pure** gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about*. Num

18:11 *And this is thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is **clean** in thy house shall eat of it.* The pure heart is clean, pure and blame free.

James introduces another word for purity, *Jas 4:8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and **purify** your hearts, ye double minded.* Purify (ἀγνίζω hagnizō) means to sanctify, ceremonially or morally. Can we do anything about purifying ourselves, is this a mission impossible? The heart of the natural man is in a desperate state, *Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and **desperately wicked**: who can know it?* The premise of our text is then, that we are blind to God until our hearts are cleaned. We cannot see God. We need heart surgery and our question is, “how do we get that change of heart, that clean heart?”

Some people go to great lengths to isolate themselves from the world, which they see is the bad influence on their heart. They retreat into retreats. They cloister themselves in communes, develop separate lifestyles, shun the modern world and its technology and adopt old ways, as if that will bring back what they see as a better and more civilised time. They miss the point completely, because it doesn't matter where you go, nothing will change. What is the same thing about everywhere you go? You are. Wherever YOU go, you take your desperately wicked heart with you and however “pure” the environment into which you enter, it will be polluted by your heart. Something more radical is required if you are ever to change.

You will note in scripture that when the Lord asks you to do something difficult or impossible, He will often provide the means *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling. *Php 2:13 For it **is God which worketh in you** both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* The task to circumcise the heart is a work of God, *Deu 10:16 **Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart**, and be no more stiffnecked.* The command to us is fulfilled by Him. *Deu 30:6 And the LORD thy **God will circumcise thine heart**, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.* God provides the miracle, just as He does with the heart transplant, *Eze 18:31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and **make you a new heart** and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Again, the command to us is fulfilled by Him. *Eze 36:26 **A new heart also will I give you**, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* What we are tasked to do, God undertakes for us. That should come as a great relief to us all.**

If we as disciples are finding our duties difficult, we need to ask if we are doing them in our own strength. Men and woman have gone to great lengths to mortify their flesh, deprive themselves of earthly pleasures, inflict bodily pain to distract themselves from their desires, to improve themselves, yet all without the slightest reference to Christ. These things become works of self righteousness. The lesson to be learned is this and it is like the “lesson of the yoke and the vine” (Mat 11:29). It is that we can do nothing of ourselves. *Joh 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for **without me ye can do nothing**.* If we wish to obey the precepts of discipleship, we need help, because we cannot operate on ourselves. If we are abiding in Christ we have the power to change because He is the source and power for change.

This “new heart” is brought about by a Divine renewal, *Heb10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.* I do not think that this is done in a single, blinding act. It is not as if one minute you are mired in sin and in a flash you are pure, sinless and perfection itself. It is a process, like the mental renewal, *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* You are shifting your position as God grows Christ in you. The new heart is like the new mind but we know that we are far from perfect, even though we have believed on the Lord Jesus. We know that there is a lot more work to be done on our evil heart. *Mat 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*

I would associate this renewal process with the discarding of our “Old man”, that is, what we were by nature. Our “Old man” died with Christ, when we were judicially condemned by God, *Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* We should view that corpse as a hindrance to anything good in our lives and we should make sure there is not the slightest vestige of it clinging to us. *Eph 4:22 ye are to put off concerning the former behaviour the old man, that is corrupt according to the desires of the deceit, Eph 4:23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, Eph 4:24 and to put on the new man, which, according to God, was created in righteousness and kindness of the truth. YLT.*

The life of the disciple is a life of renewal. It is the renewal of our mind, the way we think, what we think and how we think. It is the renewal of our heart, the source of our actions, the seat of our conscience and attitude to our Creator. This renewal is viewed variously as, the Crucifixion of the Old man with Christ, the burial and disposal of the Old man and the putting on of the New man and walking in the Spirit, *Gal 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.* There is the consequential production of the fruit of the Spirit in that new life, showing that this work is ongoing. The work of Christ is indeed of itself a finished work but it has not finished working in us.

