

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

Verse By Verse Bible Studies

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Who Then Is This

A Portrait of Christ

The Gospel of Mark

Volume II

by

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This Volume is Dedicated

To the Memory of

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

“The Greatest Preacher Since Paul”

ROBERT GREENE LEE

“The Prince of Preachers”

H. LEO EDDLEMAN

Friend and Mentor - A Preacher's Preacher

STEPHEN OLFORD

Power in Humility - Great Expositor

CHAPTER IX

9:1 - SOME OF THOSE. *“And He was saying to them, ‘Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.’”* All students of the Word do not agree on what Jesus has in mind when He uses the term, “the kingdom of God.” To some, “The proximity of this verse to the following context indicates that the transfiguration is the event designated by Jesus as ‘the kingdom of God present with power’ [BSB]. Others have seen this as a reference to either Christ’s crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, or His return.

This is a part of the message from Jesus in Chapter 8. Remember that during the fourth withdrawal Jesus is dealing with the “leaven” of the Pharisees and Sadducees as contrasted with the person and work of Christ. “It is evident that Jesus’ followers were contaminated with the former. Jerusalem and the temple were centers of the power of Judaism. So long as they stood they would be a hindrance to the spread of the kingdom of God” [Hobbs]. The destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 takes on greater significance in the light of this.

THE TRANSFIGURATION, 9:2-13

9:2-4 - TRANSFIGURED. *“And six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.”*

AFTER SIX DAYS. Luke 9:28 has, “some eight days,” which would include the beginning and ending days as well as the interval of six full days in between. This is history. There are no dates given that we can fit into our calendar, but then our calendar did not exist in First Century Galilee. In mythology one may find any number of days, months, or years, but when you read the Gospels you have to be impressed with the matter of fact way these little tidbits of information are given, just as John tells us that when Jesus had them to seat the five thousand men plus women and children (possibly 20,000 people), “there was much grass there.”

Both of my parents struggled with health problems for about eight years each, during which time I made the trip from Louisiana almost every week to see them, at their home at Sledge, Mississippi or in a hospital in Memphis. Later, when Mother was in a nursing home at Sardis, I would visit with my father at their home in Crenshaw and then drive to Sardis to see Mother. On most of my trips I made it a point to stop by a health club in Greenville, Mississippi for a brief workout, and a visit to the steam room and the whirlpool. I had gotten acquainted with a number of members and always looked forward to seeing them.

One day, as I walked into gym on my way to the dressing room, I saw Jack, and insurance salesman and committed body builder, just as he saw me. The first words out of Jack's mouth were, "There's a preacher, ask him!" The man he had backed against the wall, a history professor from a university an hour away, was really enjoying himself but I had no idea why. However, the thought of challenging a preacher seemed to excite him even more. It was during the hostage crisis in Iran and when someone had mentioned it the professor, a New Yorker, had challenged them, "You can't blame the Iranians for the way they feel. They don't even know that Christ ever existed. No historian of the First Century ever mentioned Christ."

There were several other men there but Jack was their spokesman. He was a layman but he bought time on a radio station in the area and delivered Christian messages once a week. The men were really agitated, which is exactly what the professor seemed to want - maybe he was already planning to use this experience in lectures to his classes the next day.

"Ask him," Jack demanded. He did: "Can you name any historian from the First Century who even mentioned the name Christ?" I was amazed that a history professor would not be aware of Tacitus, Suetonius, or Josephus, but I decided that this was a time to make a statement - not so much for his benefit as for the benefit of others who were listening.

"Can you name one?" he demanded again. I said, "Yes."

"Name them!", he demanded, with a gleam in his eyes and a smile that was almost a smirk on his face.

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."

"Those are gospel writers, not historians! Can you name a historian?"

"Yes."

"Name them!"

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."

We went through this cycle several times, as the men looked on. Believe me, we had their attention. Some of them may not have been active in church and some may not have been Christians, but in Greenville, Mississippi at that time you did not use the name of Christ as this man had. This was the professor who told me that he had taught his class in the predominantly black university that Communism was not so bad, especially when you compared it to Capitalism. This was before the fall of the Iron Curtain and the demise of what Ronald Reagan called "the evil empire." The professor was having the time of his life. What a lot of people may not understand is that even in the mid-seventies, these white Mississippians did not have a problem working out with black men. What really galled them was a fast talking, arrogant Yankee who was attacking Jesus Christ. To such men as these the Confederate flag had nothing to do with race, but everything to do with

Yankees who come south with the attitude that southerners (especially Christians) are ignorant if only because they speak slower.

This was the kind of scene I prefer to avoid. Dr. R. R. Pearce had taught us a lesson in Sociology classes at Mississippi College. He had a way of engaging classes in debate, and one day during a heated discussion, Dr. Pearce simply turned and wrote two words on the board: HEAT - LIGHT. After a few minutes student discovered the words on the chalk board and gradually became silent, wondering what he had in mind. When he had our attention he asked, "What are you throwing on the subject, heat or light. Heat tarnishes, light illumines."

That day, a lot more heat was being thrown on the subject than light. Finally, after repeating, "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John," I added, "I know what you are getting at, but I am not about to concede this point. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were Gospel writers, but they were also historians. As a matter of fact, Luke's credentials as an historian have been irrefutably established as modern science studies the ancient shipping on the Mediterranean Sea."

I am sure I did not convince the professor, but then I knew he was not receiving, just broadcasting. My main purpose was to emphasize to these men that the Gospels are historically reliable when dealing with historical matters. The Gospels are far more than a history lesson. The very word, gospel, means good news, and that is exactly what they are - the good news of Jesus Christ and the salvation he provides for all who humble themselves before him and accept Him by grace, through faith.

HE WAS TRANSFIGURED. Taking Peter, James, and John, the inner circle of disciples, Jesus went up onto the mountain. This is still during the fourth withdrawal, probably at Mt. Hermon. "Traditionally Mount Tabor has been identified as the site of the transfiguration. This is unlikely due to the presence of an ancient fortress there during Jesus' time" [BSB]. "Transfiguration" is a translation of the Greek term *metemorphothe*, which literally means 'to change the pattern.'" It originally suggested the act of giving outward expression of one's inner character. Jesus was transfigured, Moses and Elijah appeared.

MOSES AND ELIJAH. Moses represented the Law and Elijah the prophets. Each Sabbath Day when they went to the synagogue they heard a reading from the Law and a reading from the Prophets.

The purpose involved in this luminous change and in the appearance of Elijah and Moses was that of illumination for Peter, James, and John and of encouragement for Jesus as the cross loomed ever nearer [BSB].

Several dramatic truths are illustrated in the experience:

(1) Clearly Jesus is the fulfillment of both the Law, represented by Moses, and the Prophets, represented by Elijah. (2) Jesus Himself is viewed in a splendor at least closely approximating that glory which will be His when He returns. (3) Both classes

of believers affected by the return of Christ are represented. Moses died and was buried (Deut. 34:5, 6). Therefore, he is representative of those who have died in Jesus and who will be resurrected and glorified at Christ's coming in glory. Elijah was translated, not passing through the experience of death (2 Kin. 2:11). He represents those who are alive at the return of Christ and are caught up in the air to be with Christ (1 Thess. 4:13-17). The effect of the entire incident is to stage in miniature the coming of the glorious kingdom of Christ [BSB].

9:5 - THREE TABERNACLES. *“And Peter answered and said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’* Peter was wrong in suggesting three booths. He gave Moses and Elijah a position equal with Jesus. He is their Lord. God’s supreme revelation is not in the law or in the prophets, but in Jesus (Heb. 1:1ff). Peter may have still been trying to keep Him from going to Jerusalem, but the Father’s proclamation must have ended the protest.

Mark, my younger son, and I were looking for a place to eat in Bossier City, Louisiana when he mentioned a Mexican restaurant he really like and noted that it was just ahead of us. As I pulled into the parking lot I saw a beautiful blue motorcycle. To the left there was another bike, and to the right a number of people who were looking at the blue one. Some would move on and others would take their place. Mark would name the exact color, but to me it was a kind of bluish purple and it was shiny and new. As I paused to look at it, I happened to look across at the other one and saw printed on the front the words, JESUS IS LORD. I looked to the side and there was another sign and the reference, John 3:16. Conscious of two young men standing by me, I read the words, JESUS IS LORD. One of the young men said, “I ain’t never heard that before.”

I asked, “You haven’t heard that Jesus is Lord, or you haven’t seen it printed on a bike?” His friend said, “I’ve never seen it printed on a bike before.” The first man never responded but his expression left me wondering if he knew anything about Jesus at all, even though we have much more information than those First Century disciples.

TALKING WITH JESUS. God had revealed to Moses that He would raise up a prophet after him (after Moses was gone). That prophecy had a double barreled fulfillment. Joshua was the immediate fulfillment, and a second Joshua, Jesus, was the ultimate fulfillment. The New Testament word Jesus is the equivalent of the OT word Joshua (Yeshua, as modern Jewish believers pronounce it).

9:6 - TERRIFIED. *“For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified.”* A few years ago I turned on the TV and caught a few minutes of a telecast by one of the modern televangelists who was speaking before a very large congregation. I was not sure but it seemed that he had been telling them about his going to heaven. I did not hear whether this was supposed to have been a dream, a vision, or an actual visit, but I could not miss the entertainment aspect of the presentation as he laughed and joked about who did what, or who said what to him. I could only watch a few minutes of his presentation as his emotional pendulum kept swing back and forth between entertainment and trauma. My initial reaction was that if what ever place he visited was

that entertaining, it wasn't heaven!

How many times in the Bible do we find that when one receives a visit from an angel the first thing the angel has to tell him is to "fear not." I am convinced that if Jesus or one of His angels appeared to us, He would need to say, "Fear not...." We might not be terrified, but there was be a healthy sense of awe in the presence of the Lord. Recall times when the Lord revealed Himself to some individual: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel. Moses was told to take off his shoes because the ground whereon he was standing was holy ground.

I was recalling something that happened in my home church many years ago. My younger brother and sister were still at home and attended the Green River Baptist Church with my parents. One Sunday they had a visiting preacher who told them that one night he was awakened by a sense of some presence in his bedroom. He stated that when he opened his eyes Jesus was standing at the foot of his bed. He said that he sat up in bed and they had a conversation. Then, Jesus disappeared, and he went back to sleep. As they left the auditorium that day, Linda, my sister asked, "Daddy, what did you think about that?"

I learned very early that Daddy did not volunteer a lot of opinions but if you asked for one he could be brutally honest. Linda, asked again, "Daddy, what did you think about what he said?" Daddy said, "He was lying."

Linda asked, "You mean you don't think Jesus appeared to him?"

Daddy replied, "I am not saying that Jesus did not appear to him, but if he says he laid back down and went back to sleep he was lying." That makes a lot of sense.

When various people had an encounter with God or one of His messengers the first response was almost always fear. They had to be told, "Fear not." At other times we are told to fear God. Which, then is it? Do we fear God or do we not fear Him. The answer is simple - we enter the presence of God with a sense of reverential awe, a holy fear. At the same time, we must trust Him to give us a victory over a paralyzing fear that denies God a servant and the individual a blessing.

9:7: THIS IS MY BELOVED SON. *"Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, 'This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!'"* At His baptism, the Son was baptized, the Spirit descended, and the Father spoke. Here, the Son is visiting with Moses and Elijah when the Father spoke. Jesus sought to please the Father and on two different occasions the Father announces that He is pleased with His Son.

9:8 - JESUS ALONE. *"And all at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone."* As suddenly as they appeared, Moses and Elijah disappeared, leaving Jesus alone. The inner circle of apostles were privileged to be present at the Mount of Transfiguration when he was transfigured. The world would have the testimony, not of the required two witnesses, but three men whose testimony would be considered beyond reproach by most Christians. Here the Law and the Prophets come together with the Agent of Creation, the Source of the Law, and the

ultimate Prophet.

9:9 - HE GAVE THEM ORDERS. *“And as they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man should rise from the dead.”* Once again, Jesus orders people not to tell anyone what they have seen. Again the question arises: why, if He wants to establish the fact that He is the Messiah would he not want them to declare it to the world? He knew what the reaction would be, and that reaction might have interfered with His plans. If He had wanted this publicized He could have been transfigured in front of twenty thousand people at one time. What better time than the feeding of the five thousand men plus women and children? If He had declared Himself to be the Messiah at that moment, He could have capped it off with the Transfiguration and they would have followed Him anywhere. As a matter of fact, they would have continued to follow Him as long as He gave them bread (John 6). The problem was that they were looking for the wrong kind of Messiah.

After the Resurrection people would better understand the significance of the Transfiguration. There are three reasons for this. **First**, there was the fact of the Resurrection. **Second**, the true disciples who continued to follow Him after the Resurrection were true believers who wanted to know the truth, not the world’s crowd demanding something spectacular. **Third**, The Holy Spirit, following Pentecost, would bless them with a fuller understanding of the Gospel.

9:10 - RISING FROM THE DEAD. *“And they seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead might mean.”* It is a wise person who knows how to seize the moment, and that is exactly what Jesus did. They had seized upon His statement, and He seized the moment. He made numerous attempts to prepare His disciples for His death, burial, and resurrection, but when the time came, they were confused and defeated. Then Jesus appeared to them and they would never be the same after that. As the Teacher, Jesus was always alert to opportunities to teach His disciples and when they began to discuss “what rising from the dead would mean,” He seized the opportunity to teach Peter, James, and John a lesson they would later teach others.

9:11 - THEY ASKED HIM. *“And they asked Him, saying, ‘Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’”* What a privilege it was to be able to ask Jesus such questions. On a number of occasions, I had the opportunity to sit and ask the late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman any question that came to mind. He talked with me about how he handled certain situations when he was president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, how He dealt with liberal professors, how he dealt with a certain professor when Dr. J. Hardee Kennedy offered his honest opinion that a promotion of that associate professor would “be an endorsement of meritocracy.” I asked questions about difficult passages in the Bible, especially the Book of Acts, since he was rushing to complete his commentary, *A PRACTICAL AND EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY OF ACTS*, while he was with me in revival. The man who was declared by J. Edgar Hoover to have the best working knowledge of Hebrew of any non-Jew in the United States granted me the privilege of a one hour interview in which I could tape anything he said.

What an opportunity these there apostles had to ask Jesus the questions others were asking and then listen to Him. One of those questions quite naturally concerned the prophecy that Elijah would

appear before the coming of the Messiah.

9:12-13 - ELIJAH DOES COME FIRST. *“And He said to them, ‘Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you, that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him.’”* They were right: the Scripture does teach that “Elijah does first come and restore all things.” Furthermore, He say, “Elijah has indeed come” and “they did to him whatever they wished, just as it was written.” The disciples had not understood that John the Baptist had fulfilled the prophecy of Mal. 3:5ff.

