



DL
STEPHENS

INSPIRATIONAL
REFLECTIONS

Inspirational Reflections

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Inspirational Reflections

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An astronomer who was a sinner.

Copernicus is the astronomer who revolutionized the thought of mankind about the universe. He wrote a treatise entitled, "*The Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies.*" The printers finished it just in time to place it in his hands as he lay dying. This was in May, 1543. But this man, who gave the human race a new conception of the universe did not see himself before God as a great astronomer. He saw himself as a sinner. On his grave at Frauenburg, Poland one can read the epitaph that he chose for himself. It says: "I do not seek a kindness equal to that given to Paul; nor do I ask the grace granted to Peter; but that forgiveness which Thou didst give to the robber—that I earnestly pray."

Copernicus numbered himself among those people Jesus came to call.

Jesus came to common people, publicans and sinners.

When Jesus came in his ministry, He was in many ways similar to former prophets, but He was also different. He worked miracles; changed water to wine, fed multitudes, healed lepers, and raised

the dead. He came to the common people, and He associated with publicans and sinners. He told them,

Luke 5:31 ... *“It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. 32 “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”*

This bothered the people in authority.

The authorities rejected him and the repentance.

John the Baptist had called all Israel to repentance. He even included King Herod in the call. Luke says,

Luke 7:30 But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

They did not like John because he called them sinners. They thought they were righteous. A lot of those who refused John were Pharisees. Many of the Pharisees would not confess their sins, although they claimed to be strict followers of the law of Moses. They rejected John the Baptist, but some of them were interested in Jesus.

Jesus dines with a Pharisee.

Early in his ministry Jesus associated with the Pharisees. Luke says in his gospel that,

Luke 7:36 “... one of the Pharisees was requesting him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee's house, and reclined at table.”

Jesus vs. Pharisees—not yet in direct conflict.

Up to this time in the ministry of Jesus his relations with the Pharisees and Sadducees had not broken into open hostilities. The Pharisees—the strictest sect regarding the law of Moses—were watching him. His influence among the people was increasing. They saw that as a threat because they wanted to influence the people themselves. But they had not yet declared him a public enemy, and a blasphemer.

Luke tells us about a Pharisee, Simon, who was apparently wavering in his attitude toward Jesus. He invited Jesus to dinner, where he evidently intended to examine him more closely.

Eating meals in new testament times.

In those days the people did not eat their meals by sitting in chairs with their legs under tables. It was their custom to recline on couches with the guests lying on their left side, perhaps propped up on the left elbow, and their feet, unsandalled, stretched out on the couch.

It was also customary for people to come into the house during a feast, and sit and talk with those who were invited.

The invited guests reclined at table, while the uninvited guests sat around the wall. Also, in these oriental feasts the houses were often times left open, and uninvited strangers frequently passed in through the open courtyard into the guest chamber, and looked on. Apparently on this occasion, there was just such an uninvited stranger to that Pharisee's house, but a stranger not in the way you might be thinking. This stranger was a woman, a sinner.

Simon would have no contact with sinners if he could avoid it. He would never issue an invitation to an immoral woman to come to his house!

The immoral woman.

Luke says,

Luke 7:37 And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining *at the table* in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38 and standing behind *Him* at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume.

She knew of Jesus. She had heard, perhaps even seen, his miracle at the gate of the city. She was a sinner, and she knew it. But Jesus had said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ..." So she stood at the master's feet—weeping, remembering her sins, and wishing what had been done could be undone.

The definition of repentance.

Theologically and ethically, repentance is that sorrow for sin and contriteness of heart which produces or leads to newness of life. True repentance is a change of heart. The sinner is made to see and be sensible of his sin. He is grieved and humbled before God on account of it. Not so much for the punishment to which sin has made him liable, as that by his sin God is dishonored and offended, His laws violated, and the sinner's own soul polluted and defiled. This grief arises from a

love of God. It is accompanied by a hatred of sin, a love of holiness, a fixed resolution to forsake sin, and to do what is right in God's sight.

Now this woman brought an alabaster box of ointment; and more, she brought her love for the master. It was a bold step for one like her to press in, uninvited, in broad daylight, into the house of a rigid purist like Simon the Pharisee, but the knowledge that Jesus was there gave her courage. And consider this also: it was regarded among the Jews as a shameful thing for a woman to let down her hair in public, but she willingly made this sacrifice because of her affection for Jesus.

The opinion of a Pharisee.

Luke 7:39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."

Simon would have placed emphasis on "... were a prophet" because he intended to examine Jesus to see just what sort of man this was.

The witness of the Old Testament.

It is striking that, although the Old Testament scriptures abound in passages that attest to the greatness of God's mercy to the repentant, the Jews of our Lord's time had no place for such in their system nor in their practice. Such reasoning could not come from unfamiliarity with the Scriptures. No. It stemmed from ignorance within, a darkness of the heart. Simon, being a Pharisee, does not

acknowledge any sin in his own soul, nor any shortcoming in his own life. And thus, mistaking himself and his true condition, it is not strange that he regards this woman, who had been outwardly bad, as hopelessly lost.

Simon made several **mistakes**: He thought the woman was unpardonable and unpardoned. She was neither. He thought Jesus was undiscerning and ignorant of the woman's state. But Jesus was more thoroughly acquainted with her than Simon could ever be. Simon thought he was nearer God's kingdom than the woman was. In reality, he was farther away.

All these conclusions and opinions regarding Jesus Simon had voiced to himself. Not aloud. But the one who looks on the heart heard and judged.

The judgment of Jesus.

Luke 7:40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher."

The King James is more poetic as it reads:
"Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee."
"Master, say on."

Luke 7:41 "A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred *denarii*, and the other fifty. 42 "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?"

Simon well knew the facts upon which the Lord based the parable. The money-lender to Simon's mind was one who loans money at interest. The denarius was the chief silver coin as used by

the Romans and the most common in Jesus' day. It was the pay for a day's work. So it was five hundred days' work against fifty. Who will love him more, Simon?

The answer is obvious.

Her sin was great, but great sin should not hinder us from coming to the Savior for pardon. One of the greatest difficulties that men make for themselves is that they believe sin may keep sinners from pardon. But Jesus makes it plain that great sinners can receive pardon just as well as little sinners. In this story a great sinner becomes a monument to mercy and forgiveness.

While nobody recommends that we go out and sin in order to intensify our sense of guilt and then attempt to qualify for Christ's mercy, we do believe that great sins are no obstacle to the Lord's forgiveness—if the sinner is willing to repent.

Think for yourself: if a patient is brought into a hospital, a mass of wounds and hemorrhages and bruises; will not the magnitude of his injuries call forth pity from the people who give care, and argue for his immediate admission for treatment. In the same way, great sin is an appeal to the Savior for mercy. It is not an obstacle.

Luke 7:43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." 44 And **turning toward the woman, He said to Simon**, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. 45 "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 "You

did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. 47 “For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”¹

King David.

The Bible tells us much about David—as a shepherd boy, fighting Goliath; as a young man who fled from the king to save his life because of his respect for God’s anointed; as the mighty king who built Jerusalem and stood against the enemies of Israel. All of these recall David’s glory, and he was great, but we remember David more because of his repentance.

He had lusted for another man’s wife, Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and desired her so much that he committed adultery with her. Then to cover his sin he used his authority as king to commit murder; he had Uriah killed. Yet when confronted with his sin by the prophet Nathan David did not deny it. He said, “I have sinned against the Lord.” (2 Sam 12:13.)

And God forgave him. David knew that he was forgiven much. He wrote in psalms 51,

1 **B**E gracious to me, O God, according to
Thy lovingkindness;

According to the greatness of Thy
compassion blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

¹ Emphasis: author.

3 For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.
4 Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned,
And done what is evil in Thy sight,
So that Thou art justified when Thou dost
speak,
And blameless when Thou dost judge.
Psalm 51:1-4.

The immoral woman contrasted with Simon the Pharisee.

It seems that this was the first time Jesus had looked at the woman, and He asks Simon to look at her. Here was Jesus—an invited guest—and Simon had neglected three points of customary hospitality. He had supplied neither water, affection nor honor for Jesus, but...

- The woman's tears supplied the **water** that Simon had failed to give;
- The woman's kisses supplied the **affection** Simon failed to show for his guest.
- The precious oil with which she anointed the Savior's feet supplied the **honor** Simon failed to provide for his guest.

Simon had failed as a host to anoint the head of Jesus, the nobler part, with ordinary oil; but the woman had anointed his feet with costly oil. This penitent, sinful woman had done far more for Jesus than had the Pharisee. It had been expected of Simon, but not of the woman.

What would the Lord say to me under similar circumstances?

When we reflect about what the Lord said to Simon as He reclined at the Pharisee's table we must wonder what Jesus would have said had you or I been in Simon's place. Imagine the Lord as your dinner guest—and you are in your typical attitude and disposition—then the Lord leans over and says, “I have somewhat to say unto thee.” What would it be? What would He say?

You and I both know it would be the word each of us needs to hear the most, and at the same time perhaps the most difficult to bear. Yet it would be for the good. What would it be? Would He say -- “Let him who standeth take heed lest he fall ...”? Or, would it be -- “Your sins, which are many, are forgiven.”?

Is there something of which you would repent?

The story is told about the Swedish chemist, Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite. He awoke one morning, picked up the newspaper and read his own obituary. It said, “Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in war than ever before, and he died a very rich man.”

Actually, it was Alfred's older brother who had died. A newspaper reporter had mistakenly reported the death of the wrong man. But the obituary had a profound effect on Alfred Nobel. He decided he wanted to be known for something other than developing a means to kill people efficiently, and getting rich in the process. So he established the

Nobel prize. It was an award for scientists and writers who foster peace.

Nobel said, “Every man ought to have the chance to correct his epitaph in midstream and write a new one.” If you could read your own obituary in tomorrow’s paper, what would you do? Is there something in your life you would change?

How many times shall we forgive?

Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” 22 Jesus *said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Jesus went on to tell the disciples the parable of the Wicked Servant. That servant’s lord forgave him a sum equivalent to nearly 6 million dollars, but when the servant’s fellow slave asked him to forgive a hundred day’s wages, he refused. When his lord learned of his refusal to forgive his fellow the lord restored his debt, and turned him over to the torturers. So, the Lord is merciful, and willing to forgive a great debt, but he expects that we also should have the same quality of mercy.

Another time, the Jewish authorities attempted to put Jesus to the test, so he told them of John the Baptist, then put a parable to them.

Matthew 21:28 “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ 29 “And he answered and said, ‘I will, sir’; and he did not go. 30 “And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, ‘I will

not'; *yet* he afterward regretted *it* and went. 31 "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They *said, "The latter." Jesus *said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

He is faithful and just to forgive us, to offer us work in his vineyard, but He expects sincerity on the part of the forgiven. You cannot lie to him either by word, by disposition or by deed.

John wrote in his first letter,

1 John 5:5 And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

1 John 2:1 **M**Y little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those* of the whole world.

The sheep thief.

There is the story of two brothers who stole sheep from their neighbors. Law officers arrested them. The court convicted them, and ordered that they be branded on their foreheads with the letters “S T.” The letters stood for “sheep thief.”

One of the brothers, unable to bear the stigma, left for a foreign country, but the men there asked him about the letters, and what they meant. In shame he left there. Afterward, he wandered from land to land, becoming increasingly bitter, until he died.

The other brother repented of the theft, and became a Christian. He did not leave his home. He said, “I can't run away from the fact that I stole some sheep, so I will remain here until I can win back the respect of my neighbors and myself.” The years passed, and he established a reputation for integrity and respectability.

One day a stranger came to town and saw an old man with the letters “S T” branded on his forehead. He asked a native what they meant. The native thought about it for awhile then said, “It all happened so long ago I have forgotten the details, but I think the letters are the abbreviation for saint.”

You can, with the Lord's help, overcome a mistake.

Therefore, avoid sin when possible, but if you fall into it, do not despair. Rely on your advocate who effectively pleads your case in heaven.

Here is what Christ does on our behalf. **He propitiates**² the Father, that is, He appeases the divine wrath that falls upon our sin, thus rendering him favorable toward us. **He reconciles**³ us to God, restores us to favor thus enabling us to be at peace with him. **As a ransom**⁴ for us, He paid the debt, permitting us to go free from the bondage of sin.

The Lord forgives.

He has extended the blessings of this propitiation to the whole world, and has made it available to all mankind. Martin Luther well said, “It is a patent fact that thou too art a part of the whole world; so that thine heart cannot deceive itself and think, the Lord died for Peter and Paul, but not for me.”

No man is outside the mercy of God, except as he deliberately places himself there through the rejection of the plan which God ordained to save him.

In the book, that is entitled, *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, the author tells how the Dean fell into sin, and then committed one sin after another to cover up his first sin;--and, worst of all, permitted

² ἱλασμός, οὐ, ὁ— *expiation, propitiation.*

³ καταλλάσσω--*reconcile* (Rom. 5:11; II Cor. 5:18-19).

⁴ ἀπολύτρωσις, εως, ἡ orig. *buying back* a slave or captive, *making him free* by payment of a ransom.

an innocent man to be sent to prison for his crime. All kinds of adversities broke over him. He lost his wife and children. His home became a wilderness. Yet he would not repent. He said, "I cannot, I will not, I dare not, I must not repent."

But at length, the man he had wronged, the man who had gone to prison for his crime, wrote him a letter. In the letter the man said, "I forgive you."

The letter broke Maitland's heart, and brought him to repentance. He said, "God called to me through many years, by many judgments; but I repented not until I was forgiven."⁵

Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, 8 which He lavished upon us.

So, seek the Lord's forgiveness and favor. It is freely given to those who genuinely want and need it. When you have obtained it, value it as your most cherished possession, and pass it on to others who may be indebted to you.

⁵ Macartney.

Jesus came to Save Sinners.

On the television news I saw a report of a mother who was going from bar to bar, and sleazy motel to flop house looking for her daughter. The daughter, a young woman, had fallen into prostitution, and almost every other habit of street vice so she could obtain crack cocaine. The mother, carrying an identity card made for her daughter, would show the picture to almost anyone who would look at it, asking always, "Have you seen her? She's my daughter." Sometimes the mother would get close to her daughter's location, only to lose her. She blamed her failure on "snitches," people who tell the daughter someone is asking about her.

When the reporter questioned the mother, asking why she continued to pursue so hopeless a task, she said, "If I don't find her she will die."⁶

As it was for the woman's daughter, so it is for sinners of all stripes.⁷ If they are not rescued they will die. Moreover, it is ironic that people in such mortal danger would flee from their rescuer, but they do.

The Bible tells us that Jesus came to save sinners. Paul wrote to Timothy in his first letter,

1 Tim. 1:15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,

⁶ WTVT Channel 13, Tampa, FL, September 1995.

⁷ Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23.

among whom I am foremost of all. 16
And yet for this reason I found mercy, in
order that in me, as the foremost, Jesus
Christ might demonstrate His perfect
patience, as an example for those who
would believe in Him for eternal life.

Leprosy at the time of Jesus was an incurable
disease. Even today it is difficult to cure. It is
perhaps the most loathsome of diseases because in
its fullness it causes an ugliness that is difficult to
approach. Many believe that God chose leprosy as
the symbol of sin and its consequences. The Law of
Moses certainly carries out this idea. Sin,
uncleanness. These two ideas lie together. Luke
says concerning Jesus that,

Luke 5:12 ...it came about that while He
was in one of the cities, behold, there was
a man full of leprosy; and when he saw
Jesus, he fell on his face and implored
Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing,
You can make me clean."