As I have said we should not view these things as instantly applied, although I have met people who thought that they were perfection itself. No, we should not consider that we are actually holy and perfect now. We certainly are forensically but we are still a work in progress. If not, it would certainly disappoint us and cast doubt upon our relationship with Christ, when we fail. We would say, how can I be a son of God with all of this evil in me? No, we are changing and as we walk that path, provision is made for that failure. *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Our text, “*Blessed are the clean in heart: for they shall see God*” might be viewed as a part of this renewal process, whereby the cataracts fall from our eyes and we change. Perhaps better put, it is **the cataracts of the heart**. Do you remember when we went through Proverbs, we came across this verse, *Pro 22:9 He who has a good eye, he is blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor.* LITV. It is another beatitude. It says that we give with our eye. **He that has a good eye gives.** It is only the person with good eyes that can see the needs of the poor. Sometimes our body parts have different uses to what we think. The eye becomes the organ of giving, the heart becomes the organ of seeing.



It is not stated that we need better eyes, improved vision to see God. We need a better heart, because we see God better through a pure heart not a pure eye.

What did you expect to see, when it says you will see God? A bright shining light? A huge mystical presence? A supernatural appearance in front of you, outside of you? One day, when you have advanced down the road of discipleship, suddenly the sky will light up around you, in a Damascus road experience and you will see God, is that what you expect from our text? My friends, we should be looking in our hearts to see God, not scanning Earth's horizons. *Luk 17:20 And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Luk 17:21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, **the kingdom of God is within you.*** If the Kingdom of God is within you, then the God of that Kingdom will be there also. Have you seen God in your heart? Can people see that Christ in us? *Col 1:27 ..... Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

I have met many people over the years, who were always on about what the Lord was telling them to do and how God said this and God said that to them, their so called spiritual experiences. I used to wonder whether I was a second class disciple. Yet when I reflect back on those people, many of them lacked any Christian discipline and their lives did not mirror their claims of "spirituality". Their lives were about the externals, what was going on outside, to the neglect of what should have been going on inside. Discipleship is about getting Christ into our lives. *Gal 4:19 My children, for whom I again travail until **Christ should be formed to you.*** We become fitting habitations for God Himself. *1Co 3:16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that **the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?***

That unregenerate heart, that sinful heart, that source of our wicked actions is blinded to anything good and cannot see God, I say again, *Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* Look into your heart, what is there? *Mat 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man.* These are the things that block our view of God. They are the detritus of the heart that block out God. It is our smoking rubbish tip of sin whose dark clouds hide the light of the Creator. As our hearts are changed, we begin to see God.

Paul puts it like this, *2Co 3:18 But we all with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord Spirit.* LITV. We are changed from glory to glory. The picture Paul paints is of a disciple, looking at himself in a mirror and seeing the reflected changes of his face. It changes to become the face of another person. It changes into the face of Christ Himself. As his heart is cleansed, the filth of his life is washed away and he is renewed, he sees again the image of God, he sees Christ. We were blind to Christ until God enlightened us. *2Co 4:4 in whom the god of this age did blind the minds of the unbelieving, that there doth not shine forth to them the enlightening of the good news of **the glory of the Christ, who is the image of God;*** YLT. "**Blessed are the clean in heart: for they shall see God**".

This renewal comes at a great price. Firstly the supreme sacrifice of the Son of God, to make it possible. In the words of the beautiful Easter hymn, "He died that we might be forgiv'n, **He died to make us good,** That we might go at last to Heav'n, Saved by His precious blood." It was a death to redeem us and to make us "good". Secondly, that remedy must be applied to the sinner. It is not without its pain as when a wound is disinfected. Yet it cannot be applied unless a man is brought to

his need. To illustrate this transformation, I want to take us back to the life of David. I am not certain at what stage in David's life we might say that he was converted. It is not made clear to us, despite his dealings with the God of Israel, when he finally became "born again". You recall, "born again" was an Older Testament teaching, as Jesus told Nicodemus.

You may say, how can a person communicate with the Creator and not be born again. Well, God spoke through and to Balaam. Remember Francis Ridley Havergal, who on her own admission wrote many hymns and had committed large portions of the Bible to memory long before her conversion? The Lord will deal with whom He wants, how He wants and owes us no explanation. David was a disciple of Jehovah and although he had slain a giant, there were giants inside his own life that must be slaughtered. There is one occasion above all others where this is brought home to him.

There is an incident where David becomes overwhelmed by his sinfulness and it may be then that he made the transition to life having seen his sinful nature exposed. David like many of us believed that the laws applied to everyone but himself. I say that of him because it was the way that the prophet Nathan revealed his sin, when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. Nathan tells him the story of a rich man who takes a poor man's lamb, to illustrate David's theft of Bathsheba. David wants the man to be punished, yet is blind to the analogy, that he is in fact that man. David's conscience doesn't alert him because his heart is desperately wicked. His heart cannot even smite him for the wrong that he has done. When Nathan reveals that, David is stunned into silence.