JESUS HEALS BOY WITH EVIL SPIRIT, 9:14-29

9:14 - WHEN THEY CAME BACK. *“And when they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.”* As Jesus, with Peter, James, and John came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, they saw that the rest of the apostles were engaged in an argument with some of the scribes. They were surrounded by a large crowd.

9:15 - THE CROWD SAW HIM. *“And immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed, and began running up to greet Him.”* Once again, Mark employs the word “immediately” in portraying the reaction of people to Jesus. The disciples must have been relieved to see Him, and the excited crowd rushed to Him. That left the scribes, with their own agenda, anticipating their shot at Him. They could only accomplish so much talking with His disciples.

9:16-18 - I BROUGHT YOU MY SON. *“And He asked them, ‘What are you discussing with them?’ And one of the crowd answered Him, ‘Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth, and stiffens out. And I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it.’”* When Jesus asked what they were discussing, one man informed Him that he had brought his spirit possessed son to see Him, but when he did not find Jesus there he asked His disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they could not do it. The spirit that possessed the young man caused him to have seizures, and the seizures caused serious physiological manifestations. Was this something like epileptic seizures, or was the man’s son actually possessed by demons? This is a subject that has received a lot of attention, especially from those who do not believe in the existence of Satan or demons, and from those who see all such problems as a manifestation of mental illness.

There is little doubt that ancients explained many mental disorders by claiming they were possessed by an evil spirit. There is also very little doubt that some modern faith healers have claimed that mentally ill people were demon possessed. We must be very careful in placing a label on one whose unusual behavior claims our attention. While we may have questions about one who manifests similar behavior today, there is no doubt in my mind about this young man. Mark, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us that this young man was “possessed with a spirit.”

I have already asked, the question, “Where have all the demons gone?” Jesus saw demons everywhere He went, and He did not get rid of all of them. Where are these demons today? You can be sure they are still with us. In the first place, Jesus would be much more likely to identify demons that we are. In the second place, the demons often responded vocally to Jesus. Obviously, we do not disturb demons as much as Jesus did. Demons are servants of Satan and enemies of God and all who are created in His image. The demons are frightened only by God, and James writes that if we draw near to God we can resist the devil and he will flee from us.

A watered-down, bleached out, dumbed down gospel preached by someone who spends more time reading pop-psychology than he spends in the Word of God is not disturbing Satan or his angels. When you find a “religion” professor who denies the existence of Satan and demons, you can be sure Satan has planted that idea in his head. Satan is real, but God is infinitely more powerful. That is the reason a spirit-filled believer can resist the devil and see him flee from him.

9:19 - O UNBELIEVING GENERATION. *“And He answered them and said, ‘O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!’”* Jesus had been teaching them for months. He had demonstrated His authority over disease, demons, death, blindness, storms, and the Sabbath. He had proclaimed the complete Gospel to them. Where had they been? Why had they not understood who He was? How could they still be an “unbelieving generation” after all they had witnessed and heard? It does not stretch the imagination too much to see how foolish those people were, but what about our generation? In the last century we have seen individuals, churches, and whole denominations that once professed a genuine faith in Jesus Christ deny Him, misrepresent Him, and reject Him. We are often treated to commercials in which Jesus is portrayed as a kind, loving man who wants to help people. Then we are told that if anyone wants a copy of the King James Version of the Bible all they have to do is call the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints - Mormons. They tell you that they are not asking for anything in return. That is a clear misrepresentation of the truth, for not long after you call you may expect two visitors to show up at your door. The sad truth is that the Mormons are proclaiming a Jesus who is totally different from the Jesus of the Bible.

According to a news story on BBN today (10-25-04), the Episcopal Church is still having problems over their decision to elect an open homosexual to the office of Bishop. It is to the credit of those leaders who point out that homosexuality is a sin, but many are still defending their action and some said if they had it to do over again they would probably do the same thing. Churches have condoned everything from alcohol consumption, gambling, and dancing, while turning their backs on immodest dress, immorality, pornography, homosexuality, and even abuse in the home. Liberals have sought to de-mythologize the Bible, deny the virgin birth, a person devil, hell or any kind of eternal punishment for the unrepentant sinner. How long will Jesus put up with us? Is this an indication that the Lord’s return is near?

9:20 - THE BROUGHT THE BOY TO JESUS. *“And they brought the boy to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling about and foaming at the mouth.”* Jesus had asked them to bring the boy to Him and when

the spirit saw Jesus he “immediately” threw the boy into a convulsion. If you do not believe in the existence of Satan, demons, or evil spirits, you will no doubt see this as mental illness or an emotional problem of some kind. After all, we live in the age of psychology.

If you accept what the Bible says about Satan, the devil, then you may well understand what is happening here. It is possible of course for one to say he believes in Satan in a general way but doubts demonic possession. This boy did not go into a seizure because of environmental conditions or a change in his surroundings. When he came into the presence of Jesus the evil spirit saw Him and reacted violently, either out of fear of Jesus or a determination not to give up his host. In this case an evil spirit caused physiological and psychological manifestations.

There are two dangers we must avoid here. The **first** is seeing demons everywhere. The **second** is never seeing demons anywhere. Chuck was on a pastor search committee that went to hear a prospective pastor. Later, the pastor met with the committee in another city for lunch. They had a very productive meeting but as they prepared to leave Chuck said, “I would like to ask you a question. When we were at your church we heard a really good sermon and enjoyed the music, but we all left there wondering about the strange feeling we had. It was like there was a strange spirit in the service. We all left feeling that there was something wrong in the service. We were wondering what it is.” Several people who visited that church over a period of months made the same observation. A number of people insisted that what they felt was satanic. We can be sure Satan is not afraid to go to church.

9:21-22 - HELP US. *“And He asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!’”* The son was a youth, or a teenager, and he had been having these seizures since he was a small child. The father was desperate, no doubting having sought help everywhere but without success.

9:23 - ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. *“And Jesus said to him, ‘If You can!’ All things are possible to him who believes.”* The father had said, “if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” Jesus’ response is so typical of Him: In essence, He says, the question is not if I can, but if you can! The question is, do you believe? “All things are possible to him who believes.”

This response is typical of Jesus, simple, brief and to the point. There are many people who seem to have a gift for saying the right thing at the right time. Sometimes those right answers bear analysis, but at times when subjected to the light of the Word of God they may fail the test. That was never the case with Jesus.

In the front of my all time favorite Bible I wrote the statement I heard someone make at an evangelism conference or pastors conference many years ago: “God does not say it because it is true, it is true because God says it.” When God speaks, eternal truth is established. With that in mind, we can go on to the next statement: “All things are possible to him who believes.” He did not say that all things are probably to him who believes.

9:24 - I DO BELIEVE. *“Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, ‘I do believe; help my unbelief.’”* If you have never prayed this prayer, you have never been as desperate as this father. When I was in my mid-thirties I began experiencing pain in the metatarsal arch in my left foot. I went to the doctor my secretary called “our foot specialist.” I mention this elsewhere. He prescribed some supports that caused more problems with my foot. I went back to see if he could do something else to relieve the pain, and this time he tried something that caused far more serious damage to both feet. I went to another podiatrist and he extended the damage. Those two doctors all but totaled me out when I was a young man. I prayed as fervently as I knew how and then quoted Scripture to the Lord to emphasize the fact that He must do something to give me relief from the pain and from the intense burning from which I would receive but little relief for the next several years.

I spent a lot of time quoting Scripture to the Lord, reminding Him of His promises, asking Him to “lift me up and let me stand.” I often wondered if I was praying believing, or praying hoping. I even chose for my major writing project in my doctoral program the title, HELP FOR LONG TERM SEMI-DISABLED PERSONS. The Lord never gave me the healing for which I prayed - not as I requested it anyway. What He did was to walk with me each day, providing for my family, giving me an opportunity to continue in the ministry, and ever few years a little more progress. Finally, after twenty-five years of preaching and teaching from a tall stool, the Lord did lift me up and let me stand to preach His Word. He has permitted me to walk with Him, He has provided strength for each day as I needed it, He has provided help from my family without which I would have been totaled out many years ago, and He has provided healing - His way. “Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief.”

9:25 - I COMMAND YOU. *“And when Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.’”* Observe several things:

1) When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He took action. Jesus drew crowds everywhere He went. After the first miracles, the crowds found Him. Does this say that Jesus was performing for the crowd? Absolutely not! When He saw them gathering He took action before a larger crowd gathered. For one thing, He was not about to put on a show to satisfy their demands for a sign. In the second place, a crowd could lead to problems, both from the Jewish officials and from the Roman governor. Jesus understood the crowds. He had seen them gather, and He would see many of these people turn and follow Him no more. They wanted bread, they just did not want the Bread of Life. They wanted water to drink, they did not want the Water of Life. They wanted to live, but they did not want the Resurrection and the Life. They wanted to hear their brand of the truth, they did not want the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

2) Jesus “rebuked the unclean spirit.” This settles the issue of whether or not we are talking about demons here or mental illness. Jesus always knew unclean spirits, and you can believe they knew Him. They would never forget their experience with Him. They had been a part of the rebellion in Heaven when they followed Lucifer in the incredible rebellion that led to their being cast out of Heaven. They knew Him and feared Him. As we read the New Testament we never find one

instance when Jesus did not recognize the presence of demons, and we do not find any time when he commanded demons that they did not do what He told them to do.

3) Jesus addressed the demon as, “You deaf and dumb spirit.” Is Jesus teaching us that there are demons that attack individuals in such a way as to cause physiological problems like deafness and muteness? It is a simple matter for medical science to diagnose these conditions today, and they can usually tell the patient or his family what caused the problem. This young man’s condition is normally caused by some physiological problem. I have never heard of a person who was sound and speech challenged whose condition caused such violent and dangerous behavior. We can be sure Jesus could distinguish between psychological and demonic manifestations.

4) Jesus said, “I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.” Jesus did not discuss the pros and cons of demonic possession with a demon. He did not suggest that he come out of the young person, He commanded it. The demons knew Jesus, and just as surely as He recognized them, they remembered Him. Demons today flee from Him today because He defeated them at Calvary. You and I can command demons in the name of Jesus Christ, but we had better be sure that we do not try to do it in our own name or in our own power.

9:26-27 - IT CAME OUT. *“And after crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, ‘He is dead!’ But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.”* Two lessons demand our attention.

1) Jesus has absolute power, not only over the universe He created, but also over the unseen world of demons. Any time He encountered demons they were the ones who were terrified. They well knew the power He held over them.

2) Demons can assert a lot of control over an individual they possess. They are absolutely merciless in their attack against those who are created in the image of God. There may be both physical and mental manifestations of their attacks. Here, the young man is thrown to the ground and he passes out. The crowd thought he was dead, but Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet. He was absolutely and completely delivered.

There are some basic principles to remember in any study of the occult:

- a. Demons do exist - we have God’s word on it.
- b. Demons do possess people.
- c. Demons cannot possess a believer.
- d. Demons can influence believers.
- e. Some believers may become obsessed with the occult.

- f. Demons are more powerful than human beings.
- g. Jesus is far more powerful than demons.
- h. Demons can be resisted.
- i. Demons can be cast out.
- j. Occult activities have increased dramatically over the past fifty years.
- k. Jesus has the answer to demons or evil spirits.

9:28-29 - PRAYER. *“And when He had come into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ And He said to them, ‘This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.’”* Following a scene of glory at the summit, there was a scene of shame at the base of the mount. The disciples were confused when they were unable to cast out the evil spirit and deliver the young boy. One can imagine that they could hardly wait until they were alone with Jesus so they could question Him: “Why could we not cast it out?”

Jesus’ answer is instructive, both for those early disciples and for us: “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.” His answer would only be fully appreciated after His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus is still teaching His disciples and his answer is designed to encourage and instruct them, not discourage them. The best defense against demonic attacks is a right relationship with the Lord. That relationship begins with the new birth and it is maintained and cultivated through Bible study and prayer.

JESUS SPEAKS OF HIS DEATH AGAIN, 9:30-32

9:30 - THEY WENT OUT. *“And from there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He was unwilling for anyone to know about it.”* The period of withdrawals is over. Jesus has returned to Galilee from the region of Mt. Hermon. It is probably late September, A.D. 29. He will pass through Galilee before departing for Judea. This marks the beginning of the end. He moves through Galilee privately, not wanting to attract undue attention to Himself.

9:31-32 - THE SON OF MAN. *“For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, ‘The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.’ But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.”* Once again, Jesus “was teaching His disciples and telling them” what they needed to know about his death, burial, and resurrection. This means that He did not simply allude to what was about to happen, nor did He clothe the prophecy in such mysterious language that they could hardly expect to understand it. Still, when He was crucified they were totally lost as to what was happening.

Before we criticize these disciples, think of all the people today who are ignorant of God's plans and His works, even though they have a much greater revelation than those early believers. They would understand much better once He was raised from the dead and then their understanding would be expanded when the Holy Spirit came. No follower of Christ today can claim ignorance if he or she doubts the death, burial, or resurrection of Jesus Christ.

QUESTION OF REWARDS, 9:33-41

“This is the second lesson on discipleship (cf. 8:34-38) and the first of Jesus' lessons on 'true greatness' (the second is found in 10:35-45). The disciples (then and now) need to understand that greatness is found in serving others and not in self-advancement. To be a selfless servant is only to follow the example of Jesus, who served others and made the ultimate sacrifice of His life (cf. 10:45)” [BSB].

9:33 - HE BEGAN TO QUESTION THEM. *“And they came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, ‘What were you discussing on the way?’”* Jesus had made the home of Simon Peter in Capernaum his headquarters during his Galilean ministry. Jesus was aware of what they were discussing, but He obviously wanted them to verbalize to it to Him.

9:34 - THEY KEPT SILENT. *“But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.”* Guilty persons often, when confronted, resort to silence. We see it all the time with children. They were silent because they were ashamed to confess what they had been discussing. They had been discussing which of them was the greatest. This is something that appeals to human beings, and some times they will discuss it, even at the risk of offending others. I have not engaged in the past time lately but I well remember the time when I prepared “greatest” lists: The greatest hitters (Ty Cobb, Ted Williams, Stan Musial, Rod Carew), the greatest pitchers (Cy Young, Walter Johnson, Sandy Kofax, Greg Maddox), the greatest quarterbacks (Johnny Unitas, Archie Manning, Joe Montana - Peyton Manning?), the greatest fighters (Jack Dempsey, Sugar Ray Robinsion, Rocky Marciano - Young Otto?), the greatest general (Joshua, David, Alexander the Great, Pershing, MacArthur), the greatest presidents (George Washington, Ronald Reagan - will George W. Bush make the list?).