Under the Law of Moses lepers are separated
from the uninfected. The Hebrews prohibited lepers
from mingling with the healthy. Luke tells us that
this man was "full of leprosy." He was a leper past
all hope of recovery. In this condition he would
have been a repulsive sight. The whole appearance
of his face would have changed until he looked as a
lion. Nodules grow on the skin. They ulcerate.
Discharges flow from the wounds. The eyebrows
fall out. The eyes stare. The voice becomes hoarse.
The victim wheezes. Ultimately the disease spreads
inward. It ends in consumption, dropsy, suffocation,
and death. This man was not far from that end.

"Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean," he said. So we see that this man did not doubt Jesus' ability to heal him. He believed the only thing that would prevent his release from leprosy was Jesus' willingness.

To many Jews of that far off day ceremonial uncleanness was at least as horrible as the disease. It meant to be an outcast from Israel, to be classed with swine, and dogs. And remember this: to the Jew a man's physical condition told of his spiritual condition. And this man asked to be made clean—he did not ask for good health. So, besides asking to be healed, the leper asked that the Lord would remove his shame. This leper was beyond help so far as man was concerned, but he believed.

Luke says of Jesus that He,

... stretched out His hand and touched him.

He touched him! The man was unclean. Jesus did not shrink from him. He touched him.

And Jesus said, "I am willing; be cleansed."

And immediately the leprosy left him.⁸

This tells us that no matter how loathsome the disease—or the sin, the Lord can cleanse it. By extension, we see that the Lord can touch us just as he touched the leper. He is willing to cleanse—to forgive.

In Matthew we read a comment of the Lord about the difficulty of gaining heaven,

Matthew 19:23 And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter

⁸ Luke 5:13.

the kingdom of God.” 25 When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” 26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but **with God all things are possible.**”

God forgives all manner of sin, and no one is beyond the reach of God’s forgiveness and salvation, except the one who stubbornly remains in jeopardy.

In Luke’s gospel we read of an incident in which Jesus taught the scribes and Pharisees a lesson about His concern for the lost,

Luke 15:1 Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

3 And He told them this parable, saying, 4 “What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? 5 “And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 “And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ 7 “I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Jesus does not want to lose even one. The Lord holds out his hand to all sinners, asking them to repent—to the willful, the scoffers, the ignorant and misguided, and to the wretched. He wants to save them all.

Matthew tell us that,

Matt. 9:9 And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He *said to him, "Follow Me!" And he rose, and followed Him.

At the time of Christ the Talmud lists two classes of "publicans" or tax-gatherers. There were the *Gabbai* and the *Mokhsa*. The latter was the *douanier* or custom-house official. Both classes of tax collectors fell under the Rabbinic ban, but the *dounaier*—such as Matthew was—became the object of chief denunciation.⁹ The rabbis and the Pharisees with many of their fellow Israelites cursed the tax-collectors and classed them among the worst of sinners.

Matthew was a tax-collector. Jesus called him.

Matthew 9:10 ...it happened that as He was reclining at table in the house, behold many tax-gatherers and sinners came and joined Jesus and His disciples at the table. 11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" 12 But when He heard this, He said, "It is not those who

⁹ Edersheim, A. (1896, 2003). The life and times of Jesus the Messiah (1:515). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill." 13 "But go and learn what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Alfred Edersheim wrote concerning the difference between the teaching of the world's religions and the teaching of Jesus,

In two things chiefly does the fundamental difference appear between Christianity and all other religious systems, notably Rabbinitism. And in these two things, therefore, lies the main characteristic of Christ's work; or, taking a wider view, the fundamental idea of all religions. Subjectively, they concern sin and the sinner; or, to put it objectively, the forgiveness of sin and the welcome to the sinner.

But Rabbinitism, and every other system down to modern humanitarianism... can only generally point to God for the forgiveness of sin. What (in them) is merely an abstraction, has become a concrete reality in Christ. (Christ) speaks forgiveness on earth, because He is its embodiment. As regards the second idea, that of the sinner, all other systems know of no welcome to him till, by some means (inward or outward), he have ceased to be a sinner and become a penitent. They would first make him a penitent, and then bid him welcome to God; Christ first welcomes him to God, and so makes him a penitent. The one demands, the other imparts life. And so Christ is the Physician, Whom they that are in health need not, but they that are sick. And so Christ came

not to call the righteous but sinners... to Himself, to the Kingdom; and this is the beginning of repentance.¹⁰

So it was with Matthew whom Jesus called as he sat in the tax-collector's booth engaged in the occupation so loathed and despised in Israel that repentance was accounted especially difficult for tax-gatherers and custom-house officers.¹¹

As it was for Matthew so it is for many of us. Our deeds become barriers to forgiveness—not on God's part, but ours.

There is the story of the settler in South Africa who found a native of the Kaffir tribe near his stable. The settler accused the Kaffir of attempting to steal a horse. The Kaffir declared that he was simply taking a short cut home. But the settler had no faith in Kaffirs, and he was a vindictive man. He decided to make the Kaffir afraid of him. So he tied the Kaffir to a tree and cut off his right hand.

Months passed. A day came when the settler traveled far from his cabin. A storm overtook him and he sought shelter. The only shelter available was a Kaffir hut. Nevertheless, the Kaffirs gave him food and a place to sleep. When he awoke he saw a tall Kaffir standing over him. When he raised his eyes to meet those of the Kaffir the native held up his arm, and there was no hand on it.

¹⁰ Edersheim, A. (1896, 2003). *The life and times of Jesus the Messiah* (1:507). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Edersheim, A., 1:517. "Levi-Matthew was not only a 'publican,' but of the worst kind: a '*Mokhes*' or *douanier*; a 'little Mokhes,' who himself stood at his custom-house; one of the class to whom, as we are told, repentance offered special difficulties."

The settler felt at this point that his time had come, because he had heard that the Kaffirs were cruel and revengeful. He waited for the fatal blow to fall. But the moment passed, and slowly the handless arm dropped to the Kaffir's side. He said, "This is my cabin and you are in my power. You have maimed me for life, and revenge is sweet; but I am a Christian, and I forgive you."

How is this story different from what we have done to the Lord? Yet He forgives. Our deeds may stand in the way of forgiveness, but they are in our way, not His.

People who regard themselves as righteous, as did the Pharisees, tend to look down on others they consider to be sinners. That practice received a rebuke from Jesus in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. Yet while there are many willing to condemn the sinner the practice may be equally as prevalent in which the sinner condemns himself, and so places himself outside the pale of forgiveness. There is the story of the man who once cursed "God with all His attributes." He thought that in his anger he had committed the unpardonable sin. There was once a woman who was involved in a love triangle. She was caught. She took an oath on the Bible to her husband that she was innocent. Because she had lied with her hand on the Bible she believed she had committed the unpardonable sin. Others have said, "There are some things which are beyond the reach of God's pardon. There are some things for which one can never be forgiven."

None of these self-condemnations is true in Jesus.

Paul regarded himself as the "foremost" of sinners, but not beyond the pale of forgiveness. And note what he did,

- * Paul said he was “foremost” of sinners.
- * Acts says that Paul was, "...breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord."¹²
- * that he was, "...consenting to the death..." of Stephen.¹³
- * Paul had persecuted the church. As it says in Acts, “But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”¹⁴

But when Paul met Jesus on the Road to Damascus he found that Jesus had not come to condemn him, but to save him. Paul wrote to Timothy,

I Tim. 1:16 And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

As it was in the case of Paul so it is with those who would come to Jesus. His mercy takes the form of longsuffering, of patience. The Lord was patient with the ruin and destruction Paul wrought on the church. Jesus might have cut his career short with swift judgment. Instead, His mercy took the form of a personal rebuke, and then of a deliverance from guilt, sin and death.

The greatest persecutors, or the greatest sinners, should not despair of mercy. The Lord will

¹² Acts 9:1.

¹³ Acts 8:1.

¹⁴ Acts 8:3.

wait a long time for one sinner to come to repentance. (But will He wait forever?)

The case of Paul, "...the foremost of sinners..." ought to encourage sinners of every class to have hope and trust in the Lord. This should satisfy the misgivings of someone who thinks he has sinned too much to be saved, to receive mercy from the Lord.

David, that heroic king of Israel of whom we read much that extols his greatness, was also a great sinner. When we first meet David the prophet Samuel has come to the house of Jesse in search of the new King of Israel. Samuel looked upon the sons of Jesse and when he saw Eliab he thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." But that was not the case. For God said to him, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."¹⁵

The Psalmist wrote,

Psalm 78:70 He also chose David His servant

And took him from the sheepfolds;

71 From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him

To shepherd Jacob His people,

And Israel His inheritance.

72 So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,

And guided them with his skillful hands.

David, the chosen of the Lord, lived with God's favor until the day that he sinned. He lusted for Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and

¹⁵ 1 Samuel 16:7.

committed adultery with her. He compounded his sin by attempting to cover it up, and when he did not succeed he sent a letter by Uriah's own hand to the commander of Israel's army. The letter told Joab to place Uriah in the forefront of the fiercest battle and then withdraw from him, so that he might be struck down and die.¹⁶

David's sin began with lust that grew into adultery. Next, he used deception to cover his sin, and then he used his position as commander of the army to commit murder.

The prophet Nathan brought the judgment of God against him.

David then saw the gravity of his sin. God's judgment brought him face to face with his sin, and he confessed it. On that day it would have been difficult to imagine a man more wretched than David, the sinner. He wrote in the 51st Psalm,

Psalm 51:1 Be gracious to me, O God,
according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion
blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.

4 Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.

David's attitude was like that of Jonah when he had been cast into the belly of the sea monster,

¹⁶ 2 Samuel 11.

Jonah 2:1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. 2 And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me. "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice. 3 For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me. 4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' 5 The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. 6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God. 7 "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. 8 "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD." 10 So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

From this we learn that the Lord can deliver from the most hopeless of circumstances. Jesus touched a leper and cleansed him. He called Matthew from the most despised of occupations. He had mercy for Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor. And as David pleaded for mercy the Lord forgave him. Paul wrote,

1 Timothy 1:15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. 16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

Jesus raises the dead

The Encyclopaedia Britannica records almost casually one of the saddest and possibly the most discouraging characteristics of the modern church. In their Macropaedia the writer for the encyclopaedia said this,

“For the most part, the churches of the latter part of the 20th Century no longer have the courage to uphold the Christian teaching of life after death.”¹⁷

The loss of courage to tell the despairing of the world about the central doctrine of Christianity speaks volumes about a church that has lost its way amid the opposition and contradictions of the opponents of God. It's as if someone aboard a sinking ship knew the way to a lifeboat and was unwilling to tell the other passengers.

The evidence for the resurrection is still abundantly available. Yet, while opponents mock the testimony of scripture, Christians blush to raise the subject. The latter because they fear ridicule, and the former because they have set their hopes to low. So it is that in all this scoffing and embarrassment—despair rules, and the ones who have lost their dearest are left with naught of hope.

The spirit of the world opposes the idea of a resurrection. From youth up people are taught that death is a natural thing. It always happens. Get used to it. You go around once and then it's over. Oblivion awaits.

¹⁷ Britannica. Macropaedia, Vol. IV, p. 508.

But we know that what the spirit of the world says is not true. We have other evidence to consider.

In a cemetery in Hanover, Germany, lies the grave of a woman who did not believe in the Resurrection. So opposed to the idea was she that she directed in her will that her grave was to be made so secure that if there were a resurrection from the dead, it could not reach her. On her grave she had them place huge slabs of granite and marble. Then ordered them to fasten it all together with heavy steel clasps. On the marker she had them inscribe these words: "This burial place must never be opened."

In time, a seed, which had been covered by the stones, began to grow. The tiny plant probed and found a crack in the concrete. Slowly it pushed its way upward, out of the soil, and through the tiny crack in the sepulcher. It continued to grow, and eventually the plant became a small tree. As the trunk enlarged, the great slabs of stone were pushed aside. The steel clasps were wrenched from their sockets. In time, a mighty tree stood over the grave site.

The moral of this story is: God opens tombs. This time he did it with an acorn.

The power contained in a seed is mightier than the sepulcher. It is stronger than anything man might devise. God's power calls to life where there was no life. Someday he will speak and the graves will open. The sea will give up its dead. Unbelief cannot deter God from his purpose. Not the unbelief of a woman in Hanover, Germany. Not the unbelief of the timid church of the 21st Century.

John told us in his gospel that, “An hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.” John 5:28, 29

The great and awesome day of the resurrection is yet future, but the Bible tells us about events in ancient Palestine that foreshadowed that Great Day. In Luke, Chapter Seven, we are told that Jesus visited Capernaum. There, he listened to the entreaty of the Centurion; afterward, he healed the Centurion's servant.

In the 11th verse of that same chapter he wrote concerning Jesus,

11 And it came about soon afterwards, that He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going with Him, accompanied by a large multitude.

Nain was about 25 miles from Capernaum. On foot, Jesus could have made the trip from Capernaum to Nain by evening. Evening was when the Jews conducted their funerals.

Alfred Edersheim says that from the elevation on which the city stood we can look northward across the plain to the wooded mount Tabor. In the distance, stands the snow-capped Mount Hermon. In the west, beyond the rising hills, lies Nazareth. To the east is Endor. The Lord would have approached Nain from Endor.¹⁸

So, on this day two processions approached one another—two processions with altogether different purposes.

Luke 7:12 Now as He approached the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being

¹⁸ Edersheim, A., *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.

carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and a sizable crowd from the city was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.” 14 And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise!”

15 And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. 16 And fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”

As the only son of his mother the young man was a widow’s sole means of support. Jesus felt compassion for this widow, so He consoled her, and then gave her son back to her.

Hope now replaced despair. Consolation and joy came to replace grief. The risen son could now look after his mother—he could serve her. This resurrection was the gift of life to a young man who had died, but it was also a resurrection unto service.

Note also, that the people in the funeral procession went from grief to fear to joy.

A number of years ago in Michigan, a little child of great promise died. As she lay in the tiny casket someone placed in the child's lifeless hands a beautiful bouquet. In the center of the bouquet was an unopened bud of the Rose of Sharon. The bud symbolized the beauty of what might have been.

At the close of the services, and before she was taken to her final resting place, the loved ones gathered about the coffin for their farewell. But as

they looked they discovered that a wonderful thing had happened. The bud of the Rose of Sharon had become a flower in full bloom while still in the child's hand.

The hope of life is that it will come to full bloom in the power of maturity. This is why we feel such a greater sense of loss when a child dies. They, and we alike, are cheated by death. Yet in the face of this most dismal of partings rises the hope of the resurrection. The resurrection is the fulfillment of all the failures, losses and shortcomings of this life. In the resurrection we expect to see lives that have been cut short here to bloom in the full power of everlasting life.

The Lord told the widow—the mother of the young man of Nain—“Do not weep.” All is not lost.

In Mark, Chapter Five, Mark says that Jesus was beside the sea, and a great multitude with Him... (Mark 5:22-34).

5:22 And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet²³ and begged Him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live.”