The cataracts of the heart are removed and he sees what person he really is and out of his overwhelming grief he prays to his God. *Psa 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.* He sees the need for a clean heart. He sees just how bad it is in there, how wicked, deceived and evil and he confesses his sin. I do not think he cried for a clean heart in order to see God, I believe it was through seeing God, he saw his need for a clean heart. It is only when Christ starts that work in us, that we will have any idea what God looks like. When we do, like David, we will know what sort of person we really are as well.

### **The Beatitudes: Brothers of Christ**

Part 39. Mat 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God".

*Isa 9:6 For unto us a **child** is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, **The Prince of Peace**.* How do we reconcile this idea of peace with the violent world in which we live? How do we reconcile it with the apparent support that the Bible gives to warfare and slaughter? Does the genocide of the nations of Canaan set a precedent for us in the New Testament? *Deu 20:16 But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: Deu 20:17 But **thou shalt utterly destroy them**; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee.*

There appears to be a dissonance between the God of the Older Testament and the God of the New. People like the seemingly gentler, loving aspects of Jesus, God with us and not the stern Jehovah, Joshua of the OT. Has God mellowed and become less violent? Has He admitted being mistaken and

now wants us to see Him as a God of Love? Has the plan changed after a disastrous failure of the National experiment with Israel? Absolutely not. *Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: We are taught, Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.* No, God does not change, so what are we to make of it? I believe that what we are seeing in the Older Testament is judgement arriving early and it is an object lesson to the world. The lesson that the godly will not share space with the wicked, that the wicked will be punished for their sin and that punishment is death. *Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The message of the two Testaments is exactly the same. Christ will triumph and He will punish wickedness. *Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.....Rev 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.* God will still punish the wicked for whom there is no peace and with whom we are at war, not at peace.

It is clearly not given to us to instigate war without a command from God. Jesus refused to engage with the Armies of Rome as citizens of His kingdom are not of this world, *Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: **if my kingdom were of this world**, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.* The distinction between the Church and the institutions of this world is emphasised by Paul and it suggests that disciples should handle conflict differently to the world, *1Co 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, **go to law before the unjust**, and not before the saints?* Now, this raises another question, "Should Christians be engaged in military activities?" Should we become soldiers by career or in support of the nation in times of conflict or should we become pacifist?

John the Baptist does not dissuade soldiers from their career, *Luk 3:14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.* He does not say leave the army. When that Centurion who loved the nation and had built a synagogue in Capernaum came to Jesus to heal his servant, Our Lord didn't correct him on his choice of career and ask him to get out of the army. Yet none of these examples is a proof that being in the military with the prospect of engaging in war is an unrighteous act.

It is suggested that the early Christians did not join the military because it meant taking an oath of allegiance to the Caesar as god. Refusing to take an oath is no proof that they would or would not have joined in warfare. May I make a suggestion? Is it just possible that in our Christian lives, we should not bulldoze people out of positions that we consider unenlightened? Is it possible that John the Baptist and Jesus did not consider military careers a good thing, but that it was up to the individuals to exercise their own conscience in these matters? To develop their conscience to the point where if they chose **not** to engage in military acts of violence, they would at least have the strength of mind to be able to live with that decision?

In the OT, if a man could not face the prospect of going to battle, he was excused, *Deu 20:8 And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, **What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted?** let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.* This isn't exactly a conscientious objector but it does take into consideration that not every man is

capable of facing a physical enemy. In the case that we have cited (Jebusites, Hivites etc.), we are dealing with a “just” war, a war instituted by the command of God. What do we do in our own age, when wars are instituted by men? Do we join the ranks or do we object? How can we kill a fellow man in the Name of Christ the Prince of Peace? How do we reconcile that choice to bear arms with, the scripture that says, *Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*: to be as harmless as doves, to forgive those who despitely use you, to turn the other cheek, love your neighbour, etc.,. We must each come to terms with this.

Men must wrestle with their consciences over this. I think that taking up arms is the result of a weak conscience and refusing to bear arms the mark of a strong conscience. I think that it is like the person who will not eat meat, for whatever reason. Perhaps they are vegetarian or perhaps they didn't like the fact that meat was offered to idols. *1Co 8:10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; 1Co 8:11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?* You do not bulldoze the weak conscience, you do not squash dissent with your beliefs that others find hard to accept. If you do that you are on the way to establishing a cult. No, the weak conscience must become muscular to be able to stand on its own before God, not propped up by your life choices or my life choices.