These disciples were not speculating about great leaders of the past. They were debating “which of them was the greatest.” No doubt, if we had heard their debate we would have been turned off on all of them. It is one thing for preachers to discuss who might have been the greatest preachers of all time (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, R. G. Lee, Stephen Olford), but another thing all together if someone begins to try to convince others that he should be listed in that group.

9:35 - HE CALLED THE TWELVE. *“And 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.’”* Jesus called the twelve apostles together - He got their attention and set before them a profound principle, one many

Christians can quote, but fewer apply. The true to greatness is in humility and service to others. Those who want to be in first place should be willing to serve in a lower place. The word translated servant (*Diakonos*, deacon) denotes a slave who rinsed the feet of guests upon arrival - the lowest kind of a slave.

When Jimmy Draper was president of the Southern Baptist Convention, he invited leading moderates and conservatives to join him for a meeting at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport to discuss issues and see if they could resolve some of the issues that were causing divisions. Later, I heard a well known leader make the statement that someone at the meeting had made the statement that if they could harness the ego in that meeting they could light the entire DFW complex for a year. The speaker, speaking at the Louisiana Baptist Convention made it sound like someone was accusing conservatives of being egotistical. I sensed an arrogance in the way the speaker made the statement and then I recalled the time an editor from the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (now LifeWay Christian Resources) complained to me about this West Texas pastor who was always calling to complain about liberalism in our literature. That speaker was the one about whom she complained.

I called friends at First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas where Jimmy Draper was pastor and asked them to see what Dr. Draper recalled about a comment like that. He wrote to me and told me that a statement like that was made in a joking manner. Later, Dr. Draper and I discussed that statement in Bastrop, LA when he was speaking at an evangelism conference. I have been in many meetings with Dr. Draper and I have spent a lot of time with him, both individually in small group settings. I am chairman of the Nominating Committee for LifeWay Christian Resources and he is an ex-officio member of the committee.

I have found Jimmy Draper to be a man of character, conviction, humility, and compassion. He has the mind and heart of a servant. When the board of trustees honored him on his tenth anniversary as President of LifeWay Christian Resources I listened to testimonials about his compassion and the practical expression of that compassion. He really gets involved with people. On the other hand, there is the man who made the derogatory statement. His statement seemed designed to hide his arrogance under a cloak of righteousness indignation. When this same man - the one who had made all the calls to the Sunday School Board to complain about liberalism - became a denominational leader he condemned those who took the position he had taken when he was a pastor. What would motivate someone to do something like that? Am I susceptible to that kind of temptation?

Sadly, I have been around preachers who actually bragged about their preaching, their budget, their staff, their honors, and their degrees. My sister, Linda Furr, told me about the pastor of a large church who said, "In our church we have a theocracy, and I am Theo." What would Jesus' response be to statements like that? I think when we read this verse we do not have to speculate.

9:36-37 - TAKING A CHILD. *"And taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 'Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.'" Jesus often used object lessons, as in the Parable of the Sower (or the Parable of the Soils). Here, he sets a child before His disciples*

and tells them that “Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives me.” Furthermore, who ever receives Jesus receives the Father who sent Him.

9:38 - CASTING OUR DEMONS IN YOUR NAME. *“John said to Him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us.’”* Was John demonstrating why he and his brother James were called the Sons of Thunder, or was there some other motive in reporting this to Jesus? He may have simply wanted Jesus to comment on the person who was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. At the same time, he may have wanted that authority reserved for the twelve.

9:39-40 - DO NOT HINDER HIM. *“But Jesus said, ‘Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us.’”* John may have wanted Jesus to forbid the man from casting out demons in His name, but Jesus set down a principle which should have been obvious to those who had been following Jesus. Those who were able to cast our demons in Jesus’ name would not be the kind of people who would then turn around and speak evil of Him.

9:41 - A CUP OF WATER. *“For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.”* I grew up in an era in which Christians held their pastors in high esteem. It was generally agreed the pastor was about the most respected person in the community. I grew up on a Mississippi Delta farm and my parents planted an extra garden so that they could share with our pastor and our associational missionary, who planted out mission church. Later, Mother owned discount clothing store, and I was amazed how at the many people Mother helped through her store, including my sons. She also saved shirts and other items for her pastor, who was attending New Orleans Seminary at the time. The interesting thing was that Daddy gave Mother full credit for helping their young pastor, but never mentioned things he did him, like maintaining his automobile.

When I was a college student, Paul Brown asked me to preach for him one Sunday while he was out for a revival. A church member told me that when Paul became their pastor he stopped by the service station this member operated. He said, “Brother Paul, I always fill up the pastor’s automobile for him. I know our salary is not very high, so I like to help out with his gas. Just stop by anytime you need gas and I will fill up your tank.” Paul said, “I really appreciate that, but I cannot accept it. I do not question your motives in any way, but the Bible tells me that I should owe no one anything and I cannot accept anything that might someday compromise me.” Both men were remarkable. Even though Paul did not accept the gas, I believe the owner of the service station was blessed for the offer. Paul Brown went on to become president of Hannibal LaGrange Baptist College for a number of years before retiring and moving to Memphis where he teaches classes at Mid-America Seminary.

TEMPTATION, 9:42-50

9:42 - ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES. *“And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had*

been cast into the sea.” Any serious student of the Word can quote this verse, or at the very least paraphrase it. Jesus’ declaration of the value and worth of children came like a light to a darkened world. Two thousand years before modern politicians made our children a political football, Jesus warned against causing any small child to stumble. In some cultures, children have few rights and their protection depends upon the values, or even the whims of their parents. In some cultures, both wives and children were at the mercy of the husband and father in the home.

Hillary Clinton wrote a best seller in which she set forth the thesis that it takes a village to raise a child. It is interesting that some of the loudest proponents of protection for children in America militantly defend the right of mothers to murder their unborn child. Over 43,000,000 unborn babies have been killed in America, mostly for the convenience of their mother. To liberals, freedom of choice takes precedence over the life of the unborn child. Can you imagine anything more horribly evil than partial-birth abortion? How did we get to this point? We are reaping the harvest of seventy-five years of evolution. If you can sell people on evolution you can sell some of them on abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, and other forms of immorality. If God is not at the beginning, how can He be at the end; if there is no Creator, how can there be a Judge?

My wife, Rebecca, has seen the breakdown in the family manifested in the lives of children for many years. She assures me that most church members cannot imagine the changes teachers have seen in the last decade. There is an increase in behavioral problems, health, attention deficit disorder, medication, anger, moral values, and a host of other problems. What my wife and son have been witnessing for the past ten years is highlighted by statistics given in an article written by Tammi Reed Ledbetter in TEXAS BAPTIST CROSSROADS, quarterly publication of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Grapevine, TX, Fourth Quarter, 2004, p. 4:

Each day of the year in America, more than 3,571 marriages end in divorce. More than 50 percent of the children in America’s public schools live in single-parent homes. Of the nation’s children who live apart from their biological fathers, half have never set foot in their father’s home” [LEDBETTER].

Before you take any action that might harm a child you had better reconsider the warning Jesus gives here. Some athletes today reject the idea that they are role models for children and young people. I remember when Rocky Marciano canceled a radio interview when he learned that it was going to be sponsored by a beer company. He said that someone might hear him on that program and be influenced to start drinking. Teenagers may be easily influenced by athletes or entertainers, but a child’s language often reflects the language of the home, just as his manners reflect the etiquette taught in the home.

A teenage was asked to sit down with her pastor and tell him about the problems the family had had with her sister. As she talked the pastor became disturbed about the details she was including in her account. Finally, he asked her, “Are you talking about your sister or yourself?” She replied, “Myself. Mother doesn’t know that I was involved.” She went on to share a shocking account of drugs and sex. When I asked her how she got started in all of that, she said, “When I was thirteen my mother’s brother, who was twenty-six, got me started with the sex and a friend and I started

going to see a young adult couple to get drugs.” I asked her how she could afford the drugs and she looked at me as if to say, “How can you be so dumb?” Instead of saying that, she said, “I’m a girl! I didn’t have to worry about buying it.” The visits to the young adult couple’s apartment turned into orgies. With her sister there was an occult element. A witch brought young boys and girls together to trade sex for drugs. By the grace of God and the witness of a godly mother, these two young girls were delivered from bondage to sinful addictions. However, there are a lot of people who must answer to God for corrupting those young girls.

My older son, John, has a lot of experience prosecuting juvenile crime as the assistant district attorney in charge of juvenile prosecution. In that capacity he often has an opportunity to try to “keep kids out of the system” if they will cooperate with him. He works with children as well as teenagers. He also works with their parents or guardians. He is in a position in which he often has an opportunity to protect children from other children, and from time to time from their parents or other adults. John also serves as vice-chairman of the board of trustees for the Louisiana Baptist Children’s Home in Monroe. While he cannot discuss juvenile cases a lot of people recognize him as one of the most knowledgeable people in the area in things relating to children and young people. He can testify to the fact that a lot of people are going to have a lot to answer for when they stand before the Lord. Can you imagine having to deal with a situation in which a two years old child is raped by the teenager who lives next door?

Bill O’Reilly, interviewed a man on the January 6, 2005 O’REILLY FACTOR, who does undercover work to expose those who are kidnapping children for men to rape, six year old children, eight years old children, ten year old children. Four year old children. The reason Bill O’Reilly had the man on his program is that the report came out the same day that some of the children who survived the December 26, 2004 tsunami that swept across the Indian Ocean, killing something like 150,000 people in various countries, are now missing. Someone has stolen those children. The expert who has helped to deliver children and expose the kidnapers, says that some of these people will steal a child and keep her for several years in order to use her for prostitution. Indonesia has passed a law making it illegal to take a child out of that country, but those who steal these children do not have to take them out of the country. It would be interesting to see the media do some of their investigative reporting to try to determine who is behind this despicable, evil sin against children, Christians or Muslim.

Michael Reagan has written a very moving book, and it is not at all what I expected. The book, TWICE ADOPTED, was published by Broadman and Holman and since I serve on the Broadman and Holman Committee as a member of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, I received a complimentary copy. I read it and immediately began passing it around. This book is not about the presidency of Ronald Reagan, conservative politics, or his work for conservative or Christian causes. It is about horrible sins committed against a little boy - sins that left scars only God could heal. He was sexually abused by a private school counselor and photographed nude. When his father announced that he was running for governor of California Michael Reagan was horrified, expecting those nude pictures to surface to be used against his father. Even when he ran for president, Michael lived in fear that someone would find those pictures and use them against his father. It was only when he came to know Jesus Christ as Savior that he found peace. Anyone who

hurts a child in anyway invites the wrath of God. Many people who would never commit the crimes Reagan's counselor committed, still hurt children, some severely.

9:43-48 - IF YOUR HAND CAUSES YOU TO STUMBLE. *“And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.”*

Jesus is not prescribing the kind of mutilation practiced by some of the cults. What He is saying is that if your hand, foot, or eye causes you to stumble, you must act immediately and decisively to remove the temptation, to remove yourself from the source of the temptation. I once heard a preacher warn that if a man sensed temptation to lust, he should remember one principle: “you cannot help the first look, but you are responsible for the second look.”

James Dobson's FOCUS ON THE FAMILY has reported that a shocking number of men who call them to seek help with an addiction to pornography are not only professing Christians, many are on the staff of a church. The Internet has made it possible for men to sit in the privacy of their office or study at home and view or download pornographic pictures. I confess, I do not understand how someone would permit himself to become addicted to something so vile and destructive as pornography, yet knowing how many people do become addicted, I want anything that looks suspicious blocked from my e-mail list. Above all, I do not understand how someone can lust after a child. However, it is not uncommon to learn from the news that a local university professor or graduate student has been downloading pictures of nude children.

I do not understand why or how an individual becomes addicted to gambling, but I know the do. I remember the time when you could drive all over the mid-south and never see a billboard urging those addicted to gambling to dial the number given to find help for their addiction. It is interesting that when they are trying to get people into the casinos it is “gaming”, but when they are trying to get you into a treatment center it is for “gambling”. I do remember losing a marble at school when I was in the fourth grade. I didn't know we were playing for “keeps” until the other boy picked up my marble. There was something in his attitude that made me decide that I had rather lose a marble than have the other boys learn how naive I was.

THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. The Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, the perfect Word of the perfect God. If God could not have produced a perfect Word why do we call Him God; and if he could have produced a perfect Word and would not, what kind of God is He? This is not a political statement, it is a theological conviction. Furthermore, there is only so much space in the Bible and I am persuaded that we may profit from attention not only to the inerrancy of the Word, but also to the economy of the words. This means that when we find repetition in the Scripture we should stop and consider whether or not that repetition is significant. When He repeats

something one time it may be significant, but when in such a short passage we see the same words three times we had better pay attention. Jesus three times warns, “where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.”

Harold Bryson, an old friend from Mississippi College and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary once authored a book by the intriguing title, YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A HELL. If you are aware of how many seminary professors rejected the whole idea of hell at that time you would appreciate the need for that book. Please do not tell me what some theology professor thinks about hell, just tell me what Jesus says about it. Jesus is convinced that hell is real, it is inescapable for lost people, and it is never-ending. In other words, it is conscious, eternal torment. There is nothing in this world that is worth spending one’s eternity in hell. I have never counted the references myself, but I remember reading once that there are over two hundred, thirty warnings about eternal punishment for the unredeemed in the New Testament.

9:49 - SALTED WITH FIRE. “*For everyone will be salted with fire.* This verse has received a lot of attention, beginning with the fact that some manuscripts render it, “For everyone will be salted with fire, *and every sacrifice will be salted with salt.*” There is an interesting comment on this verse in the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary:

A difficult verse, on which much has been written -- some of it to little purpose. "Every one" probably means "Every follower of mine"; and the "fire" with which he "must be salted" probably means "a fiery trial" to season him... The reference to salting the sacrifice is of course to that maxim of the Levitical law, that every acceptable sacrifice must be sprinkled with salt, to express symbolically its soundness, sweetness, wholesomeness, acceptability. But as it had to be *roasted* first, we have here the further idea of a salting with fire. In this case, "every sacrifice," in the next clause, will mean, "Every one who would be found an acceptable offering to God"; and thus the whole verse may perhaps be paraphrased as follows: "Every disciple of Mine shall have a fiery trial to undergo, and everyone who would be found an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and well-pleasing to God, must have such a *salting*, like the Levitical sacrifices."——Jamieson-Fausset-Brown

9:50 - SALT IS GOOD. “*Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.*” Jesus had called His disciples the salt of the earth and warned them against losing their saltiness:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men” (Matt 5:13, HCSB).