35 While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, “Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher anymore?”

In this message we can hear the typical human attitude. Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher anymore? There is nothing left but mourning, despair. It is futile to press the issue any more. No one can overcome death! Can he?

But Jesus knows nothing of futility and despair. He can overcome death. Mark continues,

Mark 5:36 But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, “Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.”

37 And He allowed no one to follow with Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38 And they came to the house of the synagogue official; and He beheld a commotion, and the people loudly weeping and wailing. 39 And entering in, He said to them, “Why make a commotion and weep?” The child has not died, but is asleep.”

40 And they began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, he took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. 41 And taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “Talitha cum!” (Which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise!”)

42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk; for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. 43 And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this; and He said that something should be given her to eat.

With two words Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead and gave her back to her parents. The people who were there went from fear and futility to being astounded.

The writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Satan does indeed have the power to slay, but Jesus has the power to raise from the dead.

In John the Eleventh Chapter we read about an even more astonishing event that occurred near the close of Jesus' ministry,

11:1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

Jesus was in Perea when the message came to Him.

11:4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. 7 Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

8 The disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?”

...

11:11 These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”
12 Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.”

Edersheim says that the rabbis—the Jewish teachers of that time—frequently used the term “to sleep” instead of “to die.” The word “*demakh*” meant “to sleep” in the sense of an overpowering and oppressive sleep.

11:13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15 “And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”

The village of Bethany lay on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, not far from where the road to Jericho descends to the Jordan valley. The name of the town today is called El-Azariyeh, from Eleazar, or Lazarus. The meaning of Bethany has been given as the “House of Dates,” but more likely it means, “House of Misery.” So it was on that day Jesus returned.

11:17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. 19

And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. 20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. 21 Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 “But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

What Martha said to Jesus is puzzling. Was she saying, “You could have prevented his death, but now it’s too late”? Then she expresses confidence in Him, although she must have placed limits on what He could do.

11:23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24 Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Here Martha shows that her expectations of rising from the dead are distant, in the future, not on the day that Jesus came to visit. Yet Jesus had other thoughts.

11:25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

26 “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Is Martha surprised? Rebuked? Corrected?
Whatever she may have thought her answer still
does not show that she expected what was to follow.

11:28 And when she had said these things,
she went her way and secretly called
Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has
come and is calling for you."

29 As soon as she heard that, she arose
quickly and came to Him.

30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the
town, but was in the place where Martha
met Him.

31 Then the Jews who were with her in the
house, and comforting her, when they
saw that Mary rose up quickly and went
out, followed her, saying, "She is going
to the tomb to weep there."

32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus
was, and saw Him, she fell down at His
feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had
been here, my brother would not have
died."

These were also Martha's words! It's like
saying, "You can prevent, but you cannot remedy."

11:33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her
weeping, and the Jews who came with
her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and
was troubled.

34 And He said, "Where have you laid
him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come
and see."

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him!”

37 And some of them said, “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?”

Even the bystanders held the same opinion. Jesus can prevent, but he could not reverse the condition into which Lazarus had fallen. Who could do that? Lazarus was dead, and had been dead for days.

11:38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”

40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”

41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 “And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” 43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!”

44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his

face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

Jesus had freed Lazarus of the fetters of the grave, and He had but called to him. Where before there had been weeping, there is now joy and exulting. Jesus had called to a dead man who had been buried in his tomb for four days, and the dead man had heard his voice. Lazarus arose because even Death cannot resist its Master.

In the Gospel of Mark is written,

And Joseph bought a linen sheet, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen sheet, and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid.

And when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.

And very early on the First Day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"

And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large.

And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed.

And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; Behold, here is the place where they laid Him.”

Not many days later, Peter spoke the following to the men of Judaea,

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

In the gospels the writers have preserved for us the records of people who Jesus raised from the dead. Among them were three,

- 1) The son of the widow of Nain who was a dead man on his way to the cemetery.
- 2) The daughter of Jairus who was a girl who had just died.
- 3) Lazarus of Bethany who had been dead four days.

The living thought Jesus could prevent death, but could not overcome it. The truth is He can do both, and at any point; He can raise the newly dead, and He can raise those dead for a day but not yet in their tomb. Greater still He can raise those whose bodies have lain in the tombs for many days. And He will.

In the buried and forgotten world of the catacombs of ancient Rome, where the early Christians buried their dead, there are chambers where services for the dead were held, and where we can see inscribed on the walls and ceilings scenes from the Old and the New Testament. Among the most frequent are Noah and the Ark, Jonah and the sea monster, the sacrifice of Isaac, and Christ the Good Shepherd, with the lamb in His arms.

On each side of the narrow passages that lead to the chambers are the niches into which the bodies of the dead were pushed; and on the stone or cement that seals the rough tombs we can still read the names in Latin and Greek. One inscription reads: "Gordian, the courier from Gaul, strangled for the faith. Rests in peace." Another says: "Victoria, in peace and in Christ." Then we see an inscription in Latin that reads: "Tentianus vivit" –that is, **"Tentianus lives!"**

This is an inscription that has survived the centuries for a Christian who will survive in eternity. Tentianus will outlive his inscription. Tentianus lives!

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, (I Cor. 15:16-22, 51-57)

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet;

for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are reminded once again of what Jesus said to Martha,

“I Am the Resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

"Are there just a few who are being saved?"

"The "narrow door."

Luke 13:22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

The one who brought this question to the Lord remains unnamed. Edersheim says he was a "... representative of the Pharisees."¹⁹ Perhaps that is true. Certainly he was one of the company that either encountered Jesus or followed Him on His way to Jerusalem. Some say that the question was innocent inquiry; others say the Jews opposed to Jesus advanced the question to cause antipathy and opposition among the nationalistic Israelites. Many Israelites held that the "few" were Israel, and the "many" were the Gentiles.

Jesus did not answer him directly, but told them all to attend to their own salvation. The Lord's word "strive" means to take pains, exert yourself; in fact, strain every nerve to enter. "For many ... will seek to enter and will not be able."

¹⁹ Edersheim, A., *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, p. 298.

The Lord's words are reminiscent of Matthew 7:13, where He said,

Matt. 7:13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. 14 "For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

The Lord's words in Matthew are in the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount where He described the outcomes of certain character traits, and outlined the behaviors that are characteristic of those who are on the pathway to life. Regrettably, only the "few" will have the devotion and dedication to Christ that are the distinguishing and distinctive traits of the saved. The "many" will allow themselves to be seduced by the world, that is, drawn to the world of goods, endowments, riches, advantages, methods, and pleasures, which although hollow and temporary, stir desire, and seduce from God; this is the broad and easy way because it is the way along which a person is propelled by his fleshly desires.

The readings in Luke remind us of the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. When they might have entered the land of promise their hearts melted for fear of the inhabitants of the land. Their hesitation, and misdirected fear, angered the Lord. Only two, Joshua and Caleb, found favor in God's sight. Of that generation all but two perished without entering the Promised Land.

That generation of Israelites learned that they did not have a lock on their place in the land of promise. The same may be said of the generation that witnessed the works of Jesus with respect to a

place in the kingdom of God. The Pharisees—and many of the Jews—believed that their part in the Messianic Kingdom was theirs as a matter of course. They thought it was provided for them by their heritage in Abraham. To them, being born a Jew was enough to guarantee their part in the world to come. In that kingdom they would enjoy the fellowship of the fathers, and live in splendor while the Gentiles suffered without.

The Lord rejected that idea. All must struggle to enter the kingdom. The casual observer has no part in the world to come. It matters not whether the person is Jew or Gentile. What matters is the earnest response on the part of the person who encounters Christ. Anything less than serious intentions will avail nothing. Visible efforts will identify the one with the determination to enter.

In the roll call of the supporters who gathered at Hebron to help David secure his kingdom from Saul were the men of Zebulun. The Bible says in the 12th Chapter of 1 Chronicles,

1 Chr. 12:33 Of Zebulun, there were 50,000 who went out in the army, who could draw up in battle formation with all kinds of weapons of war and helped *David* with an undivided heart.

These are the type of the servants of the Lord. They are familiar with all the kinds of weapons for the spiritual warfare, and they serve with an undivided heart. Their striving has a single purpose—serve the King of the kingdom of God.

But “struggle” or “striving” is not the central idea in the answer Jesus made to the questioner. “Door” is the central idea in Luke. The Pharisees

were already struggling, but struggling in the wrong way. John tells us that Jesus said once,

John 10:1 ”Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 “But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 “To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. 4 “When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 “And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 Jesus therefore said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 “All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

It is essential that the person desiring to enter the kingdom of God enter through Jesus. It makes no sense to be looking for the entrance to the kingdom in another place.

There is the story about the two golfers. One of them hit his ball into the rough. After watching it sail out into the brush and trees he said, “I’ll have to

look for my ball.” His fellow-golfer said, “OK. I’ll go back to the clubhouse to get my other nine iron while you look for your ball.” The second golfer returned a while later to find his partner walking in circles on the fairway looking at the ground. “What are you doing?” the second golfer asked. “I thought your ball went into the woods.” “It did, but it’s easier to look here.”

Looking for the kingdom God requires that we look in the right place. We just might have to look “...in the rough.” Strive to enter by the Door. And that is a narrow way. Moreover, that narrow way is many times hedged about by difficulties.

Are there “...just a few who are being saved?” Yes. Sadly it is true because people insist on looking elsewhere than Jesus. Some refuse to rely on the word of God. Others lay emphasis on a religious heritage that has come down to them through relatives, or through national heritage. Many insist on their own personal performance of good works. Still others see religion as an outward expression, as ceremony and pretense, and reject any meaningful inward effect on the heart.

The people who insist that they be allowed to look for salvation on their own terms will come to the door of the kingdom of God and find the door shut. People who tell themselves they will devote their lives to the Lord after they have settled an account, finished a personal task, or reached a personal goal are deluding themselves with the reassurances of the procrastinator. They are seeking to enter on their own terms, and as procrastinators will find the door shut.

Luke 13:25 “Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door,

saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.'

Once the priests in the temple challenged Jesus' authority to teach and He answered them with a parable.

Matt. 21:28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' 29 "And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go. 30 "And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted it and went. 31 "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They *said, "The latter." Jesus *said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

In a way it is a matter of commonsense who will be saved. It is they who respond in genuine, heartfelt obedience.

The Plea of the Procrastinators.

Some of the people who heard Jesus followed him. Many did not. Of those who did not follow some may have intended to become devoted disciples, but delayed for one reason or another. Luke tells us, “

Luke 9:57 And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.” 58 And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” 59 And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Permit me first to go and bury my father.” 60 But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” 61 And another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.” 62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

To delay in one’s service to the Lord, or to put off to some indefinite future a duty or a commitment to His service is to deny Him. Unbelief and Procrastination are brothers. Procrastinators are like those in Ezekiel about whom the prophet wrote,

Ezek. 12:21 Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 22 “Son of man, what is this proverb you *people* have concerning the land of Israel, saying,

‘The days are long and every vision fails’?

Ezek. 12:26 Furthermore, the word of the Lord came to me saying, 27 “Son of man, behold, the house of Israel is saying, ‘The vision that he sees is for many years *from now*, and he prophesies of times far off.’

The Procrastinator’s excuse is, “I have time. I have plenty of time to dedicate myself in the future.

Others indulge themselves while the Lord’s work languishes as in Haggai, where the prophet wrote,

Haggai 1:1 In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest saying, 2 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘This people says, “The time has not come, *even* the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.”’” 3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet saying, 4 “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house *lies* desolate?” 5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, “Consider your ways! 6 “You have sown much, but harvest little; *you* eat, but *there is not enough* to be satisfied; *you* drink, but *there is not enough* to become drunk; *you* put on clothing, but no one is warm *enough*; and he who earns, earns wages *to put* into a purse with holes.”

The Israelites had many excuses for failure to rebuild the temple—“...it was not yet seventy years and the captivity was not complete, or we are surrounded by hostile people, or the government resists our undertaking, or the harvest requires much work, or my own house must be attended.” The result was the same. The Lord’s temple remained incomplete while the people lived in vaulted houses that were elaborately adorned with emblems and devices. They indulged themselves and they remained as unsatisfied as the Lord’s temple remained incomplete—because they had neglected the things of first importance.

The difference between the Israelites of Haggai’s day and the people of today—who indulge themselves while the Lord’s work languishes—is only superficial. Their priorities are to indulge and satisfy themselves while telling themselves they are worshippers of Christ. Yet a worshipper is one who denies himself in order to serve the object of worship—God. Many churchgoers choose a church because they believe it meets their needs for social interaction, or fulfills a desire they have for entertainment. Religious hucksters know this and employ marketing campaigns in which they offer church “services” in order to bring in large numbers of membership candidates to fill their pews. Yet, personal indulgence is not the door through which one may enter into the kingdom of heaven. And “service” is to be directed to the Lord, not at the follower.

After the Lord has shut the door on them it will be too late. On that day they will argue,

Luke 13:26 “We ate and drank in Your presence...”

There is a certain intimacy and fellowship in taking a meal with someone. Even so, it is merely an association. It is as Simon the Pharisee learned—he is the one who once entertained the Lord at dinner—there is more to religion than mere outward form. The One who looks on the heart requires mercy, compassion and love in His disciples, and to Himself, He requires unwavering loyalty.

As some of the 5000 who ate the bread and fish no doubt learned—eating and drinking what the Lord has prepared avails only for the moment if that is all they desire. Even though they ate and drank in His presence, if His words did not penetrate to their hearts, if they were unwilling to leave food and drink behind to serve Him, then the association availed them nothing.

Luke 13:26 “You taught in our streets...”

We saw you. We knew of you. We were friendly toward you. We tolerated your preaching and did not cause you to stop. But mere association or tolerance cannot substitute for service to, union with, and loyalty to Jesus.

God blessed the Jews with many prophets. He multiplied the blessing by sending His Son. Regrettably, many of the Jews rejected the calls that came from Jesus, and then from His apostles. In the end only a remnant of them remained according to the election of grace (Romans 11:5). So, are there just a few of them being saved?

The answer is clear.

Moreover, the Gentiles have also received the gracious offer of Jesus; yet, the many of them have rejected the call. Today, the greater number of the people of the world show little, if any, interest in the spiritual truth underlying the death, burial and

resurrection of the Christ. Yet it is the resurrection of the Christ that is the door to salvation from a world condemned to suffer in the present, and ultimately to perish. That present day interest is so low may be seen in the attitudes of humanity, and their daily choices for other than the spiritual food that God holds out to them in the person of His Son.

Consider carefully what the Apostle Peter said to the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem after he had told them how the lame man had been healed,

Acts 4:10 "...let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health. 11 "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, *but* which became the very corner *stone*. 12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."

There is salvation in no one else! Hear what Peter said.

Paul

The ministry of Jesus drew the interest of the religious leaders of Judea early on because of the large numbers of followers that Jesus attracted to Him. Also, the rabbis heard that Jesus had healed sick people, restored sight to the blind, and had cast out demons. Moreover, He was saying things that did not agree with the traditions of the fathers. The chief priests and elders confronted Him once and demanded that He tell them, "... by what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"²⁰

These chief priests and elders considered themselves to be the source and arbiters of religious instruction and many of them regarded Jesus as one without credentials. Their attitude was similar to that of the synagogue officials who in John's gospel answered the blind man by saying,

John 9:29 "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from."