There are Christians though who take this a whole lot further when they see things that they don't like in others. There are those who think that Christians should not wear make up, they should not dress fashionably modern, having a decent car is obscene, that going to a movie is a sin, that having a glass of wine or a cigar is the first step on the rung of hell's ladder, that buying yourself an occasional luxury is wrong, reading literature is a heathen practice. Why, there was a time when I even though that owning a TV was a crime. Yes, we are all too ready to judge what passes before another persons eyes and much slower, if at all, what passes before our own eyes. Now there may be many good reasons for doing or not doing the things that I have mentioned and many other things likewise but my question is “who are you to judge personal choices?” Who are we to judge matters of conscience? *Rom 14:3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Rom 14:4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. It is none of our business.*

Take for instance the issue of dress in Church meetings. I know a church where the men and women have a common dress code. They have it for a good reason but it is a choice, a bit like the Salvation Army. There are those who have a “Sunday best” suit or dress and it is quite easy to despise people who opt to dress differently, casually or fashionably. There are many customs that local churches adopt and people have a tendency to conform, while they are with that group. I used to find it disappointing that when they moved on, they would throw away the customs that they readily embraced with us. They don't use the same Bible version, use the same worship format, use the same music, they ditched hair covering and they no longer found a reason to have long hair, why? I imagine that they did the things that they did with us, not out of their own conscience but in respect of our conscience. They were doing things for the wrong reason. They subjugated their conscience to another persons conscience and that was a sin. *Rom 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*

One day, we will be able to check our judgements about other people and what they did and how they spent their lives compared to us. We will be able to judge whether our life choices were better than other people's life choices. Whether our unwritten values were any better than the prejudices of others? When the Lord casts our life's work on the "bonfire of the vanities" and after the fire has cooled down and when we have finished raking through the ashes, we shall see what of value remains. It will reveal what worth there was in the things that we treasured, the things that we applied ourselves to. How much of this life was fit to be taken with us to the next life. We shall see in the ashes what God thought of our lives. We shall see His verdict. We shall probably see that it was mostly ash.

Yet if there were anything of value there, would it swell our hearts? It should not, because anything we find there was given by the grace of God and we should cast it at His feet. And more than that, we should be looking to the greatest prize of all not to those things that we made in this life. Christ is that Pearl of great price.

"The Lord himself has laid the foundation of his people's hopes. It is matter for grave enquiry whether our hopes are built upon such a basis. Good works and ceremonies are not a foundation of sapphires, but of wood, hay, and stubble; neither are they laid by God, but by our own conceit. Foundations will all be tried ere long: woe unto him whose lofty tower shall come down with a crash, because based on a quicksand. He who is built on sapphires may await storm or fire with equanimity, for he shall abide the test". C H Spurgeon.

When we see people **not** doing what we do or **not** thinking like we think, there often springs up in us a root of bitterness because they are not "following" us. They are no longer part of us, they must be straying from the faith. We start to take the attitude that although what they are doing is not condemned in scripture, it is none the less an unwritten sin in our mind. We begin to despise them and it is not long after that, we begin to imagine all the things that could happen to them because they are not doing what we think they should. If you get to that stage, my friend, you are at war with them. You are far from being a peacemaker because in your heart you are at enmity with them. You have to learn to let it go because they are not your servant. Change in that individual will never be accomplished by your bitterness and animosity. Let it go before it eats you out. Change, if it is righteous change, will only come with Jesus.

If we are to be peacemakers, then we need to know where war starts. *Jas 4:1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* It starts with the desires that we generate in our lives. *Jas 4:2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Jas 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* It is the result of being a selfish malcontent. I want this and I want that and I am angry because I cannot have it and it makes me so angry that I could kill for it. Do you recall Absalom's sister Tamar who was raped by her half brother, *2Sa 13:2 Amnon was so obsessed with his half sister Tamar that he made himself sick. It seemed impossible for him to be alone with her because she was a virgin.* GW. Beside himself with lust he committed the act and then cast her aside, despising her. His lust started a war with his brother Absalom that got him killed. None of it achieved anything but more sorrow.