Salt both preserves and seasons. If we lose our saltiness we lose that quality which enables us to be a blessing to others - to preserve that which is righteous and to add seasoning of flavor to the lives of those with whom we come into contact. Robertson observed that if salt loses its ability to season and preserve “It is like an exploded shell, a burnt-out crater, a spent force. This is a warning for all

Christians” [ATR, Word Pictures, Bible Navigator].

CHAPTER X

Mark 10:1 takes up the final journey to Jerusalem. Mark passes over a considerable ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, and Perea (John 7:2-10:42).

A QUESTION ABOUT DIVORCE, 10:1-12

10:1- TO THE REGION OF JUDEA. *“Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them.”* When I left home to go to Mississippi College I was very much aware of the fact that I had lived most of my life in a unique situation. I had gone to school one year in Mobile and even though our farm was as far as you could get from town, I was not totally ignorant of city ways. When I say that I lived as far as you could get from town I mean that I lived half way between Sledge and Lula, Mississippi. Either way I traveled from home was toward town. When we first returned to our farm at the end of World War II, we discovered that our little mission had been closed when the Superintendent of Missions for Riverside Baptist Association, Major C. Waldrup had gone back into the army as a chaplain. Roads were in a deplorable condition and it was not uncommon to see people park at mud holes and walk a mile or two to their homes. No one worried about anyone bothering their vehicles in those days. Occasionally, a drunk stole someone’s spare tire or used an “Arkansas credit card” to siphon gas from someone’s tank, but folks did not have much to leave in a car in the first place, and in the second place, no one locked their doors because they did not feel it necessary. We never locked our doors at home either.

When Brother Waldrup returned from the army he started the work at the mission again, and though we were only able to build a modest building we saw a lot of people saved, we heard some of the best preaching I have ever heard, and we had outstanding denominational workers to lead in Bible studies, study courses, and other things.

I was saved when I was twelve and called into the Lord’s ministry at age thirteen. I was licensed at age seventeen and ordained at nineteen (before I had ever served as pastor). The sponsoring church asked to ordain me and I did not know that this was not the way we normally do things.

When I went to Mississippi College I had one purpose in mind and that was to study the Bible. My first class in Bible was “The Life of Christ” under Professor E. L. Douglas, who had served as a chaplain in both world wars. Professor Douglas began the class by having us study maps of the Holy Land until we could produce a map any time we were asked. We drew maps on tests, we drew

maps for exercises - we drew maps in our sleep. I would recommend that anyone who beginning a study of the Four Gospel begin by making a careful study of the Holy Land.

1) Jesus is moving from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south. Samaria is in between Galilee and Judea and Perea is across the Jordan River, on the east side.

2) Everywhere He goes Jesus attracted crowds.

3) According to His custom, He taught the people who came to Him. Because Jesus had certain customs the people knew what to expect of Him. On the Sabbath they would find Him in the local synagogue. When someone was suffering they knew He would show compassion. When there was a crowd they knew He would teach the people.

We live in a culture that is totally different from that of the First Century. As someone said, we think war ought to be a two hour movie and when the war in Iraq did not end with the initial excitement the cries went up, "We are in a quagmire." Some said, "The president did not make plans." Some said that President Bush won the war but lost the peace." The so-called "me" generation is looking for instant gratification. Sadly, this attitude carries over into the church.

People want to go to church "feeling good" and leave feeling a lot better. Older Christians still want to be fed when they go to the church, but many younger believers are looking for excitement. They love to stand and clap and wave as they sing "praise songs" but some of them make rude, and even crude remarks about those who are not demonstrative in worship. Those with that attitude cannot conceive of anyone wanting to sit and be taught. Some leaders today are quick to advise young preachers that if they want to preach doctrines they had better wait until Wednesday night.

There are two major emphases in the New Testament - preaching of the word and teaching of the word. I well remember when many church members would make the statement, "My pastor is a good teacher, but he is not much of a preacher." In some cases they may have been telling the truth. There are Christians, however, who want to be fed. They like to hear someone with a great delivery, but they absolutely insist on being fed when they go to their Sunday School class and when they go into the sanctuary for the worship service.

The best preachers are the ones who preach the word and teach the people. The most popular book in America with a lot of Christians today is a book by Rick Warren. Many pastors and many lay persons are excited about Rick Warren's THE PURPOSE DRIVEN CHURCH and THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE. Let me make a prediction - if the Lord delays His return there will come a time when if you mention Rick Warren's name some pastor may well ask, "Rick who?" Mention Charles Haddon Spurgeon and see what they say.

My all time favorite preacher was R. G. Lee, whom I heard on TV every Sunday for some time, and in person on numerous occasions. I will never forget Stephen Olford, because he both challenged people and fed them. He may well have been the most outstanding expositor of his day. Many other preachers have been a blessing to me, but one preacher has always stood out in my mind. I often

heard Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, the late president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, in chapel, in revivals, in conferences, and in churches I served as pastor. Once when he was preaching a revival in my home church - actually the church that sponsored our mission church, I attended every service. Dr. Eddleman's father had been pastor of the church many years earlier. It dawned on me on Friday evening that I could recall every sermon he had preached from Sunday evening through Friday evening, and outline the major points. When you heard Dr. Eddleman you were fed.

A fellow pastor once began, in an instructional manner, to tell me why I should not invite Dr. Eddleman to preach in a revival. He explained, "I like to hear Dr. Eddleman, but he is a conference preacher, not a church preacher." This young man really thought he was a better preacher than Dr. Eddleman. I told him about the time Dr. Eddleman was scheduled to preach in revival service at our church in Bastrop, Louisiana. Cecil Gregory was pastor of Cherry Ridge Baptist Church and when he heard that Dr. Eddleman was going to be preaching in our church he told me he wished he could schedule him to preach in his church. I suggested that we might share Dr. Eddleman, by scheduling him to speak each evening in our church and each morning, Monday through Friday in an assembly at the Cherry Ridge Christian School.

After the first service Dr. Eddleman told me that it had been a long time since he had preached to children and asked me what I thought. I said, "Tomorrow, begin teaching them something in Hebrew." He did, just running through the alphabet and quoting a verse or two. They loved it and they paid attention. Older children began making professions of faith and after the second or third day, other pastors were coming to see what was happening. Cecil Gregory told me there were 102 professions of faith that week and that he had followed up on those children and found that 93 were baptized on various churches around town. One interesting note was that neither Cecil nor I baptized one of those children. They were all from other churches.

You could not hear Dr. Eddleman without learning something. The same thing can be said of many other preachers. It is sad, however, to discover that some preachers today do not even want to preach except for Sunday morning. My brother-in-law is a Director of Missions and he goes to various churches when he is not preaching. He told me he might as well stop carrying his Bible to church on Sunday and Wednesday evenings. No one is using it - no one is teaching or preaching the Word Of God. Some so-called expert has said, "If you want people to keep coming to hear you, stop preaching doctrinal messages and save your teaching for Wednesday evenings." Any preacher who buys into that is going to have to answer for it.

It was Jesus custom to teach the people. There is no indication that he began by asking them what they wanted to hear. We would do well to stick with the "Thus saith the Word of the Lord," instead of thus fancies the heart of man, or the thus reasoneth the mind of man.

10:2 - TESTING HIM. *"Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife."* The Pharisees were constantly asking Jesus questions in an effort to trap him. Those attacks would increase now that He is in Judea. Divorce was a subject that served their purpose well because of the different positions taken by various rabbis.

10:3 - WHAT DID MOSES TEACH. *“And He answered and said to them, ‘What did Moses command you?’* As He so often did, Jesus answered a question with a question. Someone called talk show host Tony Snow (10-28-04) and asked if there was any way to stop a guest who refused to stop talking and let others speak. When he mentioned the woman’s name, Snow told the caller that he had to threaten to turn off her microphone a few days earlier. According to Snow, the woman told a blatant lie and then kept talking as fast as she could and would not let anyone respond. When Jesus asked the Pharisees this question they were forced to respond - these confrontations did not happen in a vacuum. They wanted to see Jesus condemned and sentenced to death.

10:4 - CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE. *“They said, ‘Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY.’* They were in their element when it came to the Mosaic Law, and no doubt they answered confidently. Conservatives believed that the Law allowed a divorce in case of adultery, liberals for almost any reason as long as the husband gave his wife a certificate of divorce.

10:5 - BECAUSE OF YOUR HARDNESS. *“But Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.’* They thought they had given Jesus an answer that would end the debate. However, the One behind the Mosaic Law announced that the Law allowed a certificate of divorce only “because of your hardness of hear.”

10:6-9 - GOD MADE THEM. *“But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”* Jesus state God’s purpose for marriage:

1) “From the beginning of creation” demands that there was never any other purpose in God’s mind for marriage.

2) “God made them male and female.” God has a purpose from the beginning and consistent with that plan was his making both male and female. The subject is divorce, and to answer the Pharisees Jesus deals with God’s purpose in marriage. Never in the mind of God was their any intention of marriage between two men or two women (or any other number for that matter). His plan for marriage is one man and one woman for life.

3) “For this reason” proves that Jesus is speaking of God’s purpose for marriage. From the beginning of creation, God determined that one man and one woman would leave their parents and become one flesh in the union of marriage. I used to joke with young people who came to talk with me about their marriage, that marriage is an institution in which two become one, and some couples will spend the next few years trying to determine which one. Unfortunately, for some couples that is not a joking matter.

It is a sad commentary on the moral state of post-Christian America when politicians, social scientists, judges, and unfortunately, some churches are having trouble defining marriage. President

George W. Bush asked congress to pass a law which would define marriage is a union between one man and one woman. Incredibly, our two Louisiana senators, John Breaux and Mary Landreu voted against the bill - of course they offered high sounding reasons for opposing the legislation. Louisiana voters went to the polls and voted overwhelmingly to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman - and some judge overturned the election. I would call this the tyranny of the judiciary, a judiciary that has forgotten the fact that each judge is going to stand before the supreme Judge of eternity and answer for his decision.

10:10-12 - WHOEVER DIVORCES HIS WIFE. *“In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.’* There are a number of things that should receive a second look here.

1) Jesus had responded questions from the Pharisees on the subject of divorce.

2) Later, His disciples “began questioning Him” about what He had said to the Pharisees. The wording implies that they continued to question Jesus for some time.

3) Jesus said, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her” (NASB). The HCSB translates it, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.” These are two of the most accurate translations ever made, so there can be little doubt as to what Jesus said. Matthew allows an exception: “And I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (Matt 19:9, HCSB). A. T. Robertson explains:

“Mark does not give the exception stated in Mat 19:9 ‘except for fornication’ which see for discussion, though the point is really involved in what Mark does record. Mere formal divorce does not annul actual marriage consummated by the physical union. Breaking that bond does annul it”. —Word Pictures in the New Testament

Divorce is always a serious matter in America today, breaking up families, shattering the lives of people who made lifetime commitments. It is devastating children, often opening the door to many social ills and spiritual problems. My son deals with the consequences of divorce as a prosecutor and my wife sees it every day at school. She points out that twenty years ago the child from a broken home, or the child living with a single parent was the exception. Now, the child from the traditional family is becoming the exception in many classes. One day my wife, Becky, came in from school and told me that a sixth grader had asked her, “Mrs. Sanders, how long have you been married?” She told him and he exclaimed, “TO ONE MAN!!!!?”

In America, our culture has been changed by the modern feminist movement. Some people do not seem to appreciate just how much both boys and girls need two parents. Not only do they need two parents - they need to live with two parents. Sometimes a step-father or step-mother fills the void left when one spouse moves out. Ideally, children should grow up in the home with their biological

parents. Of course, we do not live in an ideal world, and when that is not possible, every effort should be made to provide a stable environment for the children.

When a mother loses control of her son at home, that son may well become a behavior problem at school and a problem in society. Someone has said that if you find a boy whose father will hug him and say, "I love you," his son will never become a homosexual. I do not know whether that is true or not, but is something to consider. Little girls who do not have a father in the home who provides for and protects his family, is less likely to be confused about relationships with the opposite sex as she becomes an adult.

JESUS BLESSES THE CHILDREN, 10:13-16

10:13-16 - PERMIT THE LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME TO ME. *"And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, 'Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all.'* And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands upon them." It is fitting that this should follow the teaching about marriage and the home. It is also fitting that we should be looking at this passage at a time when so many in America seemed to be confused as to what constitutes marriage and family. On November 1, 2005, Dr. Erwin Lutzer was interviewed on the John Ankerberg television show concerning same sex marriage bills. Lutzer stated that he had spoken with someone in Canada about new laws there. He asked, "Can you read Romans 1 and comment on it?" The response was, "Yes, until the first court case." What he meant is that to preach, or even read Scripture that condemns homosexuality the preacher could be arrested for hate crimes violations and sentenced to two years in prison. Americans must not think this cannot happen here. It may be closer than many in the church can imagine. Let us summarize this experience concerning children who would see Jesus.

1) Some people were "bringing children to Him so that He might touch them."

2) "(T)he disciples rebuked them." How often well meaning people totally miss the message of our Lord and in doing so hinder those who would come to Christ. The guilty party may not be someone on the fringe, it may be a Sunday School teacher, pastor, or minister of music - even a youth worker. I once heard the late Paul Driscoll say that when he began in the ministry he was a youth minister and he had been very successful in reaching young people from all over the small city. Therefore, when the deacons asked him to meet with them he thought he was going to get a raise in salary. Instead, they said, "Now Paul, we appreciate your enthusiasm and all your work, but we want to tell you, these are not our kind of people." They were in a "first" church and those people should be left to some church with a "side" in it - West Side, South Side, East Side. Anywhere, but their more sophisticated church.

3) When Jesus saw what they were doing He was indignant. We had a Christmas program in our little mission church, the Green Rive Baptist Mission, west of Sledge, Mississippi. We has drawn

names in order to exchange gifts. On the night of the program there were three or four children who did not get gifts. I was one of them. The boy who drew my name did not come. My mother was indignant - not because of me, but because there were other children there who did not receive a gift. I believe she saw that they received something before they left. After that, Mother always bought a number of extra gifts, wrapped them and took them with her. She always checked out all the children and when there were not enough gifts to go around she slipped one under the tree.

It is a serious matter to hurt a child, and it happens more often than many can imagine. My younger son begged to start taking piano lessons when he was in the first grade and when he persisted we let him start when he was in the second grade. He would go across to the church to practice every afternoon. One Sunday afternoon when he was in about the fifth grade, a staff member walked behind him while he was practicing and said, in a gruff voice, "Timing's terrible." He refused to give up, but a lot of children would have quit after an experience like that.