Nevertheless, a few of the religious leaders found Jesus at least interesting and some of them met with him to ask Him questions. Among these were Pharisees.²¹ These encounters were the exception, however.

The teachings of Jesus regarding the Sabbath, purity, tithing and prayers came into direct conflict

²⁰ Luke 20:2-8.

²¹ John 3:1-15: Nicodemus, a Pharisee, visited Jesus by night. Simon the Pharisee, Luke 7:36-50.

with the beliefs and practices of the Pharisees. The Pharisees demanded that their members show external evidence of religious devotion and purity; the teaching of Christ in this regard was as He said in the gospel of Matthew,

Matthew 15:17 “Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? 18 “But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19 “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 “These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”

The Pharisees belonged to religious communities with strict rules for admission. Groups that followed the two main rabbis, Shammai and Hillel, required a candidate to undergo a period of probation before they could be admitted. During the probationary period the candidate had to prove his ability to follow the ritual laws. After the probation the candidate had to pledge himself to observe the laws of purity. The object of his new association was twofold: (a) to observe in the strictest manner, and according to traditional law, all the ordinances concerning Levitical purity, and (b) to be extremely punctilious in all laws connected with religious dues; i.e., tithes and other dues. A person might undertake only the second, without the first obligation. In that case he was a *Neeman*, and “accredited one” with whom one might freely enter

into commerce. One who undertook both was *Chabher*, an associate.²²

There were four degrees marking the ascending scale of Levitical purity; i.e., separation from the profane. The lowest were merely members of the fraternity, only initiated in its lowest degree, perhaps even a novice. A *Neeman* undertook four obligations: (a) to tithe what he ate, (b) what he sold, (c) what he bought, and (d) not to be a guest with an *Am ha-arets* (these were the country people). The most advanced was a *chasid*, or “pietist.” (*Chasidim* was a title the Pharisees assumed for themselves; i.e., they were the pious.²³) The pietist would for example bring every day a trespass offering in case he had committed some offense of which he was doubtful. The full *Chabher* undertook not to sell to an *Am ha-arets* any fluid or dry substance (nutriment or fruit), not to buy from him any such fruit, not to be a guest with him, not to entertain him as a guest in his own clothes (on account of possible impurity).

In opposition to these were the *Am ha-arets*, or “country people.” These were the people in the view of the Pharisees who knew not, or who cared not, for the Law, and were regarded as “cursed.”

How extreme they were in observance of the laws of purity may be seen in the statement of a Rabbi who would not allow his son to remain in the room while he was in the hands of a surgeon, lest he be defiled by contact with the amputated limb. (The amputated limb was dead and therefore impure.) Another *chasid* went so far in his zeal for the Sabbath observance that he would not build up

²² Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, p. 311.

²³ *Ibid.*, Edersheim, Vol I, p. 323.

again his house (that had burned) because he had **thought about it** on the Sabbath. It was even declared improper by some to entrust a letter to a Gentile, lest he should deliver it on a holy day. More extreme *Chasidim* refused to save a woman from drowning for fear of touching a female, or waited to put off his phylacteries before stretching out a hand to save a drowning child.

Alfred Edersheim says of Pharisees,
“There was probably no town or village inhabited by Jews that did not have its Pharisees, although they would prefer Jerusalem.”

“There would be no difficulty recognizing a Pharisee. If you were to walk behind him, he would soon halt to say his prescribed prayers. If the fixed time for them had come he would stop short in the middle of the road, perhaps say a section of them, then move on, again say another part, and so on, till, whatever else might be doubted there could be no question of the conspicuousness of his devotions in the market-places or corners of streets.”²⁴

In this connection is the well-known anecdote about Rabbi Jannai, who was observed saying his prayers in the public streets of Sepphoris, and then advancing four cubits to offer the so-called supplementary prayer.²⁵

The Pharisee in prayer, “... would stand, as taught by the traditional law, would draw his feet well together, compose his body and clothes, and bend so low ‘... that every vertebra in his back would stand out separate.’ The workman would drop his tools, the burden-bearer his load; if a man had already one foot in the stirrup, he would

²⁴ Edersheim, A., *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 214.

²⁵ Edersheim, A. *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, i. 536.

withdraw it. The hour had come and nothing could be suffered to interrupt or disturb him. The very salutation of a king, it was said, must remain unreturned; nay even the twisting of a serpent around one's heel must remain unheeded."²⁶

On entering a village, and again on leaving it, he must say one or two benedictions; the same in passing through a fortress, in encountering any danger, in meeting with anything new, strange, beautiful, or unexpected. And the longer he prayed the better.

The Rabbis taught that, "...much prayer is sure to be heard. And lengthy prayer prolongs life." At the same time, as each prayer expressed, and closed with a benediction of the Divine Name, there would be special religious merit attaching to the mere number, and a hundred benedictions said in one day was a measure of great piety.

Thus was the passion of the Pharisees for observing the minutest rules of the traditions of the fathers. Equally great was their zeal for making proselytes, and for their punishment of Jews who might violate the orders from the synagogues and councils.

As Jesus said,

Matthew 23:15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

And Jesus added,

²⁶ Ibid., Edersheim, *Sketches*, p. 214.

Matthew 23:29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ 31 “So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 “Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 33 “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? 34 “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Such were the Pharisees.

Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee.

Tarsus of Cilicia stood in a wild and fertile plain on the banks of the Cydnus River about 12 miles upstream from the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. In this city of education and commerce perhaps ten years after the birth of Christ a boy was born to

Hebrew parents. They named him Saul, after the first king of Israel.²⁷

Saul's family ranked with the privileged class. The city in which Saul was born had taken the side of Caesar in the civil wars of Rome. When Caesar once visited Tarsus, he changed the name to Juliopolis. Augustus made Tarsus a free city. Saul's father was of the tribe of Benjamin. (Phil. 3:5.) So, Saul was a Hebrew, but he was also a citizens of Rome. For as he wrote, he was actually born a citizen. (Acts 22:28.) His parents gave him the Hebrew name, Saul, after the first king. But his Roman name was Paul. Saul-Paul. Was there here an indication of a conflict of purposes? Great Roman? Great Hebrew? What will he become?

Tarsus was widely known as a center of education, for the historian Strabo compares Tarsus to Athens and Alexandria. But what Hebrew parent would want his child to learn the chants of the idolaters? Or learn to bow before the images of stone? Tarsus was gentile and it was pagan. Growing up there, Paul could not have escaped exposure to the rampant vices of the gentiles; yet in Tarsus, Saul was brought up as a strictly Jewish child. He got some insight into pagan literature, for he quoted from the Greek poets in Acts 17. But mainly he occupied his studies with the Hebrew old testament.

Being Jews—and more than that, having a reverence for God—the parents of Saul wanted their son educated in higher laws than were available in Tarsus. While he was still young, the parents of Saul sent him to Jerusalem to learn the law of

²⁷ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). Tyndale Bible dictionary. Tyndale reference library (1240). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Moses. The Lord Jesus would have been about twenty-three years old when Saul made the journey to Jerusalem, probably going by ship from Tarsus, then overland to Jerusalem by caravan. He reached the school in Jerusalem as a lad and there began to perfect his knowledge of Hebrew, Latin and Greek. In a few years he became a scholar, a man of arts and letters, a Jew schooled in the Law.

At Jerusalem, Paul became a disciple of Gamaliel, a celebrated doctor of the Jewish law. Gamaliel was the son of rabbi Simeon, and grandson of the celebrated Hillel. He was president of the Sanhedrin under Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, and is reported to have died 18 years before the destruction of Jerusalem. So Paul was instructed in the law of Moses by the most eminent authorities. Moreover, he was instructed in the traditions of his fathers, and he became a Pharisee.

Josephus says of the Pharisees, "The Pharisees, they live meanly, and despise delicacies in diet; and they follow the conduct of reason."

"They also pay respect to such as are in years; nor are they so bold as to contradict them in anything which they have introduced ...

"They also believe that souls have an immortal vigour in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have a power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities gave great attestations to them on account of their virtuous

conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also."²⁸

These were the Pharisees who had such power among the common people. They had a supreme regard for appearances. They wore long garments, and attached phylacteries to their garments.²⁹ They took many baths. They prayed in the public places to be seen. When they gave alms, they sounded the horn.

Thus Pharasaism was a religion based upon outward appearances.

Owing, perhaps, to a higher plan, Saul gained his education in one of the schools less given to extremes, less prone to fanaticism. The scripture records of Gamaliel in Acts the 5th chapter, as Peter and the other disciples stood before the council, charged with teaching the "heretical" doctrine of the Jesus who had been crucified, Gamaliel took a more moderate stand. He said,

Acts 5:35 "... Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. For sometime ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away some people after him; he too perished,

²⁸ *Antiquities*, Book xviii, ch. I, sect. 3. *Josephus was also a Pharisee.

²⁹ phylactery—a strip of parchment inscribed with certain texts from the old testament, enclosed within a small leather case, and fastened on the forehead or on the left arm near the region of the heart.

and all those who followed him were scattered. And so in this present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

Saul's education in the written law and in the oral law increased above that of many of his kinsmen. He later wrote to the Galatians,

Galatians 1:14 "... I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions."

He called himself a "... Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee ..." (Phil. 3:5) Therefore, he was a strict disciplinarian and law keeper.

Matthew, in his gospel, wrote that John the Baptist told the people,

Matthew 3:11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

So it happened that while Saul was learning the outward habits and the rituals of the Pharisees, there

came one who looked, not upon the outside, but upon the heart. In Matthew we also read,

Matthew 4:13 ... and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

15 “THE LAND OF ZEBULUN
AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI,
BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND
THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE
GENTILES—16 “THE PEOPLE WHO
WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A
GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO
WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND
SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A
LIGHT DAWNED.”

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

In stark contrast to the teaching of the Pharisees, Jesus said that an outward show of piety was quite consistent with wickedness of heart. This statement contradicted the beliefs of the Pharisees. Once, Jesus had lunch with a Pharisee, but Jesus did not wash his hands before he ate. (Luke 11:37)

Jesus told his host,

Luke 11:39 ... Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. 40 “You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? 41 “But give that which is

within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.

The teaching of Jesus completely contradicted the teaching of the Pharisees—and the rules Saul was learning. Jesus admonished the Pharisee to have inward righteousness, and not mere externalism.

Jesus went on to say to the Pharisees,

Luke 11:42 “But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 43 “Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. 44 “Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it.”

So Jesus compared the Pharisees to concealed tombs, to "... graves, from the wood and stone of which the whitewash had worn off, and the passersby would walk over them, and touching them they would contract ceremonial defilement, without being conscious of what they were walking over and touching."³⁰

Thus Saul of Tarsus was advancing in a religion and tradition which set him in opposition to the God he was trying ignorantly to follow.

³⁰ Note: all contact with sepulchers involved ceremonial defilement; hence the fact of their being constantly whitewashed in order to warn passersby of their presence. Pulpit -- LK I p 308.

The Passover celebration that came when Saul was about 23 years old was marred by the crucifixion of the prophet from Galilee. Saul might have heard him speak, but it could not have resulted in belief. Saul's traditions and beliefs would not permit him to listen to Jesus with his heart. The doctrine of the Pharisees he was learning only made the repentance more difficult.

Jesus made enemies of the Pharisees when he criticized their hypocrisy. It is reasonable to conclude that Christians would have been regarded as enemies of the Pharisees also. Christians would have been seen as worse than heretics -- to Saul they were rebels and traitors. At that time Saul would have believed in political emancipation for Israel, and that the Christians were working against that.

Although Saul was a pupil of Gamaliel, he did not pursue the course of tolerance advocated by his teacher. Rather, Saul fought against the Christians -- who were now preaching that the prophet from Galilee was the Messiah. They were even saying that he had risen from the dead. In spite of the warnings and threatenings of the Jewish council the disciples of Jesus "kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." Acts 5:42

The Pharisees and Sadducees reacted by ruling that if anyone should confess Jesus as the Messiah, they should be put out of the synagogue. John 9:22

The high priests seized principal disciples of Jesus, who were called apostles, and put them in a public jail. But it was reported that an angel had freed them during the night. A few hours later they were found in the temple teaching and preaching.

All of this must have deepened the anger and hostility felt by the Pharisees, including Saul of Tarsus.

But this new teaching kept on spreading in spite of what the Pharisees could do. "... The number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient ..." Acts 6:7

The rapid change in public sentiment for the crucified Galilean would have, at least, a detrimental effect on the influence and following of the Pharisees, and might yet cause them to "... Lose both their place and their nation." A greater level of force, it appeared would be necessary to reverse the sentiments of the people.

Luke wrote in the book of Acts that,

Acts 6:7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. 8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. 9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. 10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him

away and brought him before the Council. 13 They put forward false witnesses who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.”

Acts 6:15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

Acts 7:1 The high priest said, “Are these things so?”

Stephen went on to recount the history of Israel, beginning with the call of Abraham and concluding with the rebuttal of their charge that Jesus would destroy the temple, which the Pharisees believed to be the dwelling place of God.

Then Stephen said,

Acts 7:48 “However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:

49 ‘HEAVEN IS MY THRONE,

AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET;

WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?’ SAYS THE LORD,

‘OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?’

50 ‘WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?’

Acts 7:51 “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.”

The Jewish priests, rulers and Pharisees were cut to the heart by the words of Stephen -- for they were true. In anger and hatred, the Jews rushed upon him and drove him out of the city. There, they began to stone him.

Because it is difficult to throw a stone when one is wearing a robe, the accusers and false witnesses took off their robes. They laid them at the feet of "... A young man named Saul." Acts 7:58

And as Stephen called upon the name of the Prince of Peace, the priests, rulers, and Pharisees stoned him until he was dead. The scripture says that Saul was in "hearty agreement" with putting him to death. Acts 8:1

In this episode Saul had plumbed the depths of rebellion through devotion to his paternal traditions. The Pulpit Commentary says of this incident,

"This example should be a standing warning to us against trust in mere feeling and enthusiasm. The fumes of anger and violence are no signs of pure glowing zeal for the truth, but rather of the spirit that is set on fire of hell. It is when we are most passionately excited in

the cause of party conflict that we have most need to be on our guard."³¹

On that blackest of days when the Pharisees stoned Stephen to death, Saul had made his choice. He had cast his lot with the enemies of Jesus. He had approved of the death of a man who was totally innocent, although Saul thought he was justly accused. On that day he joined in the persecution of the disciples of Christ.

So, as the devout Christians lamented over the grave of Stephen, "Saul laid waste the church, entering every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison." Acts 8:2-3

Not satisfied with the threats and slaughter he could bring against the church in Jerusalem, Saul went to the high priest and asked for letters that he might take to the synagogue in Damascus. Wanting to show his zeal for God by eliminating the growing number of Christians, Saul asked for permission to go to Damascus to find the Christians in that city, to bind them, both men and women, and to bring them back to Jerusalem where they could be cast into prison.

Saul got his letters and set out for Damascus. In Luke's account we learn of the incident that occurred.

Acts 9:3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And

³¹ The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 18, Acts & Romans, p. 260.

He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."

At one moment Saul is seen as the violent and passionate enemy of Christ and the church. The next moment he is the humble and penitent sinner. From that day forward, Saul of Tarsus never looked back. Whereas before he had carried out the wrath of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, afterward he dug furrows straight and deep for the Lord he had been resisting. From then on he was not Saul the Pharisee, but Paul the dedicated servant of Jesus Christ.