I would say that we live in one of the most discontent ages in history. People are discontent with their wages, their homes, their possession and their lives. You are encouraged to borrow from a

future you do not own, so that you do not have to wait or save for something. You can get loans to tide you over so that you can buy now and avoid the frustration of waiting. The Bible takes a different view on our lust. *1Ti 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 1Ti 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* I have met so many discontent "Christians". They cannot sit still and enjoy the moment, they fidget and shift and unless they are doing something to modify their environment, redecorate it, change it, they cannot rest. If we have discontent in our heart that is leading to unhealthy cravings, we lack peace and contentment. Someone said the richest man is the man who is content with what he has.

Again this is an issue of the heart. *Col 3:14 and above all these things, have love, which is a bond of the perfection, Col 3:15 and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye were called in one body, and become thankful.* YLT. Do you recall the origin of the word Sabbath? It was derived from "heart rest". The peacemaker is at peace in himself because he is at peace with God.

The peacemaker holds dear to his heart, that source of peace. *Rom 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:* There it is, Peace in all its glory, peace with God, absolute peace and it can only come through the Prince of Peace. If you ever bring peace to the world, it is by bringing Christ to the world, for where Christ walks, peace follows. When the angels announced the birth of Christ, it was with these words, *Luk 2:14 Glory to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good will.* DRB. The Christ child came with peace, not the peace that the world strives for, *Joh 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

There is a worldly peace which men associate with the cessation of strife, conflict and fighting. It is a false peace. Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for only 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history. How many people have died in war? At least 108 million people were killed in wars in the twentieth century. Estimates for the total number killed in wars throughout all of human history range from 150 million to 1 billion. The world is far from peaceful and men are not good making peace.

I have an abiding memory of Neville Chamberlain, stepping off of a 'plane at Heston Aerodrome, as it was known, waiving a piece of paper to a jubilant crowd. Prime Minister Chamberlain was an honourable man but he was an appeaser. "My good friends this is the second time in our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honour. I believe it is peace in our time." A year later the German leader derided the agreement as just a "scrap of paper" and invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. Chamberlain and others were driven by the fear of another conflict which in the event they did not avoid anyway. Peacemakers are not flabby asking for peace at any cost. Peace that appeases bullies, peace that sells out its virtues and beliefs, peace that betrays the truth, peace that cannot face reality, that is the peace of this world, not the peace of God.

I have on a number of occasions, heard people say, when someone has died, that they are now at peace. People, who had no interest in Christ and were never interested in Christ, somehow, in their dying found peace without God? With that dying breath, in the last chance saloon, they all found Jesus? It is possible? Oh, but the man on the cross did, you say, yes and the man on the cross saw the other man on the cross and asked to be with Him. What would people look to, if they never found out about the man on the cross, after a life of ignorance, what would they look to? They would not know where to look!

What do these people mean when they say that they are at peace in death? Is this a word they use to give themselves some consolation that all suffering has ceased? What can you honestly say to someone in this situation (and what comfort did Jesus give to people)? Can you imagine the horror, to close your eyes in death and open them in a worse place, a living nightmare of unending grief and pain, far worse than anything suffered here on earth.

Peace comes with a price. True peace was bought with blood, pain, sorrow and love. *Col 1:20 And, having made **peace through the blood of his cross**, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.* If you bring peace anywhere and it does not come with the cross of Christ, it is a false peace and it is a lie. There are thousands if not millions today who have been taught that they can have peace with God through some ritual, christening, some act of contrition, some good deed or work but not through the cross of Christ. Others think that they can live safely in the shadow of someone else's faith. The day will come when they will face the consequence of those lies and that they are not at peace with God and they were never His children.

The Children of God fight for peace. That is the paradox. They are peacemakers yet they are at war and peacemaking does not mean that conflict will not arise. Peacemakers are not neutral or indifferent to the great conflict in which they are involved. They bring the cross and by that means alone, they are the blessed peacemakers. They carry the blood of their brother JESUS to cleanse the sinful warring heart and because they are brothers, they are sons of God and children of God. Yet that gospel of peace can only be truly carried by those who have found peace in Christ and those who are at peace with God otherwise, they know not what they are carrying.

It is this blessed peace that alone keeps a person safe and sound through life. It keeps them sane in a mad world. *Php 4:7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, **shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.***

### **The Beatitudes: Triumph in adversity**

Part 40. Mat 5:10 "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mat 5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake".