4) Jesus said, "Permit the children to come to Me." Jesus came to seek and to save lost people. No one is saved because of beauty, brains, or brawn. We are saved by grace, through faith - plus nothing. Most churches have programs for children from the nursery through pre-school departments, younger children and older children's departments. There are two serious dangers in dealing with children. The first is providing so many activities for children that they never get the message of God's redemptive love. The second danger is in not providing for them at all.

I will never forget Peter Douglas. I worked for several summers for the Quitman County, MS Agricultural, Stabilization, and Conservation Service (ASCS) to pay for my college education and to help with the first year or two in seminary. In the vernacular, we measured cotton; in reality, we plotted cotton fields on an aerial photograph. I had driven a school bus my senior year in high school and knew well a particular gravel loop where an unusual family lived. I remember one day when the mother had to drive two or three boys out off the porch to get on the bus. They circled in front of the bus and when they got the bus between them and their mother, instead of getting onto the bus they took off across a cotton field. This family had received a lot of attention because the daughter in the family had a biracial son.

On the day when I stopped by Peter Douglas' farm this little boy was a toddler. Peter, a black man, touched my heart when he asked my advice. He said, "That little boy needs to be in church but he is not going to be accepted in the white church. I would like to ask the family to let me take him to our church, but I don't know what they might say. That little boy needs to be in church." He was right - in more ways than one. Jesus died for that little boy, and I know he approved of Peter Douglas and his compassion for the child.

5) He added, "For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." This is amazing. The kingdom of God belongs to children? No, the kingdom of God belongs to those who come to Jesus as a little child. What does that mean? In innocence? No, no one is innocent. In ignorance? No, one needs to know who Jesus is and what He offers to those who come to Him. Children have a capacity that is absolutely amazing. They can trust. They can believe. Those who would come to Jesus must humble themselves and come to him in faith and trust. If you try to go to Him in any other spirit or

attitude you will be rejected.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER, 10:17-31

10:17-22 - WHAT SHALL I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE? “*And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and began asking Him, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, ‘DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.’ And he said to Him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.’ And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property.*” Jesus had just told them what they needed to do to have eternal life - come to Him as a little child - trusting Him. What was it that he could not understand? Why did he not apply that message to himself? Is it possible that he came in pride and arrogance rather than in humility?

10:23 - HOW HARD IT WILL BE. “*And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!’*” This flies in the face of all the Pharisees believed and taught. Like Job’s friends, wealth was a sign of righteousness to the Pharisees; poverty was a sign of unrighteousness. The very fact that one possessed wealth was a testimony to his faith. What Jesus said was a radical departure from what the Pharisees believed. If they would not make it into the kingdom of God through the Law and their good works, who would?

10:24 - THE DISCIPLES WERE AMAZED. “*And the disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!”*” So indoctrinated were they with the teachings of the Pharisees that even after all the time they had spent with Jesus, they were amazed at this basic lesson. If a person with wealth, the very symbol of righteousness, would find it hard to enter the kingdom of God, who could be saved?

10:25 - THE EYE OF A NEEDLE. “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*” They only thought they had been shocked before. Now, Jesus says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to heaven. For hundreds of years preachers and teachers have tried to explain this. How can a camel go through the eye of a needle. Are we to take this figuratively? Some have claimed that Jesus had in mind one of the gates to the city that was so small that a camel driver had to get the camel to kneel and almost crawls through it. That, is not the point Jesus is making.

10:26 - EVEN MORE ASTONISHED. “*And they were even more astonished and said to Him, ‘Then who can be saved?’*” His disciples were often astonished, both by what Jesus said and what He did. Now they are “**even more astonished.**” Why? Because what they heard flew in the face of the theology of the Pharisees, which was not at all new. Job, possibly the earliest book in the Bible,

records the attitude of the day in the dialogue between Job and his friends who tried to persuade him to repent of whatever sin had caused his suffering. Did anyone ever suffer so, being righteous, they reasoned. To a religious person, this may seem reasonable. A beautiful little girl was severely burned when a playmate pulled a burning newspaper from a trash barrel in Memphis many years ago. Her father, who was in New York on business, flew in and rushed to the hospital. Upon seeing his little daughter's face, he exclaimed, "What has she ever done to deserve that?!!" His mind was processing what he witnessed: his little girl was young, beautiful, and innocent, and her face would bear the scars of a horrible accident for the rest of her life. As I recall, He was also wondering, "What have I done that God would do that to my daughter?"

These disciples knew well the theology of the Pharisees. If you are poor, diseased, crippled, or the victim of some catastrophe, you had to be unrighteous and the Lord was punishing you for your sins. If you were healthy, wealthy, and wise, then the logical explanation was that you were righteous and God was rewarding you. What Jesus said was diametrically opposed to what they had been taught and what they heard in the synagogue.

They were amazed when He said, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" They were even more astonished when He said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God?" Who then, they asked, can go to heaven? How then can anyone go to heaven.

10:27 - ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD. *"Looking upon them, Jesus said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.'* It is absolutely impossible for any lost person to merit salvation, either through family, race, intelligence, good works, or wealth. It is impossible for any person to save himself, but with God all things are possible. Neither wealth, talent, connection, ceremony, or ritual can produce salvation. We are totally dependant upon the mercy and grace of God.

I am praying, and grieving for my Jewish friend, mentioned elsewhere in this study, who says he trained himself not to be religious. Now, past seventy-five, my friend says he wishes he could believe there is something after death - and he wishes he could believe there really is a heaven. Let me make a few very important points about my friend. (1) Even though he says Judaism does not help one with answers about what happens after death, Judaism is not the primary cause of his spiritual condition. (2) My friend's worst enemy is the Satan inspired theory of evolution to which he subscribed in his youth. He took "a lot of courses in evolution." He had shaped his life around evolution. Even when he was chairman of the building committee for the local temple - and even though one of his fondest memories is that he taught his rabbi how to play poker and then included him in their regular Friday night poker games. When I quote Old Testament Scripture, he quickly says that he is not sure he believes any of that.

When I talk with my friend I am reminded of the importance of teaching young children that God loved them so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross so that those who believe in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Children have a remarkable gift for believing, simply trusting the God Who loves them. If we do not reach children before they reach their teens it

is going to be much more difficult to reach them. An incredibly high percentage of young people who grow up in church drop out when they graduate from highschool.

10:28 - WE HAVE LEFT EVERYTHING. *“Peter began to say to Him, ‘Behold, we have left everything and followed You.’”* We have come to expect Simon Peter to be the first to speak. Was he expressing his own opinion, or was he voicing the attitude of all the apostles? Was he saying that they should be saved because they had forsaken any prospects of wealth to follow Him, and therefore they should go to heaven? Or was he expressing an attitude that James and John showed when they

they approached Jesus and asked if, when He established His kingdom (on earth), would He give them a position of power (and prestige and wealth), one on His right hand, and the other on His left hand. The response of the other disciples implies that they may well have entertained similar thoughts. Why else were they so angry with James and John?

10:29-31 - FOR MY SAKE. *“Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. ‘But many who are first, will be last; and the last, first.’”* Jesus was continually teaching His disciples divine truth, He took advantage of every opportunity to teach His disciples, and He employed the best teaching methods. Those who follow the Lord may expect the windows of Heaven to be opened and God’s blessings poured out upon them in this world. That will happen at times, but at other times His disciples will suffer persecution. More people have died for their faith in Jesus Christ in the last century than in the previous nineteen centuries all put together. Things are getting worse and worse, not better and better.

Those who experience God’s blessings should be grateful and use their resources to minister for the glory of the Lord. However, there is always a temptation for one who amasses great wealth to spend some of that wealth where it gets the most attention or where it does him or her the most good. Suppose one becomes a very wealthy and annually he receives an income most of us cannot imagine. His first thought may well concern taxes, so he goes to the experts and they tell him to set up a charity. Have you noticed that some of the most ungodly entertainers in Hollywood have their favorite charities - and the public is made aware of their generosity. A friend told me about the Christian author who had amassed a fortune through book sales. He went on to tell me that this man had set up a charity to help others. I was thinking, he may well be a man of compassion who wanted nothing more than the opportunity to help those in need. At the same time, the charity may well have been a good move financially - and when the public knows about it - and if he writes about it, they will know it - that may well be a good marketing move. Only the Lord knows his heart.

I do not know about you, but if I had millions of dollars, I am absolutely convinced that I would use a large part of it to help needy people. I can think of various groups I would like to support. Now, the question is, why would I want to do that? I like to think that my motives are pure and honorable. But suppose someone else begins to get credit for what I am doing. How would I feel about that? Again, suppose I give a lot of money to a cause and that organization honors me with a banquet and

praises me and names a building for me. How would I feel about that? Would I seek only to glorify God, or would I want a little of the glory for myself.

I am amazed at those who give anonymously to some worthy charity, or help individuals anonymously, only to confidentially reveal their reasons for doing so in a book or on a television program. Our motive in whatever we do is important. No wonder Jesus said, "But many who are first, will be last; and the last, first."

JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT HIS DEATH A THIRD TIME, 10:32-34

10:32-34 - GOING UP TO JERUSALEM. *"They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. "They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."* In 10:32, Mark clearly introduces the final phase of Jesus' ministry. Jesus spoke again about His death and resurrection. Luke says, "they understood none of those things" (18:34).

Jesus walked ahead of the disciples. The twelve followed Him and they were amazed. The other disciples who followed them were fearful. Jesus took the twelve apostles aside and began telling them what to expect when they got to Jerusalem. From their reaction to His arrest, torture, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, you may well wonder where their minds had been when Jesus was talking to them.

I was sitting in an algebra, directly in front of an open door. Across the hall, in another class sat one of the most beautiful girls in school. I was in the ninth grade and had just made the baseball team. I was starting at center field and we had a ball game that afternoon. Though he didn't know it at the time, my teacher, the superintendent of our school, was more conscious of the ball game than I at that point in time. It was a rude awakening when I heard my name: "Johnny, we'll play Lambert when we get down there!" I said exactly what you would expect one to say under the circumstances - "Yes, sir!" As the class ended and I started to leave, Mr. Shivers said, "Johnny, I'll give you a quarter if you will tell me what you were thinking about?" I said, "That was close enough." I was not about to tell him that when that young lady turned around and looked back at me, I was thinking, "That little girl has grown up, and I had no idea she was going to be so beautiful! Of course it could have been a lot worse - Mr. Shivers might have asked me a question about algebra!

The movie, *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST*, portrays the suffering, torture, and cruel death to which Jesus was subjected. Mel Gibson portrayed the sheer horror of His suffering and the cruelty of those who tortured Him more forcefully than anyone else has ever presented it on film. Many who went to see the movie were surprised to see just how violently He was scourged, and punished in other ways. Jesus, however, was not surprised by it. He anticipated it and tried to prepare His

disciples. The interesting thing is that they would not fully appreciate what He was trying to teach them until after the Resurrection, and after Pentecost. The Holy Spirit would bring all these things to their remembrance.

PRINCIPLES OF GREATNESS, 10:35-45

The Believer's Study Bible Notes puts this passage in perspective:

“This is Jesus’ third lesson on discipleship and His second lesson on true greatness (cf. 9:33-37). The disciples are concerned about position and prominence, but Jesus tells them discipleship involves a willingness to suffer (vv. 38, 39), and it also means a life of service for others (vv. 42-44). In v. 43 Jesus uses the Greek word *diakonos*, translated ‘servant.’ It is also the source of the English word ‘deacon.’ In v. 44 He uses the word *doulos* (Gk.), translated “slave.” Jesus completely reverses the criteria for greatness. God’s kingdom and His servants operate by radically different principles than does the world [BSB].

10:35-36 - JAMES AND JOHN. *“And James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Him, saying to Him, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.” And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?”* It would be interesting to know more about the attitude of the various apostles at this time. It is possible that there had been some speculation among them as to their positions in Jesus’ kingdom. Matthew provides a little more information on two of them:

“Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons approached Him with her sons. She knelt down to ask Him for something. ‘What do you want?’ He asked her. ‘Promise,’ she said to Him, ‘that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and the other on Your left, in Your kingdom’ (Matt 20:20-21, HCSB).

That James and John approached Jesus with their mother with their request immediately after He had told them about His death might suggest that they were now looking beyond the hope of a restored Davidic kingdom.

10:37 - YOUR GLORY. *“And they said to Him, “Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left.”* Robertson notes that “the mother spoke for the sons. But they try to commit Jesus to their desires before they tell what they are, just like spoiled children” [ATR].

10:38 - ARE YOU ABLE TO DRINK THE CUP. *“But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized’”* Robertson points out the use of the Cognate accusative with both passive verbs, and explains:

“Mat 20:22 has only the cup, but Mark has both the cup and the baptism, both

referring to death. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane will refer to his death again as "the cup" (Mark 14:36; Mat 26:39; Luke 22:42). He had already used baptism as a figure for his death (Luke 12:50. Paul will use it several times (1Co 15:29; Rom 6:3-6; Col 2:12)" [ATR].

10:39 - YOU SHALL BE BAPTIZED. *“And they said to Him, ‘We are able.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.’”* James and John had no idea what they would suffer for the cause of Christ. James would be the first apostle to be martyred (A.D. 44), and John would be the last, near the end of the century.

10:40 - FOR WHOM IT IS PREPARED. *“But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”* Jesus affirms the supremacy and sovereignty of God the Father in these matters. The Father alone at this point had the authority to make such assignments.

10:41 - THE TEN. *“Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.”* When you first read this verse, was your initial reaction, “I don’t blame them. I would have felt indignant, too? Before jumping to any conclusions, ask yourself why the ten were so indignant. Is it possible that they were indignant because James and John beat them to it?

10:42-44 - WHOEVER WISHES TO BECOME GREAT. *“Calling them to Himself, Jesus said* to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.”*

- 1) Jesus called all twelve of the apostle to Him to teach them. All of them needed to be taught.
- 2) They were acting like Gentiles - their rulers “lord it over” (exercise authority over) others.
- 3) Christians should have a totally different world-view from the Gentiles (pagans).
- 4) Christians should be more concerned with serving others than ruling over them.

Is it not wonderful how Christians have learned and applied this lesson from that day forth? It is a wonder that, apart from Diotrefes, who loved to have preeminence over his fellow believers (3 John), Christians no longer have to struggle with the temptation to seek positions of honor or prestige among the brethren. It is amazing today that lay-persons do not try to force their will on other members. Pastors do not seek denominational offices that offer power, prestige, maybe just a little glory. Is it not wonderful that we do not have to deal with the temptations Satan threw up in front of those primitive disciples? Of course, we know that very thought is absurd. Human nature has not changed in two thousand years, and man’s fallen nature has not changed. I have sat in a lot of meetings in which someone seemed to dominate others. I have also sat in committee meetings in

which members were unselfish, perceptive, and committed to finding God's will. As long as we are in this world, meaning that until we are glorified, we are going to have to struggle with self. We have learned well the gospel of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-love.