What cause could have wrought such a wondrous effect? In the beginning we see Saul the Hebrew and Pharisee, a rabid enemy of Christ. When we first meet him he is a passionate Pharisee, a man zealous for the Law of Moses and ardently opposed to anyone who contradicted the traditions of the fathers. After the incident on the Damascus Road we see him as a totally penitent believer and follower of Christ. The cause of the change in him was one thing: Saul of Tarsus met Jesus of Nazareth on the road to Damascus.

There is no other cause.

What we know of Paul's life comes down to us as a witness. His experience bears witness to the reality and power of the gospel. After that meeting on the road to Damascus Paul never changed in his obedience to Christ. He followed his Lord through trials, persecutions, imprisonments, and ultimately - - death. The effect of the change on him he described to the Philippians:

Philippians 3:3 for we are the true
circumcision, who worship in the Spirit
of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put
no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I
myself might have confidence even in the
flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put
confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5
circumcised the eighth day, of the nation
of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a
Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a
Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the
church; as to the righteousness which is
in the Law, found blameless.

Philippians 3:7 But whatever things were
gain to me, those things I have counted as
loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than
that, I count all things to be loss in view
of the surpassing value of knowing Christ
Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered
the loss of all things, and count them but
rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and
may be found in Him, not having a
righteousness of my own derived from
the Law, but that which is through faith
in Christ, the righteousness which comes
from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I
may know Him and the power of His
resurrection and the fellowship of His
sufferings, being conformed to His death;
11 in order that I may attain to the
resurrection from the dead.

Truly, the only adequate explanation for such a
complete reversal of attitude is that Saul the
Pharisee encountered Jesus Christ on the road to

Damascus and became Paul, the follower of Christ, and apostle to the gentiles.

He was a man whose life was wrung out of him, and then put back. And when it was put back, those conflicts which had followed him from birth, which had been in the Hebrew child who had been born a Roman, but became a Pharisee, those conflicts had been combined by the master Craftsman, and what could have been shameful rebellion and hypocrisy, became humble obedience and stirring character.

You may not meet the Lord on the Damascus Road as Paul did, but you can meet him just the same, and your conflicts can be resolved as were Paul's.

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Thomas, the Believer

Rabbi Jochanan ben Saccai was for two years the president of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. He served immediately before and after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. He presided over his nation when Israel was in her death throes. The Talmud tells of an incident that happened as he lay dying. His disciples came to visit him. When they came in to his chambers and saw him on his deathbed, he burst into tears. His tears astonished them. Why they asked, did he whom they called the light of Israel, the right pillar of the Temple, and its mighty hammer—why did he betray such signs of fear?

He replied, "If I were now to be brought before an earthly king, who lives today and dies tomorrow, whose wrath and whose bonds are not everlasting, and whose sentence of death, even, is not that of eternal death, who can be assuaged by arguments, or perhaps bought off by money—I should tremble and weep. How much more reason have I for it when about to be led before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, Who lives and abides forever, Whose chains are chains ever more, and whose sentence of death kills forever, whom I cannot assuage with words, nor bribe with money! And not only so, but there are before me two ways, one to paradise, and the other to hell, and I know not which of the two ways I shall have to go—

whether to paradise or to hell. How, then, shall I not shed tears?"³²

There are many kinds of doubt: there is uncertainty; there is the want of conviction, sometimes perplexity to the point of despair, but "doubt" as it was frequently used by the Greeks of the First Century meant to be without a way.³³

Some men live to see their doubts erased by their experiences; others carry their doubts to their graves. The latter never knowing the way they shall go into eternity.

Thomas the Apostle has been called a doubter. And he was. He was probably born in Galilee, but there is doubt about the place of his birth. Tradition says he died in Madras, India in A.D. 53, but that is not certain. His name in Aramaic was Te'oma—in Greek, Didymus. The name meant "twin."³⁴

His full name was Judas Thomas, Judas the Twin. Perhaps he had a brother. What we know of him are only a few facts: We know that he lived during the time of John the Baptist, that he was Jew, and that he became the disciple of Jesus.

In those days, a Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, ruled Judaea. Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee, and Peraea. Hard times buffeted the Jews, and their lives hung as if on a thread.

There was plenty of reason for doubt. Doubts and fears have a way about them. They arise at inconvenient times. When they come—the way

³²Edersheim, A. (2003). *Sketches of Jewish social life in the days of Christ*. (161).

³³ ἀπορέω, always used in the Middle Voice, lit. means to be without a way. Vine.

³⁴Wood, D. R. W. (1996, c1982, c1962). *New Bible Dictionary* (1183).

ahead becomes dim. A man hesitates; he becomes uncertain.

Jesus did not hesitate. He chose twelve men, and sent them to preach that the "...kingdom of heaven is at hand."³⁵

The Twelve were men of ordinary occupations. Many were fishermen. One was a tax-gatherer. All were witnesses. Good eyes and ears were better qualifications for the original Apostles than all the learning of a university doctor. Their most important role was to identify the person of Jesus, whenever they saw him. Jesus expected them to tell what he did, to repeat what he said, and to proclaim the facts without comment. Common, unlettered men fulfilled this role better than scholars—unless they doubted.

Thomas doubted.

Who was Thomas the Apostle? All we know of the Apostle Thomas comes to us from the Gospel John. This amounts to three traits. (1) He was a man slow to believe—he saw all the difficulties of a case. (2) He was subject to despondency, seeing things on the darker side. (3) He loved Jesus.

Why would Jesus choose such a man? What reason did He have? For surely there was a reason.

During the days that Herod Antipas ruled Galilee the Jews expected the Messiah to appear. They hoped the great Prince of the chosen people would come, and relieve them of their burdens. The Jews expected an earthly king in the mold of David who would overthrow their enemies and usher in a golden age. When the hope dragged on, a groaning took hold of the spirit of the Jews. Some despaired. Others allowed their afflictions under the Romans

³⁵ Matthew 4:17; 10:7.

to goad them to rebellion, and they looked to every zealot leader as, perhaps, the one.

The Apostles expected a temporal prince, at first. When Jesus began to heal the sick, restore sight to the blind, and to feed the thousands with a word, the expectations of the Apostles soared.

On one occasion when the enemies of Jesus attempted to seize him, Jesus left Jerusalem and crossed to the other side of the Jordan River. He stayed at a place where John the Baptist had first baptized his disciples. Word came to Jesus from Bethany that Lazarus, his friend, was sick.

Jesus delayed going to Lazarus, and Lazarus died.

John, in his Gospel, says that Jesus told his disciples that,

"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go that I may awaken him out of sleep.'

The disciples therefore said to Him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.'

Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. Then Jesus therefore said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.'

Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with Him.'" John 11:11-16.

Thomas saw the danger that Jesus faced if he returned to a town so near the center of his enemies. Yet he was devoted to Christ and was not deterred.

Bethany lay slightly less than two miles from Jerusalem. It was situated on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives, fully a mile beyond the summit, and not far from where the road to Jericho begins the descent to the Jordan valley.

The Jews had threatened to kill Jesus, and now Jesus was about to go to their center of power. Yet, loyalty compelled Thomas to accept the same fate. But in his statement we can also see his despondency, the sense of defeat. He did not expect Jesus to succeed.

When Jesus and the Apostles reached Bethany many of the Jews had gathered to console the two sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Martha said to Jesus,

"Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.

Jesus said to her, 'Your brother shall rise again.'

Martha said to Him, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'

Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?'" John 11:21-26.

Thomas must have known what Jesus said to Martha. It would be strange consolation offered by one who the Apostle thought to be in danger of death at any moment. The words would perplex a man who harbored doubts of the kind that burdened Thomas. Still, the words Jesus spoke to them before

they returned from beyond Jordan could have echoed in his thoughts, "...that you may believe...let us go to him."

Certainly, Thomas would have been surprised by what happened next. Jesus asked where they had buried Lazarus. They led him to the tomb, a cave, where a stone was lying against the opening.

"Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.'

Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.'

Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' John 11:39-40.

And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said,

'Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me.'

And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.'

He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' John 11:41-44.

So stunning a miracle was the raising of Lazarus of Bethany from the dead that it converted many of the Jews who stood watching and shook

the foundations of the political authority in Jerusalem.

But what of Thomas? He was there. What would he have thought? He saw Jesus raise a man from the dead, a man who had been dead four days, a man whose body had already begun to decay. The Lord answered in a stroke all his hopes, all his fears. Thomas had come to Bethany to die with Him, but had seen instead the gift of life. He witnessed with his own eyes the astonishing, yet moving, sight of a man stumbling out of his own tomb, his grave wrappings still clinging to him. A man who had been dead four days, but now lived. Could Thomas still have doubted that Jesus was more than just a prophet, more than simply a good man? With the words of Martha still ringing in his ears: "I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world," what does Thomas think?

Who was He Thomas? Who was this Jesus?

Paul the Apostle later wrote that the Jews ask for signs, and the Greeks search for wisdom.³⁶ If ever a man received a convincing sign, on that day Thomas received the most profound. But did he believe?

Not yet.

Thomas did not need a sign. He wanted more. He wanted to believe, but he wanted the evidence in his own hands.

Make no mistake, Thomas was not a materialist, one who rejects the supernatural, and who refuses to believe that God has spoken to man. Thomas was a Jew, a man who heard the Law of Moses in the synagogue on the Sabbath, a man who

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:22.

believed the Law. And the Law of Moses said, "You shall have no other gods before Me," and you shall not make a graven image. He, like other Jews of his day, believed that the ensigns of the Romans with their graven images were a blasphemous affront to God. Yes, Thomas believed the Shema: "Hear O Israel. The Lord Our God is One Lord." So how could this man, Jesus, be what He claimed? God's Son.

Yet Jesus did things that only God could do.

Thomas was perplexed. He had the doubt born of cynicism, the kind of doubt that arises from the experiences of a man's life. Something had happened to Thomas to cause him to expect the worst. Something had been sown in his soul, something not revealed, but nonetheless real, for it wrung the confidence of belief from him.

It was days later, Jesus is talking to the disciples, and He says,

"Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.'

Thomas said to Him, 'Lord we do not **know** where You are going, how do we **know** the way?'³⁷ John 14:1-5

Thomas would have put the emphasis on the word "know." "Lord we do not **know** where You

³⁷ Emphasis mine, author.

are going, how do we **know** the way?" Thomas wanted to **know**. He wanted to be sure. He did not want to finish life as did Jochanan ben Saccai, not knowing.

Jesus knew he was about to die. As the Passover approached he brought his disciples together and spoke to them. Of the things he told them one in particular troubled them. He said that one of you will betray Me.

The disciples looked at one another. They were at a loss to know which one he was speaking about. They doubted. This would have foreshadowed the doubt that Thomas suffered as the authorities arrested his Lord.

It must have seemed to Thomas that all his doubts and fears were justified when Jesus surrendered Himself to the Jewish authorities. He was in Gethsemane when Judas came with the multitude. He saw Jesus led away to the courts of the Jews. As swiftly as the sword of Peter had cut off the ear of Malchus, Thomas saw Jesus separated from the disciples. Thomas, as the rest, fled for his life.

Jesus stood trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin, before Pontius Pilate, and before Herod Antipas. Contemptuous, and mocking, the king dressed the King in a purple robe and sent Him back to Pilate.

The Romans took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross to the Place of a Skull. They crucified him. With him they crucified two other men. Pontius Pilate wrote an inscription and had it attached to the cross of Jesus. It read, "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews."³⁸

38 John 19:19.

The hope that flamed in Thomas flickered when Jesus died. The One who could heal the sick, feed the thousands and raise the dead, was gone. The feeble hope that Thomas had cherished lay buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Thomas despaired, but the death of Jesus had also cast the other disciples into the valley of gloom. Yet, Thomas felt it more. For some reason he left the other disciples and went away.

Men suffering despair sometimes go away to be alone with their sorrow. Thomas had not only sorrow to wrestle with, but doubt.

The doubt of Thomas was not the doubt of a quibbler. It was not that of the immature student. The doubt of Thomas was the doubt of a man who had sought the hope of a lifetime, yet whose self-assurance had been shaken to the foundation of his soul. Had his doubts been the simple kind—mere asking for signs or proofs—Jesus could have answered him in an instant, and did in the raising of Lazarus of Bethany.

Thomas had a glimpse of the greatest of all hopes. He had climbed a mountain and had seen the vista beyond, and in the end had thought it was out of reach. Hope had abandoned him.

But Jesus did not forsake the disciples. He did not forsake Thomas. In this blackest of hours, Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, at early dawn on the first day of the week, came to the tomb in which Joseph and Nicodemus had laid the body of Jesus. They brought spices for his body.

But when they arrived, they found the stone that had covered the entrance rolled away. They entered the tomb, and did not find the body of Jesus. And it happened as they were perplexed about this

that two men stood beside them. Their garments were dazzling.

They said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen."³⁹

The women returned and told the Apostles what had happened. All of them? No. Thomas was not with them. But even to the other Apostles the words of the women appeared as nonsense, and they would not believe them.

More doubting.

Peter and John ran to the tomb to confirm what the women said. Indeed, the body was not there. After that fruitless search Jesus came and spoke to them.

When evening came, after the disciples had shut the doors where they were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came to them. He stood in their midst, and said,

"Peace be with you."

And when He had said this, he showed them both his hands and his side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be with you; As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." John 20:21-24.

But Thomas was not with them when Jesus came.

Many times, the one who doubts will attract attention to himself. The doubters of all mankind have attracted a great amount of attention. Would not those believing Apostles have attempted to

³⁹ Luke 24:1-5.

reason with Thomas? Would they not have attempted to restore his confidence? At least as much as theirs had been restored. Apparently, the disciples knew where to find him. For we read next,

"The other disciples therefore were saying to him, 'We have seen the Lord!'

But he said to them, 'Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.' John 20:25

Thomas would not allow even his fellow Apostles to dash his hopes again. He would have an infallible demonstration of proof, or he would not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

It was eight days later that the disciples had shut themselves again inside their room. In much the same way, Thomas had shut himself inside the room of unbelief, and of doubt.

While Thomas and the other Apostles were together, Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be with you."

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing." John 20:27

The effect on Thomas was immediate.

The evidence in his hands staggered him. When words formed in his mind, when he spoke, the Thomas who had said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him," who had asked, "How do we **know** the way?" this Apostle answered with a conviction

deeper and stronger than any of the other Apostles. No higher assertion of the Divine nature of Christ has fallen from apostolic lips. He said, "My Lord, and My God."⁴⁰

No longer could he be called Thomas the Doubter. He is now Thomas the Believer. Now he knew the way as Rabbi Jochanan ben Saccai could never know it. The way was Christ Himself.

Christ had said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me."⁴¹

Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." John 20:29.

The example of Thomas is given for all the doubters of the world, for all the lost ones, for all the ages. They don't need to doubt any longer. They can know the way. And the Way is Christ—through faith in Him.

40 John 20:28.

41 John 14:6.

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John Mark—The One Who Came Back

During the American Civil War there was a cavalry officer who was caught in a difficult battle predicament and forced to withdraw in haste. So he swung his horse around and rode hard toward his own lines. As he retreated an opposing soldier fired a shot that struck his horse in the rump. The effect this had on the officer we can only guess, but it greatly impressed the horse. Thereafter, the horse would not turn its rear to the enemy.