We come to the last blessing in our series and the end of our current study theme. This blessing is one which is on the face of it far less pleasant. We have seen those blessings that affected how we outworked our faith, we saw those blessings that in-worked our faith but now, we look at a blessing that comes from outside from those who work against us. We might say of this one, that it is hardly a blessing or not one we readily welcome. Do we really have to be persecuted for being on the side of right? Surely people would speak highly and well of such persons, not revile them or speak evil against them. Yet this is the world we live in.

I had nurtured a thought, wrongly it turned out, that when I became a Christian, people would respond similarly to me, if they heard the Gospel, that they would believe like me. If someone like me had been convinced of its truth, then there were plenty of other bad people who would respond. It became one of the great disappointments of my early Christian experience that people did not respond. It was further compounded by another unexpected reality, not only did people not like the

Gospel, they did not like the people who carried the Gospel. My circle of acquaintances diminished rapidly but in the event, I was glad because the Gospel had revealed what true friendship was.

If it was “blessed” to be persecuted and despised, it didn’t feel like it. It was more like “disappointed are those who have evil spoken against them...” not blessed. That shows you how far off the mark I was and how much I had to learn about the workings of God. I had and still have to a lot to learn. One of the great truths that I have come to see very clearly, is the immense gulf between the sinner and the saved, the difference in their mindset, the difference in their world view, the difference in their attitudes, all as a result of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Why should we expect person who walks in darkness, influenced by the devil, to change? *Eph 2:2 ..... the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that **now worketh** in the children of disobedience:* Why on earth would they change? From where they stand, the news about Christ is not good news. It is very bad news and it will excite them to some degree that they have the prospect of judgement. Paul does not smother the unbelieving Athenians at Mars hill with good news but the impending judgement of God (the bad news), the “appointed day” when he will “*judge the world in righteousness*”. Today, we are too willing to provide sinners the cure before we convince them of the disease, unlike Paul. The man possessed who came into the synagogue in Capernaum spoke thus, *Mar 1:24 Saying, Let **US** alone; what have **WE** to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy **US**? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.* The evil in men will speak like that.

As I have said before, the devil never did a good deed and hates the followers of Jesus. The devil’s children will do the same. Never think that your unbelieving colleagues, neighbours, relatives or children will not do it either and that somehow, because they know you, they will not treat you that way and persecute you. It is, as they say, “par for the course”, that is, what should be expected. Jesus is saying, in our text, that if when we get persecution, reviling and false witness, it is part of the saving package. *Mar 10:29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, Mar 10:30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, **with persecutions**; and in the world to come eternal life.* Jesus promises us a secure future **but not a safe present**.

Of course, there is a huge difference between being persecuted for righteousness, for Christ’s name sake and being persecuted for being a total idiot. Like the minister whose sermon was interrupted by an angry parishioner who accused him of having an affair with his wife. He “confronted the Rev’ Martin Perry at the altar and told him that he was a “fornicating adulterer” after discovering e-mails between his wife, Sally, and Mr Perry. A parishioner at the service at St Anne’s Church, Oldland, Bristol, said: “There was a shocked silence and Mr Perry just stopped what he was saying and left the church. He hasn’t been seen since.” “I went into the service, walked straight up the aisle, stood right in front of him said the aggrieved husband.” He was saying, ‘Lord forgive us’ as I walked in, which struck me as somewhat ironic. I told him to spit out the words he was saying. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing; it was so hypocritical. To see him kneeling at the altar was ridiculous”.

It does not put the gospel in a good light does it and it leads to that well used observation that “Christians” are hypocrites? *1Pe 4:14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 1Pe 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. 1Pe 4:16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be*



*ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.* Peter is warning us that it is no glory to God if we suffer as evil doers.

At the end of last year (2013), a Methodist minister was suspended for drug taking. He became known as the “Crystal Methodist”. He was the minister, who has served as director of the Lifeline Project which helps tackle drug and alcohol addiction. He released a statement through the Methodist Church saying his actions were “stupid and wrong”. In the same year, “A married GP and Christian leader has admitted sexually assaulting child patients as young as 18 months and taking indecent photos of them during medical examinations. He also pleaded guilty to having 500,000 indecent images of children on his computer, including some at category five, the most serious level.”

In the US, Nearly 250,000 people have signed a White House petition that would label Westboro Baptist Church as a “hate group” after its members announced plans to picket a vigil for children killed in the Newtown, Connecticut school massacre. Within a few days a petition had logged 247,170 signatures, making it the largest online White House petition in history. A petition needs 25,000 signatures to be reviewed by the administration. Margie Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church said God sent the Sandy Hook shooter to Connecticut because the state had legalized same-sex marriage. Westboro Baptist Church has made national news in the past for its strong views against homosexuality. The religious group blames most tragedies - from the death of American soldiers to the recent massacre of 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School - on what they call a 'pro-gay' agenda in the U.S.