10:45 - THE SON OF MAN. *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* His disciples may have been preoccupied with their pursuit of honors, glory, and power, but the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve others. What a blessing it is to have church members who always make themselves available to serve those who need them! Throughout my ministry I have seen this servant attitude and it is very refreshing. I have also seen a few people who were always willing to help others as long as they received credit, or praise for it.

There was a man in a church I served as pastor who quite obviously was never going to be too happy with me as his pastor. After several years I mentioned this to a couple I knew I could trust. The wife said, “What you need to understand is that for years this man was used to hearing his name called from the pulpit. He loves to be praised from the pulpit. You haven't done that.” Pastors had praised him for years for the things he did in church or the community - or some of them. In some cases it was better not to mention what he had done.

Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight, 10:46-52

10:46-52 - A BLIND BEGGAR. *“Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ And Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him here.’ So they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.’ Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him, Jesus said, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ And the blind man said to Him, ‘Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.”*

Bible students are familiar with the story of blind Bartimaeus. Here, we have the simple narrative of his encounter with Jesus, Who gave him his sight. John tells us that if he wrote everything Jesus said and did in a book the world would not hold the books. That means that the Lord must have excluded a lot of interesting sorties to make room for those like this to be included. The Bible is the most important book ever published, space is limited, and every word is precious. So why was this story included?

Was it included to show that Jesus had the power to give sight to the blind? It certainly illustrates that. Was it to show that He is a compassionate Person? It does that. Some sermonize stories such as this, speculating as to what Jesus was thinking and what response He was trying to elicit from the

blind man. Was the point that Bartimaeus had to ask for mercy? Or, in this age of psychology, is the message that he had to verbalize his need?

We know exactly what we are told. The Holy Spirit will help us make an application, but that which we know for sure is that

- 1) Jesus encountered a blind man at Jericho; the man cried out for help.
- 2) Jesus called the man to Him and asked what he wanted from Him.
- 3) The man said he wanted his sight restored (he may not have always been blind).
- 4) Jesus gave him his sight and stated that it was his faith that had made him whole.
- 5) As soon as Bartimaeus received his sight, he began following Jesus.

There is no more important lesson here than the fact that Jesus is the answer to our needs. Jesus, the Light of the World, offers sight to those who are spiritually blind. All they have to do is trust Him. All who receive spiritual sight should follow Him.

CHAPTER XI

NOTE: The Gospel of Mark has followed the ministry of Jesus from the wilderness, through Galilee, to the final destination of Jerusalem, where Jesus will fulfill His mission as the Messiah: “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles” (10:33). The rest of the Gospel According to Mark has to do with the last eight days of Jesus’ life.

The Royal Entry

11:1-6 - THE LORD HAS NEED OF IT. *“As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, and said to them, ‘Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ you say, ‘The Lord has need of it’; and immediately he will send it back here. They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. Some of the bystanders were saying to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’ They spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission.”*

“Less than a mile southeast of **Jerusalem** was the village of **Bethphage** (lit., “house of unripe figs”) **and** about two miles out was **Bethany** (lit., “house of dates or figs”) on the eastern side of **the Mount of Olives**, a high ridge about two miles long known for its many olive trees. In Bethany, the last stopping place on the desolate and

unsafe road from Jerusalem to Jericho (cf. 10:46), was the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:1), which generally served as Jesus' abode when He was in Judea (cf. Mark 11:11). Bethany was also the home of Simon the Leper (14:3-9)" [THE BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY - BKC] .

Once again we find the word "immediately". Immediately, Bartimaeus received his sight. Immediately, the owner of the colt would send it to Him. Jesus, in preparation for His royal entry into the city of Jerusalem, sent two of His disciples into the village of Bethphage to get a donkey for Him to ride. Jesus knew they would find the colt, and He knew the owner would permit Him to use it.

11:7-10 - BLESSED IS HE. *"They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it. And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: 'Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!'"* There is more to this than a simple ride into the city. This entry spoke volumes to those Jews at that time.

1) When Adonijah conspired with Joab and others to take over the throne of David when his father was on his death bed, Nathan and Bathsheba went to David with the report. David had told them that Solomon would reign in his place. What could be done? Adonijah was in control. At least, he thought he was. David told them to put Solomon on the royal donkey and lead him into the city of Jerusalem and proclaim him king. The people recognized the significance the king entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey and recognized Solomon as their king. Almost one thousand years later Jesus would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The significance of this action was not lost on a people who knew the Old Testament prophecy.

"Jesus' entry into Jerusalem fulfilled the prophecy of Zech 9:9, but it was not understood by the disciples until after His resurrection (cf. John 12:16). In entering in this manner, Jesus demonstrated the true nature of His messiahship. Rather than making a royal or military entrance (which would accord with Jewish expectation), He comes peacefully, 'having salvation' (Zech 9:9)" [BSB].

2) This is usually called the Triumphant Entry. In reality, we may think of it as the Royal Entry. The Believer's Study Bible Notes prefer a peaceful entry, but in the case of Solomon, it was unmistakably a royal entry. Jesus' entry was a peaceful entry in that it did not signal an insurrection against Rome. In time Jesus' disciples would understand that He was both King of Kings - and the Prince of Peace.

3) Hosanna originally meant, "O' save us now." In time it came to be used like we might use "Hallelujah."

11:11- INTO THE TEMPLE. *"Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late."* We

are not told what happened to the crowds that line the street, shouting hosannas, but Jesus went to the Temple and entered it, looked around and then left for Bethany where He and His disciples would be staying in the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. He had been to the Temple to survey the place where the next act in the drama of redemption would be played out. It was near sundown and the gates to the city would be closed for the night, so Jesus went to Bethany, where he would stay each evening until the time of His arrest.

Jesus Places a Curse on a Fig Tree

“This section has a “sandwich” structure (cf. 3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-31). The account of Jesus’ judgment on the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-26) is divided by the account of His cleansing the temple precincts (vv. 15-19). This structure suggests that each episode helps explain the other. Like the fig tree, Israel flourished with the “leaves” of ritual religion but lacked the “fruit” of righteousness God demanded. Both episodes signify God’s impending judgment on Israel for religious hypocrisy (cf. comments on 7:6). Matthew telescoped the incidents into two separate, successive accounts without the precise time intervals Mark noted (Matt. 21:12-17, 18-22)” [BKC].

11:12 -14 - A FIG TREE. *“On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, ‘May no one ever eat fruit from you again!’ And His disciples were listening.”* Once again, there is a lot of symbolism here which the disciples would comprehend more fully after the Resurrection. The fig tree was a symbol of Israel, and at this point the action of Jesus had special significance. The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes these verses and provides practical commentary:

Next day, early Monday morning, after **leaving Bethany** for Jerusalem (cf. v. 1a) **Jesus was** (lit., “became”) **hungry**. From a **distance** Jesus saw a wayside **fig tree in leaf**, with full green foliage, and **went to see if it had any fruit**. But it had **nothing but leaves**. Mark explained that **it was not the season for figs**.

The time of year was Passover (cf. 14:1), the middle of the month of Nisan (April). In Palestine fig trees produced crops of small edible buds in March followed by the appearance of large green leaves in early April. This early green “fruit” (buds) was common food for local peasants. (An absence of these buds despite the tree’s green foliage promising their presence indicated it would bear no fruit that year.) Eventually these buds dropped off when the normal crop of figs formed and ripened in late May and June, the fig season. Thus it was reasonable for Jesus shortly before Passover (mid-April) to expect to find something edible on that fig tree even though it was not the season for figs [BKC].

The fig tree gave evidence of fruitfulness, but, while it had leafed out, giving evidence that there should have been fruit on the tree, but there were no figs on it. The barren fig tree highlighted the

attitude of Israel toward herself and toward Gentiles. “Like the fig tree, Israel flourished with the “leaves” of ritual religion but lacked the “fruit” of righteousness God demanded” [BKC]. Outward appearance implied that Israel was faithful to the Lord, but in reality, they had institutionalized Judaism and rejected the Lord.

The fruitless fig tree represented the nation of Israel and particularly her ritualistic, hypocritical religion. Like Israel, the tree looked good (“having leaves”), but upon closer inspection it was found to be without fruit, just as Israel did not bear the fruits of righteousness. The cursing and withering of the tree (v. 21) was a sign of God’s impending judgment” [BKC].

Israel had political ambition and spiritual rituals, but they lacked righteousness and made no effort to share the Gospel with any Gentile. They could point to their rituals and ceremonies and boast of their faithfulness, but in reality, they rejected the mission for which they had been called.

What is the point? Jesus is saying that Israel had had every opportunity to serve His purpose but had failed to do so. From that time forward, Israel would no longer be His instrument of evangelism and outreach to the world. Very soon, that responsibility would be assigned to the church. That does not mean that God is not concerned with Israel, nor does it mean that He had forgotten any promise He has made concerning His Chosen People. The fact that the nation of Israel exists today is proof of God’s faithfulness to His promise. At the same time, we must understand that every individual, both Jew and Gentile must come to Jesus Christ for Salvation - There is still no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved (Acts 4).

When I was very young in the ministry I invited a friend to come to our church and show his slides of the Holy Land - this was often done in the sixties and seventies. Now, all you have to do is find the right program on a satellite network and watch them almost at your convenience, or check out the Internet. My friend showed slides of Bedouin Arabs watching over a few sheep, and then he showed us slides of a beautiful, green valley in Israel, cultivated, irrigated, and fertilized by Israeli farmers. His conclusion was that the Jews were prospering because they were God’s chosen people and the Arabs were deprived because they were not. Masses in Arab lands are still trying to cope with poverty but oil has made many of their people some of the wealthiest people in the world. The point we must never forget, however, is that a Jew without Christ is in the same position as an Arab without Christ. There is but one hope for either and that is a personal relationship with Jesus. Is it possible that you have failed to witness to a Jewish friend or acquaintance as you would others. What were your reasons? He is one of the Chosen People? He knows the Old Testament Scriptures? He may not. How else do you justify failure to share your faith with a Jew?

I have for many years tried to be a witness to a Jewish friend, mentioned in another place in this study, who tells me that he grew up orthodox - “very orthodox” he says - but trained himself not to be religious. He is often frustrated trying to make sense of things that will never be clear to him apart from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Recently, he talked with me at our health club about a number of issues. I went to work out and when I returned to the dressing area he saw me and said, “I was just about to go out there to find you and thank you. You are the only one out here I

can really talk with and I want to thank you.” I looked him in the eye and said, “We do not agree with each other, but I am your friend. I am not going to try to convert you, only God can do that. I am your friend and I am glad we can talk with each other.” His liberalism often turns me off, but I listen and try to respond, always aware of two facts. First, he needs to know Jesus Christ. Second, he has willfully blinded himself to the truth to the point that he may well be blind. Having eyes, he does not see. I am praying that he will permit the Lord to open his eyes.

Jesus Drives Money Changers from the Temple

11:15-18 - A HOUSE OF PRAYER. *“Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He began to teach and say to them, ‘Is it not written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS’? But you have made it a ROBBERS’ DEN.’” The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.”*

1) After placing the curse on the fig tree, Jesus continued his journey into Jerusalem, going directly to the temple. On the previous afternoon he had gone to the temple to look around. Now he focused His attention on the temple which stood as a testimony to God’s covenant relationship with Israel - but it was a temple whose purpose had been perverted. They no longer looked for the Messiah of the Covenant, but a messiah who would serve their purpose, their agenda, and their prosperity.

2) When Jesus arrived at the temple He witnessed the commercialization of that holy place. That which was intended for worship had been turned into a business. Money had to be exchanged for temple coins, but their main focus was the profit. They had to have a dove or a lamb to offer, but the people in charge of this were not so much concerned with worship as with the worth of a dove.

“The commercial enterprise in the temple was offensive for more reasons than merely the location of the sellers. Exorbitant prices for sacrificial animals made offering a sacrifice so costly that the poor were almost certainly either excluded or impoverished. The deliberate falsification of rates of exchange in changing Roman for Jewish coins afforded still other unlawful profits for the temple” [BSB].

3) Jesus drove out the money changers, turned over their tables, and the seats of those who sold the doves. His justification cries out for attention today: *“ ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS’? But you have made it a ROBBERS’ DEN.”*

11:19-21 - THE FIG TREE...HAS WITHERED. *“When evening came, they would go out of the city. As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. Being reminded, Peter said to Him, ‘Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.’”* The previous morning, Jesus had placed the curse on the fig tree. They went to the temple where He had driven out the money changers and those who sold doves. Then they returned to the home of his

friends in Bethany, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. The following morning as they began their trip back to the temple, Peter saw that the fig tree Jesus had cursed had already withered. He expressed his amazement.

The NEW COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE offers additional insight into this miracle:.

“A fruit tree without fruit is useless. The curse did more than condemn the tree to a barren life. It killed it completely. Matthew says that it withered as soon as it was cursed (21:19), but for some reason the disciples did not notice what had happened on their way back to Bethany that night. Whether because of the darkness, the dust, or simply because they were tired, it was not until morning that they saw the dying tree. It is quite possible, as Matthew says, that the tree did die right away, but it is also possible that Matthew simply compressed the specific facts of the incident in order to capsule the significance of the event. His book is more a summary of Jesus’ teachings than a detailed diary of his life. Mark is always more concerned with the details of a matter than Matthew. At any rate, their contrasting styles only confirm and complement each other” [NCWB].

11:22-23 - HAVE FAITH IN GOD. *“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 will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.”* Americans have a way of sitting back waiting for the next fad. Christians are not completely immuned to those fads. I first discovered how fads work when I was a young boy, possible in junior high. Suddenly, most of the boys in school were wearing pink sport shirts. I lived in Tunica County, Mississippi but went to school at Sledge, which is in Quitman County. We lived twenty-five miles from the school I would have attended if I had not gone out of county. We did not see the pink shirts in my community, but when I went to school I thought I must have been the only boy in school who did not have a pink shirt. My parents, not seeing pink shirts in our community or in our church, could not appreciate just how far I was from being “cool”. They finally gave in, but by the time I finally got my pink shirt almost every one else had gone on to the next fad.