Besides motivating the horse, this incident likely had a positive effect on the officer's career, and greatly increased other people's estimate of his courage. We can only hope that was the outcome.

Sometimes Christians need just such an impetus to keep their spiritual life going in the right direction. Oft-times a person's spiritual life will go in the wrong direction. When that happens it is worthwhile to listen to what the prophet said to King Asa.

In Second Chronicles the 14th, 15th, and 16th Chapter the Bible tells us about Asa, king of Judah. Asa called upon the name of Jehovah, and the Lord routed the Ethiopians before the armies of Judah and Benjamin. The Ethiopians had attacked with an army of a million men, outnumbering Asa's army by nearly two to one. They also had chariots.

After the victory the prophet Azariah said to Asa,

2 Chronicles 15:2 "Listen to me Asa, and all
Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with

you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."⁴²

Later, in the 36th year of his reign Asa had war with the king of Israel, Baasha. Instead of calling on the Lord to deliver him, Asa took gold and silver from the treasury of the Temple and sent it to Ben-hadad, king of Syria. Asa asked the king of Syria to deliver him. So Ben-hadad delivered him.

But Hanani the seer came to see Asa and said,

2 Chronicles 16:7 ... "Because you have relied on the king of Syria and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped out of your hand. 8 Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars."

You would think that if the Lord sent his prophet with a special message that the king would gladly and humbly receive it, but in Asa's case it did not happen.

⁴² *New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update.*
LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995, S.

Asa became angry with the seer and put him in prison. At the same time he oppressed some of the people. After that things got worse for Asa.

In verse 12 of Chapter 16 it says,

12 And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign
Asa became diseased in his feet. His
disease was severe, yet even in his
disease he did not seek the Lord but the
physicians.

Asa began well, but his example is that of a man whose trust in the Lord deteriorated. He ended up trusting in outsiders instead of the Lord.

Asa became a backslider.

In Mark the 14th Chapter, we read how the enemies of Jesus arrested him in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was about midnight in Jerusalem, and it was the Friday before the Passover which in that time they called The Day of Preparation. Jesus and the disciples had come down from the upper chamber. They had descended the hillside, crossed the bridge over the Kedron, and made their way to Gethsemane. At the time of the arrest the disciples were asleep. Even Peter, James and John slept, but Jesus was not asleep. He had been praying. He told them to arise because His betrayer was at hand.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Judas approached Jesus and kissed him, and the scribes and chief priests laid hands on the Lord, and seized Him to drag him away. Peter drew his sword and smote Malchus, the servant of the High Priest, but Jesus healed Malchus.

In Mark, the Scripture says,

Mark 14:48 Jesus said to the Jews, "Have
you come out with swords and clubs to

arrest me, as though I were a robber?" 49
"Every day I was with you in the temple
teaching, and you did not seize me; but
this has happened that the Scriptures
might be fulfilled." 50 So all the Lord's
disciples left Him and fled.

But a young man followed the arresting party
as they bore their prisoner away. Oddly, the young
man is wearing only a white linen garment. It
attracts attention from the Temple Guard. One of
the guards then lays hands on him evidently
attempting to arrest him as well.

In his Gospel, Mark says,

Mark 14:51 And a certain young man was
following Him, wearing nothing but a
linen sheet over his naked body; And
they seized him. 52 But he left the linen
sheet behind, and escaped naked."

Why did Mark record this incident in such
remarkable detail? Only the name of the young man
is wanting. Surely, it was Mark, himself. Who else
would know that he wore only a "sheet over his
naked body."

In the writer's style of that day Mark is telling
us that he fled in fear from adversity. He abandoned
the Lord to the enemy. Mark was now naked,
without Christ, unprotected, revealed in his shame.

Mark, without the Lord, was as Israel at Ai.
There the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard
to the things under the ban, for Achan took some of
the things under the ban. When they went up against
Ai they were defeated. Joshua says that "...the
hearts of the people melted and became as water."
Joshua 7:1-5.

But God expects his messengers to be stalwart and faithful. As He said to Ezekiel,

Ezekiel 2:1 ..., "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you." 2 And as He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. 3 Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day." 4 "And I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children; and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.'" 5 "As for them, whether they listen or not--for they are a rebellious house--they will know that a prophet has been among them." 6 "And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house." 7 "But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious."

Should not the servant of the Lord be willing to maintain the Lord's charge even though thorns and thistles hinder him? Or have we become like Mark who fled in fear from the scorpions of adversity?

There is a story about a traveler who had retreated from trouble. One day he found himself in a logging camp. He watched as a lumberjack jabbed a hook into a log and separated it from the others. The rest floated on down the mountain stream.

Wondering why the lumberjack separated that particular log, he asked the logger. The logger said, "All these logs may look alike to you, but over the years I've learned to tell the difference." The ones I let pass are from trees that grew in the valley. They were always protected from the storms. Their grain is coarse. This one I hooked to separate it from the others came from up on the mountain.

Up there it is tested by strong winds from the time it's a sapling. This toughens a tree, and gives it a fine grain. It will be saved for choice work. It's too good for ordinary lumber."

Macartney wrote, "Steel is made in the furnace. There is no wine until the grapes are crushed. The strongest characters are those who have faced the contrary winds.

"It is said that "They who go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep."⁴³

The lesson is this: You must go to experience; you must enter into risk to see. Because it is adversity that strengthens.

But John Mark fled.

All the Lord's friends had forsaken Him. Even so, Mark could have become a prisoner with him. He could have walked beside Him. He could have encouraged Him.

But in this, his first trial, he failed.

He wavered in doubt.

He fled, naked, through the streets of Jerusalem. He slid backwards.

⁴³ Macartney, C.E., *Macartney's Illustrations*, Abingdon Press, 1945. cf. Psalm 107:23.

Fifteen years later and it is springtime in the harbor of Antioch of Seleucia. The harbor is filled with wooden ships. Grain ships lie close to the wharf, taking on burdens that have come down from Mesopotamia through the mountain passes to Antioch. There are triremes, Roman naval vessels with three banks of oars. There is an imperial barge of the Roman Government. Everywhere there is confusion, animation, excitement, outcries, farewells, greetings, and a Babel of tongues. There is also a small vessel getting ready to sail. The rudder is set in its groove. The anchor is hoisted. Timbers creak. The sail is spreading into the freshening wind. The ship passes out of the harbor into the open sea where it turns its bow toward Cyprus. On the deck of the ship are three passengers. No one paid them much attention, yet these men have begun one of the most important journeys in history. They are Saul of Tarsus (Paul), Barnabas, and John Mark.

They are bound for Cyprus where Barnabas was born. Mark accompanies these mighty preachers, going along as a helper.

The three journey through Cyprus. Then they take a ship for Perga in Pamphylia, on the southern shore of Asia Minor. From the deck of the ship the land appeared bleak and wild. Dangers lurked in those high passes. Paul wanted to depart for the high country of the interior, to preach.

But Mark refused to go.

He retreated from the conflict, from the adversity, from the "thorns and thistles."

It would not be right to cast his retreat in a different light.

Near the end of the American Civil war, when the Confederate armies were retreating toward

Richmond. A lady of the South asked a Southerner how the battle was going, hoping she would get encouraging news. Not wanting to disappoint her he answered, "Well ma'am, due to the lie of the land where they're fightin', the Yankees are retreatin' forward, while we are advancin' backward.

The moral of the story is this: We might call it a strategic withdrawal, but it's still a retreat. It's still a defeat.

Mark retreated.

The Scriptures do not say why Mark deserted them. Perhaps it was just homesickness? Perhaps he was tired? Or, maybe he feared the dangers of the interior where Paul wanted to go? Whatever his reason, he deserted them in Pamphylia, and did not go with them to the work. In the face of the danger, Mark deserted Paul and the elderly Barnabas, and left them to scale the mountain passes by themselves.

He took a ship back to Syria and home.
As Luke wrote in Acts,

Acts 13:13 John departing from them
returned to Jerusalem."

John Mark failed his second trial.

On the First Missionary Journey, Paul had Barnabas with him. God many times sends his disciples out by two. Paul had intellect, and knowledge of the Law of Moses. But he needed an even-tempered partner, a man of consolation and exhortation. The two together did what neither could have done alone. The Christian ministry is frequently like that. No one has all the talents. There is no such thing as the complete human being. Every person has a rough spot somewhere, or a defect that hinders. A companion can compensate.

One of the reasons the church is not more successful is because it does not recognize the different gifts that the Spirit endows different members.

When we look back on this first pair of evangelists, Paul appears to tower over Barnabas. But we cannot be sure that by God's measure the difference is so great. Paul left the footprints on the pages of history. But nobody knows how much Barnabas contributed to the endurance and strength that kept the feet moving.

In Acts Chapter 15, Luke wrote,

Acts 15:36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." 37 And Barnabas was desirous of taking John, called Mark, along with them also. 38 But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. 40 But Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

Luke records Paul's differences with Barnabas as a disagreement over John Mark. There may have been other differences as well.

Some time before this incident, Paul clashed with Peter and the "party of the circumcision." Even "Barnabas had been carried away by their

insincerity."⁴⁴ At that time Paul must have felt the defection of Barnabas bitterly.

So now, Barnabas is not won over to Paul's opinion that he be identified without reservation with the Gentile churches. Barnabas was a Levite, a man devoted to the Law of Moses for many years, and he had sided with the opinion that arose from the church in Jerusalem.

Also, John Mark was the son of a woman named Mary who dwelt in Jerusalem, and a cousin of Barnabas. All these things would have had some effect on the partnership of Paul and Barnabas. But Luke says in Acts Chapter 15 that Paul and Barnabas disagreed about taking Mark with them. And so sharp was their disagreement that the two old friends separated and went different ways.

It is sad to see great partnerships break up. Paul and Barnabas were great companions. I wonder if John Mark could have avoided blaming himself for the breakup. He knew how well they had worked together. He knew he had come between them. And at what cost?

Also, Paul may have been a difficult man to get along with. Few geniuses are easy companions. They set high standards. They labor long and hard. Others, less spiritually endowed find the standards too high. Too difficult.

John Mark, in turning back on the first journey, showed Paul that he was a quitter.

I had a friend named Luis Gil who had a poster that he hung on the wall of our office. It was a picture of a boy who wanted to be a football player, but found the rigors of the sport too hard. He is pictured sitting, in a dirty uniform, with his face in

⁴⁴ Galatians 2:11-13.

his hands, saying, "I quit." On a hill behind him is a cross with the Savior hanging on it, crucified. A caption beneath the cross says, "I didn't."

Barnabas was not a demanding person. He wanted to give Mark another chance. Paul was convinced they needed a man of finer material. More mettle. So, Barnabas went off to Cyprus with John Mark. Paul went northward with Silas.

Paul set high standards, but it is from high standards that the best work proceeds. The one who expects the best from us—more than we feel they have the right to expect—is the one we recognize later as the one who drew us to greater heights.

The Lord's standards are like that.

In the making of a honeybee, the queen lays each egg in a six-sided cell. Each cell is filled with enough pollen and honey to feed on until the egg reaches a certain stage of maturity. The top of the cell is then sealed with a capsule of wax.

When the occupant of the cell has eaten all the food, it is then time for the little bee to get out. But the wax seal prevents an easy exit! The opening is so narrow that the bee must push and struggle to get out. Yet in the agony of its exit, the bee rubs off the membrane that encases its wings. After the struggle, when it emerges, the bee can fly. If an insect gets into the hive and eats the wax capsules, the young bees crawl out without any effort.

But they cannot fly.

Mature relatives must then sting them to death.

The lesson is: The Lord made the honey bee. Before you give up in whatever service to the Lord you are selected to render, remember the bee. If things are too easy, your faith will not grow.

Some people are content to carry the yoke of Christ alone. They don't have much need for

fellowship. Other people are different. Paul did need fellowship in his work. He needed friendship, and support. He needed the cooperation of other men and women who shared the faith.

In 2 Timothy Chapter 4, Paul wrote,

2 Timothy 4:6 "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Paul had come to the sunset of his earthly life. He is about to end his missionary journeys at Rome. As he writes, clouds and darkness surround him, but there are rays of light. Paul is in a dungeon. A cold, damp, circular dungeon, just behind Capitoline Hill, near and alongside the Roman Forum. There, by some unknown hand, perhaps Luke, he writes his last letter. He does not expect the Lord to deliver him again. He is now ready to be offered up, to be executed. He will die as he has lived—in the faith.

Paul was no backslider. Once his course was set he never wavered. Yet, before the end comes he wants to spend the time well.

He writes to Timothy at Ephesus. He tells him to come before winter, to bring the books with him, the writing materials. A cloak he left behind in the house of Carpus at Troas. Luke, he says, is with him. But Demas has forsaken him. Demas loved the world of that time, and so made shipwreck of his

faith. Crescens has gone to Galatia. Titus to Dalmatia. Tychicus he has sent to Ephesus. Only Luke is with him.

So he writes to Timothy, and tells him to "come before winter." There is only one other thing he wants Timothy to bring with him. There is one other person he wants to be there with him in his final hours.

Jesus wanted Peter, James and John. These three to watch with him in His hours of trial before His arrest.

Now, Paul wants three, Timothy, Luke and one other Christian.

And who was this other man? Was it Onesimus? Epaphroditus, Aquila, Tertius, Titus or any other of that group of stalwart friends?

No.

The Apostle writes, "Take Mark, and bring him with you; for he is useful to me for ministering."

In that final hour, with the shadow of death over him, Paul wants Mark. Mark, who fled naked through the streets of Jerusalem when he ought to have stood beside the Lord.

Mark, who left Jesus in the hands of His enemies.

Mark, who left his companions to climb the rugged mountains of Middle Asia, alone, to ford swollen rivers, to face the mobs of Antioch and Lystra, and Iconium.

Mark, who went back.

Mark, the quitter who feared to go on.

Mark, who separated one of the strongest friendships in the Scriptural record.

Mark, whom Paul had once rejected.

"Bring him with you," he said, "for he is useful to me for ministering."

So Mark passes the record of the New Testament. He had failed in so many previous accounts. But now he passes with laurels.

The lesson we take away from the scriptural record of Mark is this: It takes more than one defeat to make a failure. It takes more than one fault to ruin.

Mark had failed twice, nay, many times.

But by repentance, and perseverance, by friendship and patience, he became not the Mark who failed, but the Mark who came back.

Mark lived to re-establish himself in the good graces of the man whose intellect dwarfed the New Testament times.

He lived to write the most graphic account of the life of Jesus. That is the biography of the man who failed more than once, but who persisted and eventually succeeded.

All of us have problems in life. Mark had his. Nevertheless, like Mark, we are expected to overcome them.

There was a man named Elkington who served as a Colonel in the British Army during the 1st World War. Records show that in the early part of the war Colonel Elkington was cashiered. The charges against him were “conduct unbecoming an officer,” but that was a euphemism for cowardice in the face of the enemy. The Army dropped his name from the rolls of the honored soldiers.

Disgraced, Elkington went to Paris. In Paris, he changed his name and tried to begin a new life. Finally, he joined the French Foreign Legion. Evidently, he had a change of heart, for wherever the Foreign Legion went into action, Elkington made himself conspicuous by his bravery and gallantry. After a particular feat of heroism the

government of France decorated him. In some way his true identity was exposed, and someone brought the facts to the attention of the British government.