I do believe that homosexuality is a sinful act but when it comes to attributing the consequences of other people’s actions, such as murders or wars, to that act, where do we get the right to say that? Did God explain that was the outcome or did they just assume it was another case of Sodom and Gomorra? And then to rub it in, make placards and banners to show how righteous they are? Was there not a more constructive approach that Westboro could have adopted, especially to the bereaved and grieving souls? Are there not some basic truths about Christ that must be accepted before we can effectively wage war on those sins of the flesh. Should not Christ have been taken to those bereaved?

I had a dear brother, in this town, some 40 years ago now, who had a banner with the words, “the wages of sin is death” printed on it. He would polish his shoes, put on a clean shirt and suit and go into town and preach in the street. He would say that if he was smart and his shoes were clean and people didn’t like it, it wasn’t him, it was the word of God that caused offence. There is some truth in that, the point being, he didn’t want to deliberately offend people because of what he was.

It is very easy to stop up people’s ears to the gospel and we can suffer as a result of our own sinful actions. As we noted in a discussion last week, the teachings of the NT are for believers and yet we constantly use them against unbelievers. “Christians” are more likely to apply scripture to the unbeliever than themselves and when people see the hypocrisy of their lives, the fact that they do not do what they say, we get all the bad publicity. Christians they say, are a bunch of hypocrites and in many cases they are absolutely right. Isn’t it about time we got our own houses in order, before we start beating up on people who haven’t yet received the gospel? Shouldn’t we apply the scripture to our lives first.

I am beginning to think that there is little difference between many so called Christians and unbelievers. Christians do not see the separation that is a result of the Cross and so their lives differ little from unbelievers. They put on services, especially for them at this time of the year, like the carol service in the local evangelical church that also provides them with mince pies, sausage rolls and mulled wine. The churches dedicate their children, marry them and in the end officiate at their funeral. We have become the technicians for the unbeliever from the womb to the tomb.

That apart, our text is **not** talking about suffering for our own unrighteousness but suffering for Christ, for example, like this man:

Dr Richard Scott was frustrated with his lot. Despite having a flourishing GP practice and happy family life, he felt that he was not making a difference. So he turned to someone who had always helped him in the past. "I asked God to send me a challenge that would resonate with people," he says, "to make them see the importance of faith." God listened. Within the year, Dr Scott was locked in a battle with the General Medical Council after he suggested to a suicidal patient in August 2010 that religion might do more to help him than medication.

He also found himself fighting for his own life, after being diagnosed with bowel cancer. Though Dr Scott has undergone painful surgery, radiation and two rounds of chemotherapy, the cancer, he says, has been the least of it. What upsets him most is the realisation that it has become dangerous today to express Christian beliefs in the workplace.

The GMC, which regulates standards among medical professionals, issued Dr Scott with a warning last March. He had, it claimed, "overstepped the line" when, in a consultation, he urged his **24-year-old patient** to give Christianity a chance. "The man was depressed, and had left his own faith. So I told him, 'You may find that Christianity offers you something that your own faith did not.' **His mother complained** that I was forcing my religion down his throat."

You might say, well, the doctor should have kept his beliefs to himself, become one of those "you have your beliefs and I have mine" type of person. Isn't that just why the churches are in the position they are? They no longer contend for the faith and it is no longer a solution to the ills of humanity? A big reason is that we no longer value our faith, teach ourselves its values and propagate them. "A George Barna poll indicated that at least 12 percent of adults in the US believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Another survey of graduating high school seniors revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. A considerable number of respondents to one poll indicated that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham. We are in big trouble". We suffer as a result of our own ignorance and stupidity.