Christians people, even churches and denominations, have been open to various fads - and the Lord has used some of these fads to accomplish His purpose. You may remember when Christians were rushing to the bookstores to find the latest Henry Blackaby EXPERIENCING GOD book, workbook, and related materials. Currently, Rick Warren’s PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE is “selling like hot cakes”. Before that, everywhere you looked you saw bracelets, bumper stickers, lapel pins, and all sorts of other paraphernalia with the letters WWJD on them. What would Jesus do? This was the theme of an old book by Charles M. Sheldon, but somehow or another, this caught on and was marketed in such a way that it was popular to wear the bracelets, necklaces, and pins - even lost people were wearing them. I am sure the Lord gleaned a harvest from that popular fad. I think we should consider two warnings when we see something like this. **First**, if it becomes popular with the world you had better be very careful. Jesus was very popular as long as he raised the dead, gave

sight to the blind, walked on water, and fed the multitudes, but when the people began to understand what His ministry was really all about the multitudes turned and followed Him no more.

Second, as worthy as the sentiment is, you really do not know what Jesus would do, because He continually surprised people in His day. No doubt, Jesus would surprise us today with some of the things He would do. His character and nature would never change, but his response to people, their needs and questions, would probably surprise us.

When Peter exclaimed, "Look the fig tree you cursed yesterday is already withered!", what would you have done? I believe I would have said something about the fig tree. What did Jesus do? He said, "Have faith in God." Then He added, "*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 will be granted him.*" Now I want to ask you a question. Do you really believe that? Have you ever seen that kind of response to your prayers? Did you really expect to see anything that dramatic? Have you considered that possibility that you may have finally discovered why your "faith" is not moving mountains. Ages ago, someone said, "Someday someone is going to pick up a Bible and read it and believe it and it will turn the world upside down."

Jesus is as clear as a bell - "*Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.*" Do you really believe that? Before you answer, let me ask it this way: Do you believe God **will** do it, or do only believe that God **might** do it? Your answer will speak volumes about your prayer life. There is no question in my mind - God can do it. But do we really believe He will answer our prayers. What do we do? Pray for the faith of which Jesus is speaking here. Pray and believe and you will receive, pray in doubt and do without. Jesus is very clear: "*all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.*"

11:25-26 - FORGIVE. "*Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. ["But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."]*

A retired Jewish businessman asked if he could ask me a question. I assured him that he could, but stood there wondering what he might ask, and why. He asked, "Does Judaism teach an eye for an eye or forgiveness?" This is a secular Jew who grew up orthodox. His orthodox brother and his friends meet and debate the jot and tittle of the Law. My friend has been away from it a long time.

I explained what Jesus taught and added, "I would like to think that it would be better for both Jews and Christians to forgive others." As I spoke I was recalling the Jewish lady who was asked about some atrocity committed against Israel by Palestinians. She exclaimed, "I don't believe in forgiving, I believe in getting even." Right now in the middle east, especially in Israel, there are three major religions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Only one of them believes in forgiveness, the other two believe in vengeance. There will never be any serious peace until both Jews and Muslims come to the point that they are willing to forgive past atrocities.

Anis Shorosh, was a Palestinian whose father was killed, he believed by Jews. Anis says that when he was a child he had one goal and that was to get old enough to start killing Jews. However, when he was a teenager he got a job working in a Baptist hospital where he came into contact with Christians who shared their faith in Christ. Anis was saved and then called into the Gospel ministry. I talked with him often when we were students at Mississippi College and later when he was speaking in our area. Anis says, “When I stand on a street in Jerusalem and look at a Jew and love him it is a miracle from God.”

I am comfortable talking about how important it is for Anis to forgive Jews. I think that is great! The real issue, however, is do I forgive others. How willing are you to forgive those who offend you. I was impressed when a denominational worker spoke to a pastors conference on forgiveness and confessed that his number one sin was holding a grudge. I thought it really showed a lot of character and humility to confess that. Then I learned that I may have one against whom he had held a grudge. I had made a particular request when I asked him to speak in our church. He not only ignored my request, he spoke in very strong terms in favor of something I asked him not to address. It had a dramatic effect on a mission effort we were involved with the following year. I went to his office and explained what had happened and what effect it had. Someone met me at my son’s office and told me about a conversation between that denominational worker and two or three pastors at a meeting. I assured him that I had put all of that behind me and did not worry about it. He said, “You don’t understand. They don’t want you out of (that association), they want you out of the ministry!” I was surprised. I was also surprised that I did not hold it against him.

I preached in revival services not long after I graduated from my first seminary and the pastor of the church told me that the church was quietly but deeply divided. It seemed that a generation or two earlier one man’s cow was chased into a barbed wire fence by his neighbor’s dog and the cow sustained some cuts. I do not know if they remembered who owned the cow or who owned the dog, but they were not willing to forgive.

You cannot have a right relationship with others if you do not forgive those who offend you. You cannot have a right relationship with the Lord if you do not forgive others. You will not know God’s forgiveness if you do not forgive others. The Lord not receive those who do not forgive. If you do not forgive others you cannot claim to love either God or your neighbor.

A Minister of Music asked me once if I knew what was wrong with our choir. I said, “Yes, I do.” He asked what I thought it was and I said, “Too many chiefs and not enough Indians.” He admitted that I had a point. A number of years later another Minister of Music asked me the same question. This time I asked him for his opinion. He said, “We have choir members who can’t stand each other - they just barely tolerate each other.”

I have often been reminded of the blessings that follow forgiveness. A young wife comes to her pastor and pours out her heart about an unfaithful husband who has abused their children, offended her parents, and hurt others. The more she talked the more convinced the pastor was that her husband was a really sorry excuse for a human being. Three months later the pastor talks with this same wife and she is glowing with love for her husband, praising him for his relationship with the

children, and sharing an account of his good deeds in the family and in the community. The pastor is thinking, “What is wrong with this woman? Doesn’t she remember all those terrible things she told me about only two or three months ago?” The answer is, No. She does not remember. She has forgiven him. Her forgiveness has been a blessing to her family and to others.

His Authority Challenged

NOTE: In Mark 1:27-12:44, Mark records the five temple controversies in Jerusalem and parallels structurally five earlier encounters in Galilee (2:1-3:6) [BSB].

11:27-28 - AGAIN TO JERUSALEM. *“They came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him, and began saying to Him, ‘By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?’”* As they did each morning, Jesus and His disciples walked from Bethany to the temple in Jerusalem. This was Tuesday morning. Jesus had created a scene they could not overlook when He had driven the money changers out of the temple. This was their domain. They were the authorities at the temple, authority granted by Rome. However, if they did not maintain order that authority might be stripped from them.

Did Jesus not know what their response would be? Absolutely. Earlier in His ministry he sought to avoid the final showdown, but now that the time had come for Him to go to the Cross, He will confront them - even provoke them so that they will demand his crucifixion.

They demanded to know by what authority He had driven the money changers and sellers of doves out of the temple. After all, these leaders had authority over the temple. They knew the answer to their question. No one had gone to Rome for permission to do what Jesus had done, and no one had come to them.

11:29 - 33 - I WILL ASK YOU ONE QUESTION. *“And Jesus said to them, ‘I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ‘Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me.’”* Jesus often answered a question with a question, and when He asked His question the discussion was often over at that point. There is more here. The time was at hand for Jesus to pour out His life’s blood for us. He must not seek to disappear through the crowd again. He could not seek a reconciliation with the religious leaders in Jerusalem at this point. He had told His disciples that he must go to Jerusalem where He would be betrayed and put to death. His answer would silence these religious leaders, but only for a brief time. They would regroup and began plotting His death with increased hatred.

11:31-33 - WHY DID YOU NOT BELIEVE. *“They began reasoning among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ ‘But shall we say, ‘From men?’—they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet. Answering Jesus, they said, ‘We do not know.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’”* The religious leaders, Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees were

aware of the fact that they had to be very careful in answering His questions. They had had some experience with Him before. The wrong answer and they would trap themselves.

John the Baptist was very popular with the people and they understood that if they said the wrong thing the people might create a disturbance. All we have to do is watch the news on television when there is a problem in the Middle East. Whether in Palestine or in Baghdad, when there is a problem the streets fill up instantly. The wrong answer here could cause a riot. They did not dare say that John's baptism was of man, but they could not bring themselves to say that it was "from heaven." If they said it was from heaven they could expect the people to demand to know why they had not believed him.

So, they did what people in their position have done throughout the ages. They avoided the issue by offering an answer that did not settle anything. They said, "We do not know." Jesus replied, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

CHAPTER XII

The Parable of the Vine Growers

12:1-12 - A MAN PLANTED A VINEYARD. *"And He began to speak to them in parables: 'A man PLANTED VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 'At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. Have you not even read this Scripture: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?' And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.'" The parable of the vine growers, or vine dressers, reflects the social situation of first-century Palestine, especially Galilee.*

"Wealthy foreign landlords owned large land estates which they leased to tenant farmers. The tenants agreed to cultivate the land and care for the vineyards when the landlords were away. A contract between them designated that a portion of the crop was to be paid as rent. At harvest time the owners sent agents to collect the rent. Inevitably tension arose between the absentee owners and the tenants" [BKC].

Jesus “began to speak to them in parables.” If we do not keep this in context we may conclude that He was speaking extemporaneously to the crowd, but when we keep it in context we see that He was speaking specifically to those religious leaders who had asked Him by what authority He had cleansed the temple. These Jewish religious leaders were the interrogators from the Sanhedrin whose purpose it was to trap Jesus and accuse Him to the Roman governor, Pilate, of some crime that demanded the death penalty. They understood clearly what Jesus’ parable meant.

- 1) The “man” represents God.
- 2) The “vine growers” represent Israel.
- 3) The “servants” represent the prophets.
- 4) The “one son, his beloved” represents Jesus.

In telling this parable, Jesus exposed the planned attempt to take His life, as well as God’s judgment on those who have rejected Him.

“The son’s arrival may have caused the tenants to assume that the owner had died and this son was his only heir. In Palestine at the time, a piece of land could be possessed lawfully by whoever claimed it first if it was “ownerless property,” unclaimed by an heir within a certain time period (cf. Mishnah Baba Bathra 3. 3) The tenant farmers assumed that if they killed the son they could acquire the vineyard.

“So they conspired together and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. Some say this predicts what would happen to Jesus: He would be crucified outside of Jerusalem, expelled from Israel in a climactic expression of the leaders’ rejection of Him. But this presses the parable’s details too far here. It is better to see the throwing of the son’s dead body over the wall without burial as a climax to their wicked indignities. Mark’s emphasis of their rejection and murder of the son took place within the vineyard, that is, within Israel” [BKC].

Jesus Answers the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes

12:13 - TO TRAP HIM. “*Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement.*” Matthew 22:15-40 and Luke 20:2-47 give parallel reports of this confrontation. The incident probably occurred on the **Tuesday** of Jesus’ last week in Jerusalem. From Matthew we learn that the Pharisees had met beforehand to try to think of some way to trap Jesus into saying something for which they could arrest him. Mark’s affirms that. Their questions were obviously constructed for that purpose, but Jesus handled them skillfully.

“They” denotes the Sanhedrin, in essence, the supreme court in all things religious among the Jews,

not only in Judea, but in other countries as well. Rome had given them authority over Jewish people in religious matters. Paul had received a letter authorizing him to take the persecution of Christians from Jerusalem to Damascus.

From Matthew, we learn that these Pharisees who went to see Jesus were not the leading Pharisees, but disciples of the Pharisees (Matt. 22:16). These representatives may well have been some of the most advanced young scholars (like young Saul of Tarsus), who were bent on destroying Jesus by twisting his words until they could corner him. They were probably more aggressive than the more mature Pharisees. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible offers the following information on the Pharisees and the Herodians:

The Pharisees are first mentioned as a group during the reign of John Hyrcanus in the time between the writing of the Old and New Testaments. They were known for their strict adherence to the ceremonial law, with special emphasis on tithing and personal purity. While the Pharisees were religious separatists, the Herodians were political nationalists. When the Roman tributary king, Herod the Great, died in 4 B.C., Palestine was divided among his sons. Herod Antipas became ruler of Galilee and Perea, Herod Philip became king of Trachonitis, Iturea and Abilene, and Archelaus became king of Judea and Samaria. As the Jews watched the decentralization of their country they realized that the only hope of ever being a free nation again would be to keep Herod's family together. That is why, more out of love for their country than devotion to the old king and his sons, they formed the Herodian party to preserve their Jewish national identity. It is curious how Jesus' presence brought these two groups with very different objectives together in one concerted effort to get rid of him. Apart from their mutual hatred of Jesus, they had nothing in common, but this new threat to their influence over the Jewish people had drawn them increasingly closer. In fact, it was soon after Jesus began his public ministry that they had begun their joint deliberations (3:6). The Herodians' obvious plan of attack was to trap him into saying something that could be taken as subversive to the administration of Rome. The Pharisees were on the lookout for something that might be construed as blasphemy against God and equally punishable by death. to catch [trap] him in his words—The word “trap” was most often used, as our English word, in a hunting context. Jesus' opponents were out to get him from both sides. If they could not catch him on a religious technicality, they would get him on a political misdemeanor” [NCWB].

12:14 - TEACHER, WE KNOW THAT YOU ARE TRUTHFUL. *“They came and said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?”*

1). They were trying to trap Jesus. Guile is never more vile that when it is cloaked in the dignified robes of self-righteous religious leaders. Dan Rather demonstrated this kind of attitude in his effort to try to help defeat President Bush in the presidential election of 2004. He was so determined to build a case against President Bush that he used false material and viciously attacked the President.

Senator Trent Lott is one of the most committed Christians the US senate has ever known, yet he was forced to resign as the Senate Majority Leader when a statement he had made was twisted to make it sound like he was insensitive to racial issues. He was attacked by people who are far less righteous than he. During a conversation with then Congressman Lott following the funeral service for my wife's uncle, I became convinced of the high value Trent Lott places on honesty and integrity. His aunt was married to my wife's uncle and she remembers him from the time he was a small boy, rocking on his grandmother's porch.

Trent Lott told his family that when Senator John Stennis suspected that Trent might run for his seat before Stennis' last campaign, he called him in to visit with him. Senator Stennis said, "If you will not run against me this time, I promise that I will not run again and when you run next time I will support you." Six years later, Senator Stennis supported Lott's opponent. He had lied to him.

When the Episcopal church elected an openly homosexual priest as bishop, two priests defended the decision on the Hannity and Colms program on Fox New Network. They smugly announced that the Bible was not their authority. When the courts sent people to remove the display of the Ten Commandments from the supreme court building in Birmingham, Alabama, The Rev. Barry Lynn, of "Americans for the Separation of Church and State, defend the action by telling the nation how sad it would be for an atheist to have to walk by and see those words and be reminded of God. When some group in Pennsylvania filed charges against a school district that permitted schools to teach intelligent design along with evolution as and alternate theory, the Rev. Barry Lynn was quick to support the action, announcing that the teaching of creation was a violation of the constitution. That is very interesting in light of the fact that in 1925 the ACLU sued to have evolution taught along side creation as an alternate theory.