The result was that they gave his commission back to him. So, he resumed his old name and title. He even rejoined his old regiment at the front. So it happened by wounds and bravery he won back the rank and the honors that cowardice had forfeited for him.

In Revelation the Scripture says,

Revelation 3:18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eyesalve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore and repent. 20 Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him and he with Me. 21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 He who has an ear let him hear...

Peter

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews said that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...⁴⁵ We could word this differently by saying that faith is the assurance of the certainty of the promises of God, and the persuasion of mind and heart that what we cannot see now is there.

Faith makes the promises of God to be real, to have substance...

The Bible Exposition Commentary says this:

“True Bible faith is not blind optimism or a manufactured ‘hope-so feeling.’” Faith is not an intellectual acceptance of a doctrine. It is certainly not believing in spite of the evidence! That would be superstition. True Bible faith is confident obedience to God’s word in spite of circumstances and consequences.

Think about that last sentence again and let it soak into your mind and heart.

Faith operates quite simply: God speaks and we hear His word. We trust His word and act on it no matter what the circumstances are or what the consequences may be. The circumstances may appear to us to be impossible, and the consequences frightening and unknown, but we obey God’s Word just the same and believe that He will do what is right and what is best.⁴⁶

The apostle Simon Peter was a man who struggled with his faith. Peter was a bold man, a

⁴⁵ Hebrews 11:1, NASB.

⁴⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Heb 11:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

man of impulse and action; yet he was also a man of conflicts and self-doubts. He is not lazy either; for when the gospel narrative about him opens, he is working. Peter and his brother Andrew were casting a net into the sea when Jesus saw them. "Follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men," Jesus said to them.⁴⁷

Peter meets Jesus (Matt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Luke 5:2-11; John 1:40)

It must have been before Jesus met them at the Sea of Galilee that Peter's brother, Andrew, came to him. Andrew was enthusiastic. "We have found the Messiah," he told Peter.⁴⁸

Jesus likely was nearby, for Andrew took Peter to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which translated means Peter).⁴⁹

Peter did not believe as readily as his brother. He needed more convincing. Peter had practical matters to which he must attend. He must fish. So, after he met Jesus, he returned to Galilee with his brother, Andrew, and resumed fishing with his partners, the Sons of Zebedee.⁵⁰ There is a gap in the gospel record between Peter's first meeting with Christ and when next we meet him, but it is clear that Peter became a follower of Christ, for we read in Luke's gospel that he referred to Jesus as "Master."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Matthew 4:18-19; Mark 1:16-17.

⁴⁸ John 1:41.

⁴⁹ John 1:42.

⁵⁰ Luke 5:10.

⁵¹ Luke 5:5.

Peter lived with his wife in the city of Capernaum.⁵² Capernaum stood on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, which in Simon's day was also known as the Sea of Tiberius. The city was on the highway from the Mediterranean coast to Damascus, with a small port for its population of fishermen.⁵³

Peter and his brother fished the Sea of Galilee for their living. On this morning Peter and his partners, tired and grumpy, returned to Capernaum from a night of fishing. Their nets were wet but the hold of their boat was empty. Their mood must have been that of fishermen who had fished all night, and had not got so much as a bite.

They drew up to the shore, moored the boat and began to clean the nets.

On the way in, Peter had seen the Teacher from Nazareth, talking to a crowd. And as he stood cleaning the nets, he looked up and saw Jesus coming. Jesus got into Peter's boat and asked Peter to put out a little from the land. Then Jesus began teaching the crowd from the boat. After He had finished teaching the people who had gathered, Jesus spoke to Peter.

For Jesus said, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."⁵⁴

The word of the Lord seldom comes under what we would consider the most favorable

⁵² Matthew 8:14. At Capernaum, "...Jesus saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever." See also, Mk. 1:30. In his letter the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:5) Paul mentions that Peter had a wife, "Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?"

⁵³ Negev, A. (1990). *The Archaeological encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (3rd ed.). New York: Prentice Hall Press.

⁵⁴ Luke 5:4.

circumstances. In Peter's estimation these were not promising conditions. Peter thought the best opportunity for fishing was past. Besides, it's hard work to fish all night and then clean the nets—doing it twice in one day is hardly what Peter wanted.⁵⁵ So, Peter, showing his doubts, answered, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing—but at your bidding I'll let down the nets." It is as if Peter said, "If you say so, Lord, I'll do it. But this is on You. I don't think there's a fish within a mile, but if you insist, I'll go."

At this point Peter had little faith in Jesus. He seriously doubted that they would catch any fish, but if Jesus really was a prophet it might be worth a try. If they fail it only means that they have to clean the nets again.

Peter and his brothers, with half-hearted enthusiasm, rowed their boat back to the middle of the lake. For a second time they spread the nets and watched them sink. Wasn't this a waste of time—to bring the men back out on the lake when the sun was getting hot, and when he knew the fish had long since gone?

But something happened. The nets began to get heavy. There were fish in them! So heavy were they that the weight of the catch nearly broke the nets. There were so many fish that they called to the other boat to come and help them. Their partners came, and still the quantity of fish was great enough to fill both boats. To their dismay they discovered that the boats were laden with so many fish that they began to sink.

⁵⁵ **Toiled** (κοπιάσαντες). From κόπος, *suffering, weariness*; and therefore indicating *exhausting* toil.

Can you imagine such a quantity of fish in the lake where, before, there had been none? Peter thought there were no fish to catch, but this time the Lord provided the fish. The circumstances looked impossible, but the outcome was extraordinary.

When they had brought the catch to shore, Peter, forever the impulsive, the first to speak, the first to act, fell down at Jesus's feet and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

The Scripture says that Peter and his fellow fishermen, Andrew, James and John, had been seized with amazement.

But Jesus said, "Don't be afraid; come with me; I'll make you fishers of men."

So they left everything, and followed him. And who wouldn't?

Peter's faith before the incident with the fish was just barely enough to believe that Jesus knew where the fish were. He obeyed the word of the Lord in spite of the circumstances. After that his faith grew stronger. Now his faith—his confident trust—grew strong enough to leave everything and follow Jesus. But there was more growth in store for Peter.

Peter follows Jesus (walks on water - Matt. 14:22-36)

The multitudes following Jesus had grown larger. The teacher was attracting the attention of the authorities, namely Caiaphas the high priest, and Pilate the Roman governor, and Herod. A day came when Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish.⁵⁶ After that, Jesus sent the multitude away. Then Peter, with the rest of the

⁵⁶ Matthew 14:13-21.

disciples, obeyed the Lord, got into a boat and went ahead of him to the other side of the lake.

Out on the lake, the wind became contrary. It began to batter the ship. Waves with white caps rose and tossed the ship. Yet, it is doubtful that Peter would have been much concerned about a little wind, or a few waves. He was after all—a fisherman. But he must have wondered where his Lord had gone. Truth was Jesus had gone up into the mountains to pray.

Night fell on the lake, and the wind and the waves pounded on the boat of disciples. It was a poor night to be out on the lake and with the wind and the spray and the tossing of the boat and perhaps worse, wondering where Jesus was it was uncomfortable. As Peter watched the waves over the gunwale, during the fourth watch of the night (3-6 a.m.), he was astonished to see the Lord coming toward them, walking on the sea.

"It is a ghost!" someone cried.

But Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

But now Peter the impetuous, filled with wonder, said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

One would think from reading the narrative in the Scriptures that Peter was attempting to put the Lord to the test. If that was the case then the circumstances turned quickly and revealed yet another purpose. The result of his rash statement was not to try the Lord, but to put his own faith to the test, for the Lord answered, "Come!"

Now you've done it, Peter! At that instant Peter might have wished he had not spoken so rashly. Maybe he had not expected that reply from the Lord. Perhaps he wished he could withdraw his

request. Could he do this, or not? What was he to do? The Lord was there, and he had asked, and everybody was watching. He could have asked himself at that instant, "How much faith **do** you have Peter?"

And indeed the Lord was asking just that very question.

In these circumstances Peter is in the throes of conflict. He sees the tossing waves; he feels the wind and the spray in his face; his fisherman's mind tells him the utter impossibility of a man walking on water; yet, there is the Lord, standing among the waves, beckoning to him to come.

Do you have the faith, Peter? What if you are wrong? Your emotions want to do this. But can you bend your mind around it? Can you believe?

He got out of the boat, and he put his foot down amid the waves, and he felt support where he had never felt support before in his life. So he was filled with an exhilaration no man had ever felt. He walked on the water toward Jesus.

But then a lifetime of fishing those waters, of seeing the waves rising around him, of feeling the wind buffeting his body, and feeling the spray in his face he began to think as would we that no man walks on water. So, as these thoughts and feelings assailed him he became afraid.

He began to sink.

Then, in the midst of the stormy sea, which for any man who has ever lived could be life itself, he uttered that plaintive cry that comes down to us through two thousand years of human misery, "Lord, save me!"

"And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"

Then Jesus led him into the boat.

When they had entered the boat, the wind stopped. Those in the boat worshipped Jesus, saying, "Truly you are God's son."

We are tempted when we read this story to criticize Peter for his lack of faith, but I think we must temper our criticism with this thought: Peter actually walked on the water. Could I, under those same circumstances? And when the Lord took him by the hand he walked on the water back to the boat. Surely, in the end, Peter accomplished with the Lord's help what we might see as impossible.

A lesson we can take away from this incident is that faith involves not just the emotions of a readiness to believe; that is, the desire to believe, but believing in a way that you are motivated to obey despite the circumstances.

But that's not all. Peter had more to learn.

The confession (Matthew 16:13-20)

Still impulsive and temperamental, Peter followed Jesus throughout Galilee. The pressures from the Pharisees mounted with each passing day. Peter's faith must have been straining at its moorings; yet, Peter being impulsive was also whole-hearted and courageous. Within the apostle surged a conflict of emotions, a battle between doubt and belief, a struggle between a fisherman's ignorance and moments of incredible insight.

Peter followed Jesus into the district of Caesarea Philippi, the rolling land lying on the southern slopes of Mount Hermon. Peter's faith spoke when the Lord addressed the question to the disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

The disciples said, "Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you Simon Barjonas, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

"And I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Here, Peter's faith shows in his sudden, outspoken confession. But that leads to another lesson about faith and presumption.

When it appeared Peter's faith had reached unto heaven itself, when he had attained unto the distinction of that noble confession, he slipped. The Lord continued talking to the disciples. Peter listened in evident dismay while Jesus said he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Evidently disturbed by what he had heard Jesus say, Peter took the Lord aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it Lord! This shall never happen to you."

With these remarks, Peter's presumptuous spirit plumbed the depths of Hades. True Biblical faith trusts in the Lord's word regardless of the

circumstances or of the outcome. Jesus had blessed him for his confession, but now he dares even to rebuke the Lord for what He had just said.

And the Lord turned on him. "Get behind me Satan!" the Lord told him. "You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Our own opinions—no matter how strongly held—can be obstacles to faith. Our opinions can bring us into direct conflict with the will and word of God. We might even think that our opinion is for the greater good, but if what we want or what we understand to be the right way is not God's way then we rightly expose ourselves to a Divine rebuke that is justly deserved.

The transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-4)

Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. "And he was transfigured before them; and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as light. "And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him.

"And Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'

"While he was speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; hear him.'

"And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid.

"And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, 'Arise and do not be afraid.'

“And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus himself alone.”

Peter found himself in the presence of glorious persons, and he was motivated to be especially deferential, but it does not matter in what circumstances we might find ourselves. Listen to Jesus alone. Have confident trust in Him. Faith trusts in the word of the Lord, not others.

There is the story of a missionary whose name was John Paton. When he was translating the Scripture for the South Sea Islanders, he found that there was no word in their vocabulary for "believe," "trust," or "have faith." He had no idea how he would convey this principle to them, since they had no word for it. One day, as he was translating, a native came running up to his house. He ran up the stairs, in the door and flopped himself in a chair in Paton's study. Then he said to Paton,

"It's so good to rest my whole weight in this chair."

The word in the native's language which we translate "...resting one's whole weight upon..." became the word Paton used for "faith."

Paton's definition of "faith": was "...resting your whole weight on God."

The lesson of the Transfiguration is: rest your whole weight on Jesus.

The barren fig tree (Mk. 11:20-25)

The Scripture tells us that as they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. And being reminded, Peter said to him, "Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which you cursed has withered."

And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to

this mountain, be taken up and cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen; it shall be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions."

In these incidents Peter, and the others, received two important lessons to strengthen their faith. They were told by the Transfiguration to put their trust in Jesus, and in Him only; not in Elijah; not in Moses; but in Jesus.

The fig tree had no fruit on it when the Lord came to it expecting to find fruit. Therefore he caused it never to bear fruit again. What is the lesson there? Fruit is borne through simple trusting faith in Jesus, as Lord. Further, great works can be accomplished by simple faith.

Peter's denial foretold (Matt. 26:31-35)

After the last supper, Jesus led his disciples out to the Mount of Olives.

There Jesus told them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

But Peter, always so sure of his own motives and feelings, said, "Even though all may fall away because of you, I will never fall away."

Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times."

But Peter would not believe it. He said, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you." All the disciples said the same thing.

The lesson here is that faith is confident assurance. It is never stubbornness.

Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 22:40-46)

Peter should have remembered the lesson of the barren fig tree, but he apparently did not. Peter felt tired, so did the other disciples. So tired that when the Lord took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him to pray Peter couldn't keep his eyes open. He went to sleep.

The Lord woke him some time later, saying, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

No doubt Peter saw the concern and suffering in the Lord's face. But his eyes were so heavy. He felt so sleepy, he just couldn't stay awake.

The Lord woke him again, saying, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold the hour is at hand and the son of man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; behold the one who betrays me is at hand."

And while Jesus was speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up, accompanied by a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Peter watched as Judas approached Jesus and kissed him, and said, "Hail, Rabbi."

Jesus said, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Peter, seeing the guards about to seize Jesus, stood up in anger, and faced the mob, including the Roman guards. He drew his sword. Then, when Malchus, the servant of the high priest, came within range, Peter struck at his head. The blow was poorly aimed, but still cut off his right ear.

Jesus said, "Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." And he touched the ear of Malchus, and healed him.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against him, "Have you come out with swords and staves as against a robber? While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."

So they arrested him, and Peter watched them lead the Lord away.

Then all the disciples fled, leaving the Lord to the mercy of the priests and Romans. Faith was on the run.

Peter denies Jesus (John 18:15-18)

We don't know what thoughts coursed through Peter's mind as he followed the mob. They were taking away his Lord, and he did not understand why. But we know that he had used his sword to strike off the ear of Malchus and that in defense of his Lord, but instead of pleasing Jesus, Peter had endured a stinging rebuke again. What was happening? Should he feel resentment for the Lord's latest rebuke? Could he allay his doubts about the Lord's intentions now that Jesus had allowed himself to be arrested?

What was he to believe?

Yet, hope had not died in Peter's heart, for he followed the mob at a distance. And with him went another disciple. The disciple who went with Peter was known to the high priest, so he gained entrance to the court of the high priest, and he left Peter outside.