There are those who genuinely suffer for their faith. *Heb 11:36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: Heb 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; Heb 11:38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:). Men like the apostle Paul, 2Co 11:24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 2Co 11:25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; 2Co 11:26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 2Co 11:27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

This blessing upon those who suffer, is I am sure, far less welcome than all of the other blessings that we have considered. It is one of those that we can readily discount. I will have heaven but not persecution, revulsion, or evil spoken at me. Why? Will I take whatever steps are necessary to avoid paying this price? Will I keep silent about the Gospel and its consequences because it might be offensive, I might lose "friends", I will alienate my children, relatives will not like me, people will think that I am a fanatic, neighbours will despise me. Yes, that is quite likely but by the dark lantern of our silent witness, we are letting them all go down to the grave in sin and all to an everlasting separation from God. Christ has asked us, to the contrary, to shine, to illuminate and to enlighten this dark world of sin. That will have consequences as it did for Paul and thousands of others.

There are also those sufferings that will come unrequested and in this we must acknowledge that we are expendable. We are not isolated or immune to the assaults of evil, because we are in a battle. We are going to become collateral damage but that in the end is repairable in glory. Mary Slessor was a Christian missionary to Nigeria in the late 1800's. She had a book written about her entitled, "The expendable Mary Slessor". You would not want to be in some of the situations she found herself in but in herself it did not matter because she realised she was expendable. She had also found great comfort, writing, "Heaven is now nearer to me than Britain".

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) started his China Inland Mission (1865). Taylor was later supported by Henry Grattan Guinness (1835-1910) who founded Cliff College (1883) to train and equip people for local and global mission. His books, speaking, and examples led to the formation of numerous inland missions and of the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM, founded in 1886), which from 1850 to about 1950 sent nearly 10,000 missionaries to inland areas, often at great personal sacrifice. Many early SVM missionaries travelling to areas with endemic tropical diseases, left with their belongings packed in a coffin instead of suitcases, aware that 80% of them would die within two years. The regions God called them to often did not participate in the practice of burying their dead. The trip was one-way because of cost and the extensive time to arrive. Aside from sporadic letters through the postal service, the missionaries sent so far away were rarely heard from again.

Just after I became a Christian, I was given a copy of this letter:

Feb 2 1968

Dear Friends, There has been a real delay in us getting this off and I'm sure you'll understand when you learn why, Dec. 9 Jesus took our four precious little jewels to heaven. We had purchased a new boat to go to the islands to evangelise. It was 1 week old, but Don had practised everyday. We were on our way to our 1st island service, however he had gone the previous day and taken the 3 older children to find a building to hold services in. Dec. 8 at 5.30 G.M. we started and at 6 He realized the boat was leaking. There were 2 service men , plus 2 church workers, and our entire family aboard, but there was a 12 adult passenger limit. We all got life jackets on, and the 2 service men gave an international S.O.S. to a nearby Japanese freighter, but it passed by. In about 15 minutes the boat was so full of water it turned over and we were thrown into the sea. He clung to a life preserver in 57 water temp and 27 temp (air) for 10 hours all night.

The baby stopped breathing about 1 hour before we swam to shore the others all except my husband and I and 1 more service man died of shock and exposure. Our hearts are so crushed and lonely, but Jesus has really been helping us. We are continuing our work

here among the Japanese. The mistake was found to be in the way the boat was made. I'll send a picture that we had taken 3 weeks before the accident" Please pray for us and God bless you. In Christian Love, The Bereans.

In the depths of those "Why Me?" moments, why do I have to suffer, what have I done to deserve this, then the question why does God cause suffering to His children? Look no further than our text, "Blessed are you". Further, consider these words of the letter to the Hebrews.

*Heb 11:33 Through faith they conquered kingdoms, did what God approved, and received what God had promised. They shut the mouths of lions, Heb 11:34 put out raging fires, and escaped death. They found strength when they were weak. They were powerful in battle and defeated other armies. Heb 11:35 Women received their loved ones back from the dead. Other believers were brutally tortured but refused to be released so that they might gain eternal life. Heb 11:36 Some were made fun of and whipped, and some were chained and put in prison. Heb 11:37 Some were stoned to death, sawed in half, and killed with swords. Some wore the skins of sheep and goats. Some were poor, abused, and mistreated. Heb 11:38 **The world didn't deserve these good people.** Some wandered around in deserts and mountains and lived in caves and holes in the ground. Heb 11:39 All these people were known for their faith, but none of them received what God had promised. Heb 11:40 God planned to give us something very special so that we would gain eternal life with them.*

Next time you are tempted to think that you don't deserve whatever you suffer for the Faith, think this, **the world does not deserve you** but this is your trial of faith. Through and after this, God has something very special for you. That is why you are blessed.

*Rom 5:3 And not only so, but **we glory in tribulations** (affliction) also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; Rom 5:4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: Rom 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*