Once inside, the other disciple spoke to the slave girl who was keeping the door, vouched for Peter and got him in. But as Peter went in, the slave girl asked him, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?"

And Peter said, "I am not."

The slaves and the officers stood in the court, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves.

Peter went over and stood with them, and warmed himself.

But another slave girl saw him standing in the firelight, and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

And Peter answered, "Woman, I don't know him."

A little later, one of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with him? Certainly this man was with him, for he is a Galilean, too."

Peter's fear, anger and resentment boiled over.

He began to curse and to swear. "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!"

And immediately, while he was speaking, Peter heard the cock crow. The Lord, who was standing nearby, turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had told him—before a cock crows today, you will deny me three times.

In this moment Peter understood that faith requires steadfastness in loyalty because the Lord had been clear in his word of prophecy. Peter first denied the word and then he denied the Lord.

So Peter went out and wept his bitter tears of regret and remorse.

It was not much later that the day's incredible events culminated in a crucifixion, a disastrous turn of events that left Peter shattered and empty. They buried Jesus in a tomb not far from where He had been crucified. But then on the day after the Sabbath Mary Magdalene came saying that the body of Jesus was not in the tomb.

Peter and John ran to the tomb to see, and it was as Mary had said. Jesus was not there.

John 20:9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.
10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes.⁵⁷

Puzzled because of the events, and still not understanding what Jesus had told them, Peter and the other disciples returned to Galilee. Peter, probably feeling the sting of the Lord's departure the most, said, "I'm going fishing."⁵⁸

The other disciples said, "We'll come with you."

So they went out, got in their boats and fished all night, but caught nothing. But at daybreak they saw a man standing on the shore. The man said, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?"

They answered, "No."

He said, "Cast the net on the right hand side of the boat, and you will find another catch."

⁵⁷ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. 1995 (Jn 20:9–10). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁵⁸ John 21:3.

So they made a catch. And they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

John said to Peter, "It is the Lord."

When Peter heard what John said, he put his outer garment on and jumped into the sea.

Undoubtedly he swam to shore to see the Lord.

When all of them got to shore they found a charcoal fire already laid. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught."

So Jesus cooked their breakfast.

Then Jesus asked Peter three times, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter answered yes. The three affirmations correspond to his three denials. Perhaps three is some relation there. Then Jesus said to him,

"Truly, truly I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this he said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he said this, he said to Peter, "Follow me!"

And Peter followed. He was ready. He had been taken to school by the Master Teacher, and he had learned his lessons well. In this, Peter is like many of us. We must be taken to school. We must be taught hard lessons in order to see that faith is more than mere superficial acceptance of a doctrine, or "hope-so" feelings, or of habitual practice because it has been handed down through generations of family and community. True Bible faith reveals itself in confident obedience to God's word in spite of circumstances and consequences.

Conclusion

Here then is the lesson of faith. We, as Peter, must learn what a trusting faith is. True faith arises from the heart, and it is a confident, trusting faith like Peter had after his trials. That is the kind of faith that saves.

In the Gospel of John we read,

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16) That salvation was not cheaply bought, neither is it awarded to claimants with flimsy faith.

Finally, Peter, on the day of Pentecost, took his stand with the eleven, and raised his voice and declared to the people of Jerusalem that the Jesus they had crucified was both Lord and Christ.

Acts 2:38 and Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself."

Humility

There is a story about Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) who was the Founder of Harvard University. One night about midnight, towards the end of his life, Shepard was found lying on his face in his study with a copy of the *New England Gazette*—a newspaper—crushed in his hands. People did not learn the reason for this until sometime afterward. What happened was this: Shepard had managed to get one of his sermons printed in the *New England Gazette*, but to his deep disappointment his close friend had also published a sermon. It was well-known that this friend was more eloquent and better in English than Shepard! That midnight’s paper contained an especially beautiful sermon by this friend. And so it happened that Shepard tried first not to read it, then they say he turned in prayer to try to read it, but he could not, and he fell on his face in remorse.

In a diary under Nov. 10, 1642, Shepard wrote “I kept a private fast to see the full glory of the Gospel—and the conquest of my remaining pride of heart.”⁵⁹

There is an important lesson we should take away from this story. Shepard could not humble himself to accept the superior qualities of his friend’s abilities. A humble person could have read the other man’s sermon and valued it, but Shepard couldn’t.

The lesson Shepard could not accept is the one we must accept.

⁵⁹ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

In Mark's gospel the writer tells us in Chapter 9 that Jesus and the Apostles,

Mark 9:33 ... came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He *began* to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which *of them was* the greatest.

9:35 Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

How difficult this lesson is to learn and accept. I think that of all the lessons of the Lord this is the most difficult for us as His disciples, but the most necessary.

In Matthew 18:3 He said,

18:3 ... "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven does not consist of haughtiness, pride and conceit, but humility. Mark tells of the same incident in this way,

9:36 Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

The child at that time was the least in a household. Adulthood was the ideal state.

The Lord pointed out to the disciples that His thinking is many times contrary to the way we

think. The ideal of Jesus and of the Father is the least, the most humble, the child.

The world's philosophy is that you are "great" if others are working for you, but Christ's message is that greatness comes not from being served but from our serving others.

The words "child" and "servant" are the same in the Aramaic language, and so it is easy to see why Jesus connected the two.

If we have the heart of a child, it is easy to be servants; and if we have the attitude of servants, we will welcome the children as those who in character are the same as Jesus and the Father.⁶⁰

Yet, in a great many of the things I have seen in life, I have seen that man invariably erects a hierarchy of greatness.

Man wants to arrange people in a hierarchy of greatness.

The human hierarchy of greatness may be seen in the story of Tiridates and Caesar:

In AD 66, Tiridates the Parthian, wanted to be king of Armenia. Yet, Tiridates could not be king without the approval of Caesar—Nero. So Tiridates left for Rome with his whole family, surrounded by a retinue of princes and 3000 Parthian nobles.⁶¹

In Rome there was a hierarchy that began with the slave, and then citizen, the quaestors, the aediles, the tribunes, the

⁶⁰ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Mk 9:30). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁶¹ Britannica, Vol 9, p. 845.

praetors, the consuls, the magistrates, and above them all Caesar.

So high was Caesar by this time that people began to look on him as a god. And Caesar Nero had been acclaimed a god by the Romans. Moreover, when The Emperor built his Golden House he included a colossus 120 feet high, bearing the likeness of his head haloed with solar rays that identified him as Phoebus Apollo—the god.

When Tiridates came to Italy, he did homage to Nero at Naples as “the lord” and in Rome he knelt and worshipped Nero as Mithras.⁶² This was an act of homage and worship accorded to a mere man who had been exalted to godhood.

In this way did the Gentiles lord it over people who were deemed of lesser importance.

Note how this differs from the New Testament church. The church is a local, autonomous congregation of disciples. Each disciple has a different function as in a human body. Some are deacons; some are elders. All are brothers. Servants of one another.

Even the disciples of the Lord thought in terms of a hierarchy,

Matthew 20:20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him.

21 And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Command that in Your

⁶² Durant, *Op. Cit.*, p. 280.

kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.”

22 But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They said to Him, “We are able.”

23 He said to them, “My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.”

24 And hearing *this*, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.

25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. {It is not so among you.}

The disciples wanted high offices, and earthly glory. But Jesus taught them that the kingdom of God is not like that. It is quite the opposite.

At another time Jesus spoke of the Pharisees, and said,

Matthew 23:6 “They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. 8 “But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 “Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 “Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*,

Christ. 11 “But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

In the synagogues of the Jews there were places for the lesser to sit, and places for the greater. They had chief seats and places of honor. The greater ones bore titles to distinguish them from the ordinary man.

But Jesus said the first in the kingdom of heaven is the greatest servant. In this the hierarchy is inverted when compared to that of man.

The first in the kingdom of heaven is the greatest servant.

He told his disciples,

Matthew 20:26 “It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Jesus is the greatest example of how a person should humble himself,

In Isaiah Chapter 9 we read the prophecy concerning Jesus,

6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;

And the government will rest on His shoulders;

And His name will be called Wonderful
Counselor, Mighty God,

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

7 There will be no end to the increase of *His*
government or of peace,

On the throne of David and over his
kingdom,

To establish it and to uphold it with justice
and righteousness

From then on and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will
accomplish this.

These words of Isaiah describe Who Jesus is.
Paul speaks of this same Jesus in his letter to
the Philippians,

Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in
yourselves which was also in Christ
Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the
form of God, did not regard equality with
God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied
Himself, taking the form of a bond-
servant, and being made in the likeness of
men. 8 Being found in appearance as a
man, He humbled Himself by becoming
obedient to the point of death, even death
on a cross.

Jesus. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

From such a lofty position He humbled himself
to the point of death. Death on a cross. For service.
For you and me.

John in his gospel describes a thing that Jesus did. And remember He is the Creator of all. Remember the titles He bore.

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

John 13:5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

John describes the incident further in verse 12,

John 13:12 So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for *so* I am. 14 "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16 "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

We are not greater than Jesus. Far from it. Yet, observe how far He humbled himself. Therefore, be humble as the Lord is humble.

But Jesus gave us the child as the example of humility.

The child is the example of humility.

How does one receive a child?

For their knowledge? No. They are unlearned. For their strength? No. They are weak. For an advantage they can supply; i.e., *quid pro quo*? No. They are dependent on adults for everything. Then what? What is it to receive a child in the name of the Lord?

It is not as the little child *humbles himself*, but, it is to make oneself humble as the little child *is* lowly; it is to willingly become by spiritual process what the child is by nature.

Christ is humble like the little child; therefore, if you receive one of His in his humility then you receive Christ.

I came across this story about a lady named Joann Jones. She wrote in *Guideposts Magazine* that in her second year of nursing school that her professor gave the students a pop quiz. She said that she breezed through the questions until she came to the last one. It said, “What is the name of the woman who cleans the school?”

Joann thought the question was a joke. She had seen that cleaning woman several times, but she certainly didn’t know her name. So she handed in her test and left the final question unanswered.

Before the class ended, she said that one of the students asked if the last question would count toward their grade.

“Absolutely,” the professor answered. “In your careers,” the teacher answered, “you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your

attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say “hello.”⁶³

The lesson is: humble yourself and be accepting of the lowly. Do you think you would be contaminated by condescending to speak to the janitor? This is one of the cases where our pride frequently gets in the way.

Jesus said,

Luke 14:8 “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give *your* place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 “But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. 11 “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Remember, the Lord will come for His bride—the church—and there will be a wedding feast. You do not want to be last there.

Paul wrote to the Romans,

Romans 12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to

⁶³ Larson, Craig B., *Choice Contemporary Stories & Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, & Writers*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 49516, 1998. p. 224, “respect.”

think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

We ought not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. Some think too lowly of themselves. We should not do that either. We ought to think of ourselves using “sound judgment.”

George Washington.

The story is told that after America had won its freedom from England under the leadership of George Washington, at a meeting of the House of Burgesses, the Speaker of the House praised Washington for his courage and his sacrifice. Washington, at the conclusion of the Speaker’s eulogy stood up to give his response. At that point he was overcome with confusion and modesty. His face flushed a deep red and he could not say a word.

Instead of being proud, he was humbled by the Speaker’s gracious words—and so he stood, speechless. Then the Speaker said, “Sit down, General Washington! Your modesty and humility are equal to your valor, and that surpasses the power of language I possess.”⁶⁴

Washington’s humility would not allow him to accept praise. His is a good example of character.

Jesus said,

Matthew 23:12 “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

⁶⁴ Knight, Walter B., *Knight’s Treasury of Illustrations*, Eerdmans, 1963, p. 173.

Lincoln and McClellan

It was during the Civil War that Abraham Lincoln went to General George McClellan's house to consult about a military matter. They told him that the general however had gone to a reception. So they sent word to the general that Lincoln wanted to see him.

Lincoln waited for a long time, and finally the general returned.

When General McClellan returned from the reception he walked down the hall, ascended the stairs and went to bed. He did this knowing that Lincoln was waiting for him in a nearby room.

They sent a second message to the general. The reply came back that General McClellan had gone to bed.

Lincoln never spoke of that incident. But he did not call on McClellan again until the crisis of September, 1862. Lincoln and General Halleck went to McClellan's house to ask him to take charge of the defeated and disorganized army of the Potomac. General Robert E. Lee had defeated the Union Army in the 2nd Battle of Bull Run.

Lincoln's friends criticized the president for tolerating McClellan's attitude. Lincoln's response to his critics was, "Why, I would be willing to hold McClellan's horse, if only he will give the victory to our army."⁶⁵

The differences between Lincoln and McClellan are obvious. Lincoln was humble.

The Washington Post wrote of General McClellan in its Civil War Records,

McClellan is generally portrayed as one of the war's great, failed generals — proud,

⁶⁵ Macartney, C.E., Macartney's Illustrations, p. 175.

sensitive, overwrought, tentative, quick to exult and to despair. He opposed emancipation and had a strained relationship with Lincoln, privately calling him a “gorilla.” His offensive against Richmond in spring 1862 was thrown back by the Confederates under Gen. Robert E. Lee, and he was shortly supplanted by a rival general, John Pope.⁶⁶

Lincoln, on the other hand, needs no one to tell of his successes and failures, much less of his character.

Lincoln had a clear perspective of himself. McClellan apparently did not.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote,

1 Corinthians 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that,

⁶⁶ http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-10-07/lifestyle/35279277_1_george-b-mcclellan-army-officer-cavalry. Quote taken, 20130109.

just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Associate yourself with the lowly. Do not think so highly of yourself.

Dr. T. F. Cowan once told the story of a small religious college that was having financial problems. They were having problems even though their academic standards had been exceptionally high. One day a wealthy man came to the campus looking for one of the college officials. He found a white-haired man in overalls painting the wall, and he asked where he could find the president. The painter pointed out a house on the campus and said he was sure the president could be seen there at noon.

At noon the rich man knocked at the door of the president’s house and when the door opened he was admitted by the same man he had talked to who had been painting the wall.

The wealthy man accepted an invitation to have lunch with the painter-president. In their conversation over lunch he asked a number of questions about the needs of the college, and told him he would be sending a little donation. Two days later a letter arrived enclosing a generous donation.

The humility of a man who was fitted for his position as college president, but who was not too proud to put on the clothes of a painter and do the job that needed to be done, had opened his purse strings.⁶⁷

In life, it is difficult at times to know the station of the person we meet.

⁶⁷ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

We might think the person we meet is painter, but he may be in fact a college president. In Jordan, people have met a man they thought was an ordinary citizen, but he was in fact the king. King Hussein, in disguise. The people of His time thought Jesus was just another carpenter from Galilee. But he was the King of all creation, and was in fact the Creator Himself.

Conclusion

In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, (Luke 18:9-17),

The Pharisee boasted that he was not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even the Publican who stood nearby. But the Publican was beating his breast and was asking God to be merciful to him, a sinner.

Jesus said that the Publican went down to his house, justified, but the Pharisee did not. And then the Lord pointed out that the Publican had humbled himself, while the Pharisee had rather exalted himself.

Thus is the difference between humility and pride seen in the way a man sees himself as either righteous, or a sinner.

Jesus said to those who met Him,

Matthew 11:28 “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

So come to this meek and lowly Savior. He receives all who humble themselves as He is humble.

If you wish to be His disciple then humble yourself and receive His baptism. I know—it's a humbling experience.