A number of leading ministers have been invited onto television programs to share their convictions about some issue, only to be blind-sided by some enemy of the cross. Some, like Jerry Falwell, Dr. James Dobson, and Franklin Graham have handled that kind of situation well. Others, less articulate, have been portrayed as fools, bigots, and fanatics. One expects a lawyer to try to trap a witness in court, but Christians must deal honestly with others.

My son John told me about an attorney who would write a vicious letter and send it to another law firm. After writing the letter she would attach a post-it note telling the other attorney that she did not mean what the letter said, but she had to write it because her client expected her to write it." John's response was, "No, you don't!" You can tell the truth and tell your client that if they do not like it they can get another attorney.

2) They resorted to flattery in trying to set Jesus up for their question. The liar, cheat, and deceiver is never more like his master, Satan, than when he uses flattery, and make no mistake about it, these people are doing the work of the devil.

3) They asked Him, "Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" This was one of those red-button issues that could have caused a riot. Certainly, if Jesus had told them that it was not lawful

(either according to Roman law or the Jewish Law), it might have started a riot. It would have given them an opportunity to bring an accusation of insurrection against Jesus.

12:15-17 - RENDER UNTO CAESAR. *“Shall we pay or shall we not pay?” But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, ‘Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.’ They brought one. And He said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ And they said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they were amazed at Him.”* They picked the right subject to either cause a riot or to set Jesus up for a charge of insurrection.

“A Gaulonite by the name of Judas had campaigned against taxes a few years before (A.D. 6) under the slogan “Taxation is no better than slavery.” Rome silenced him shortly, but his words were still a popular rallying cry of the masses in Jesus’ day. Taxes were oppressive by this time, and were designed to hit everybody at least once. There were three basic taxes: (1) a ground or produce tax took one tenth of all the grain a man grew and one fifth of all his wine and fruits, (2) income tax took one percent of a man’s earnings, and (3) everyone aged 14–65 paid a poll tax collected at the census enumeration. (Women began paying the poll tax, equivalent to one day’s wages, at age 12.) It is not definite whether the question that was directed at Jesus referred to taxes in general, or just to the poll tax. At any rate, it was carefully worded. If Jesus supported taxation he would stand to lose his tremendous popularity with the people, but if he denounced taxation he could become another Judas” [NCWB].

- 1) These representatives from the Sanhedrin employed flattery and deceit to try to trap Jesus.
- 2) They asked whether or not they should pay taxes to Caesar.
- 3) Jesus recognized their hypocrisy and asked for a denarius.
- 4) He asked, “Whose inscription is on this?”
- 5) When they answered, “Caesar’s”, He said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s—Jesus’ reply packed a double punch. There was no way anyone could find a loophole in the answer, and it left no opportunity to pursue the matter further. Nobody could argue with the answer. and to God the things that are God’s—Jesus’ simple statement was loaded with meaning for these men. The person who uses the emperor’s money pays the emperor’s taxes because he has earned that right as ruler of the empire. However, Jesus says, there is another dominion that exceeds his authority at the same time it supports it. God’s sphere of authority eclipses the emperor’s but does not invalidate it. Cranfield states, “Here Jesus is not saying there are two separate independencies, that of Caesar and

that of God (for Caesar and all that is his belong to God); but he is indicating that there are obligations to Caesar which do not infringe the rights of God but are indeed ordained by God.” Man has an obligation to both God and government (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:13-17)” [NCWB].

6) Once again, they were amazed at Jesus!

12:18-23 - SOME SADDUCEES...CAME TO JESUS. *“Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying, ‘Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN’S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one’s wife will she be? For all seven had married her.’”* The Sadducees were the Jewish aristocratic party whose members came largely from the priesthood and the upper classes.

“Though less numerous and popular than the Pharisees, they occupied influential positions on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court and generally cooperated with the Roman authorities. They denied the truths of the resurrection, future judgment, and the existence of angels and spirits (cf. Acts 23:6-8). They accepted only the Books of Moses (the Pentateuch) as authoritative and rejected the oral traditions observed as binding by the Pharisees. This is Mark’s only reference to the Sadducees” [BKC].

Some have called this confrontation a “press conference”, but it was more like an inquisition. Jesus had silenced the Pharisees on the tax issue, so now the Sadducees, who said there is no resurrection, confront Jesus with another question.

“With nothing to live for after death, these men made the most of their life on earth by surrounding themselves with material possessions. They were, for the most part, members of the rich ruling class of that day. Since they did not believe in a spirit world they were hardly friends of the Pharisees. Yet they felt they were on the right religious track anyway, because of their strict insistence on the written law. They condemned the Pharisees for putting equal weight on the written law and the traditional rules they had built up around them. At the same time, they rejected all of the OT except the Pentateuch. The Pharisees could not get along with the Sadducees any better than they could with the Herodians, but they all got together to ‘gang up’ on Jesus” [NCWB].

12:24 - YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES. *“Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?”*

1) The Pharisees and Sadducees knew the Law, they knew the oral traditions of the Jews, but they did

not know the Scriptures. We make a mistake when we think modern day Jews know the Hebrew Scriptures. A Jewish friend told me today that Judaism does very little to prepare people for anything beyond death. He talked about good works one might do, but again stressed that there is no way he can know anything about what lies beyond death. When I tried to quote Old Testament Scriptures he said, "I am an evolutionist and I don't believe in any religion. As a matter of fact, I have reservations about anything that has happened in the past ten thousand years." He added, "All those things you quoted don't mean anything to me."

One of the biggest problems with shallow preaching, dumbed-down Sunday School lessons, and touchy-feely Bible studies is that while people may be excited about their church, and they may feel good about themselves - if they do not know the Scriptures the church is in trouble. A speaker at the Southern Baptist of Texas Convention in 2004 made the statement that therapy sermons are killing the church. A lady made the statement that she had joined a local mega-church and she loves her pastor, "because he doesn't preach the Bible, he just tells us how to live." Many of us fought the Battle for the Bible, but sadly, now that the battle has been won, some of those who helped win it are not preaching the Word. Somewhere along the way some of those people seemed to concentrate on the Word of God but neglected the God of the Word.

2) They did not know the power of God. My brother-in-law, Jimmy Furr, for twelve years led conferences all across America on New Age Movements, cults, and the occult. He made the statement that many young people who become involved in the occult say that they turned to the occult because they found a power there they had not found in the church. It is understandable that a lost person would not know the power of God, but that should never be said of a Christian. Jesus said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, HCSB).

12:25-27 - WHEN THEY RISE. *"For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, and the God of Jacob'? 'He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken.'"*

1) Jesus clearly and succinctly explained the fallacy of the hypothetical position of the Sadducees. "Marriage is an institution that God designed specifically for the procreation of the human race. When death is no longer a possibility, procreation will no longer be a necessity. That is precisely God's plan (Luke 20:36). Man would not be governed by physical laws but will be "like angels" (there is no article in Gk.) instead. That is, he will share the immortal nature of angels. Since Jesus was speaking specifically about death, and life after death, it is safe to assume that immortality is the only angelic quality Jesus was talking about. In the same way, when Luke (20:36) says we will be the "sons of God" he qualifies it by adding that this is only in respect to the fact that we will be "sons of the resurrection" (Gk.). We can never be sons of God in the same sense that Jesus is, but we will be his sons in the sense that we will share his eternal nature"[NCWB].

What could have been more absurd than for the Sadducees to argue about the resurrection when they did not even believe in the resurrection, nor did they believe in a spirit world, or in angels. It has been suggested that all of their problems related to their refusal to admit this basic truth. “Because they had no concept of spiritual laws they tried to apply the physical laws of marriage in hypothesizing about a spiritual afterlife. This implied a denial of the divine power that would generate resurrection from the dead, and amounted to virtual atheism” [NCWB]. My Jewish friend rejected his orthodox upbringing many years ago, and by his own admission trained himself “not to be religious.” Now he proudly proclaims, “I am a scientist, I am not religious. I am an evolutionist and I don’t believe in much that has happened in the last ten thousand years.” He has not properly processed the fact that both the First Law of Thermodynamics and the Second Law of Thermodynamics clearly refute evolution and demand intelligent design. My friend’s world-view is remarkably similar to that of the Sadducees.

2) Jesus pointed to Moses to make His case. “Jesus pointed out this discrepancy in their reasoning by citing Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush. It was a skillful tactic in dealing with these rationalists since they had just finished quoting Moses’ law to build their own hypothetical argument (12:19) [NCWB].

In vs. 27, He says, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living (lit. “he is not a God of dead persons but of living persons.”

“The emphasis in the Greek is on the present tense predicate: is. Jesus demonstrated that God is the God of living men. Though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had long been dead by the time God spoke this to Moses, God still talked about them as if they were alive. The only possible explanation is that there is life after death, and that men retain a conscious relationship with God that never ends. It is generally admitted that Jesus chose a passage from Moses to prove his point about the resurrection because it was the only part of Scripture the Sadducees recognized. Some have further suggested that he chose it because every level of Hebrew society accepted the Pentateuch as the fundamental source of their religious and legal system” [NCWB].

12:28 - THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT. “*One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘What commandment is the foremost of all?’*” They are ganging up on Jesus now. First, it was the Pharisees and Herodians, then came the Sadducees, and now we have a scribe. The scribe at this time performed basically the same duties as do our lawyers. Though scribes were originally secretaries who duplicated copies of the law by hand, sometime during the inter-biblical period they became professional people, trained to interpret and apply the law. The blending of these two functions was natural. Their secretarial experience served them well, and they continued to record all the transactions and interpretations they had handled over the years until they gained a knowledge of the law and at the same time they built up great libraries, similar to that in some of our law libraries. “These records developed to the point where a person could find a precedent for almost any situation that might arise in the course of everyday affairs. By the time Jesus arrived, their stature as a national tradition was so prominent that they were the sole source of legal and religious advice in the country, and carried more weight than

the Scriptures themselves” [NCWB].

This scribe seems more sincere than the others who had been trying to trap Jesus. He perceived that Jesus had answered them well, so he asked Him what he thought was the greatest commandment. This is not to say that he was not also trying to trap Jesus.

“He came with no apparent hostile or hidden motive to appraise Jesus’ skill in answering a much-debated subject in scribal circles. Traditionally the scribes spoke of 613 individual commandments of the Mosaic Law—365 negative ones and 248 positive ones. While they believed all were binding, they assumed a distinction between weightier and lighter statutes and often attempted to sum up the whole Law in a single unifying command” [BKC].

12:29 - 31 - YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD. *“Jesus answered, ‘The foremost is, ‘HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ ‘The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

1) Jesus quotes from Deut 6:4, 5 and then Lev 19:18 (Mark 12:31). The former passage came to be known as the shema (Heb.), after the first word of the verse which means “hear.” This text became the Jewish confession of faith and was recited every morning and evening by devout Jews. “The word ‘first’ (prōtē, Gk.) may mean first in sequence or first in importance and significance. In this context the scribe probably had the latter sense in mind (v. 28). This can be seen in comparing Matt 22:34-37, where the superlative term “great” (megas, Gk.) is used as a synonym” [BSB].

The HCSB renders verses 30-31, “This is the most important,’ Jesus answered: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”

2) The first, or “the most important” commandment is that “you shall love the Lord your God” with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. This “foremost” commandment covers the first four of the Ten Commandments. If you love the Lord with all your heart you do not worship others gods. If you love the Lord with all your soul you do not take His name in vain, or violate the Lord’s Day.

3) The second commandment is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If you love your neighbor as God expects you to, you do not steal from him. You do not kill him, and you do not commit immoral acts with him/her. If you really love your neighbor you do not covet his possessions.

12:32-33 - YOU HAVE TRULY STATED. *“The scribe said to Him, ‘Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE’S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt*

offerings and sacrifices.” The scribe was quick to affirm the accuracy of Jesus’ answer and acknowledged that Jesus was indeed an excellent Teacher (cf. vv. 14, 19). This scribe shows more character than some of his cohorts, making a bold statement that the double command of love is much more important than “All burnt offerings (fully consumed sacrifices) and sacrifices (those partly consumed and partly eaten by worshipers; cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 21:3; Jer. 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8). ‘He had responded wisely, and Jesus probably stimulated further thought by declaring, You are not far (“not far” is emphatic in Gr.) from the kingdom of God (cf. Mark 1:15; 4:11; 10:15, 23)” [BKC].

He restated Jesus’ answer, “carefully avoiding mention of God (not in the Gr. text but supplied in the NIV) in keeping with the typical Jewish practice of avoiding unnecessary use of the divine name out of great respect for it. The words, There is no other but Him, come from Deuteronomy 4:35. He also substituted the word understanding for “soul” and “mind” (cf. Mark 12:30)” [BKC].

12:34 - WHEN JESUS SAW... “*When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.*” Jesus’ appraisal was that this scribe answered intelligently, and from this statement we may infer that he was intellectually honest.

The religious leaders had tried repeatedly to trap Jesus, but they had failed at every turn. “Their reactions are progressive: “So they left Him and went away” (v. 12); “And they marveled at Him” (v. 17); “But after that no one dared question Him” (v. 34). They realized that they could not trap Jesus and further attempts were useless” [BSB].

12:35-37 - HE TAUGHT IN THE TEMPLE. “*And Jesus began to say, as He taught in the temple, “How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? “David himself said in the Holy Spirit, ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET.’ ‘David himself calls Him ‘Lord’; so in what sense is He his son?’ And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.”*

1) Jesus taught the people. Jesus preached the most important sermon ever preached when He preached the Sermon on the Mount. Without a doubt, He was the greatest preacher who ever lived. He was also the greatest teacher and he never missed an opportunity to teach His disciples. When I was growing up I recall hearing people say, “Our pastor is not a good preacher - but he is a good teacher.” In those days when many smaller churches did not have a sound system, or a poor one at best, volume was important and many people would be happy with any preachers who “had a good voice.” Many were ecstatic when he combined the voice with emotion and volume. To many, expository preaching was only teaching. People who only want to hear “hell-fire and brimstone” preaching are not interested hearing the pastor who feels compelled to teach his people.

Preaching and teaching are not mutually exclusive. I have heard a lot of preachers say they received more from the preaching of the late Stephen Olford than any other preacher they ever heard. Stephen Olford insisted that there is a famine in America today and it is a famine of expository preaching. He was right, and sadly, it seems to be getting worse. Some of those called to preach the Word have dumbed down the Word. Sunday School and Vacation Bible lessons have been dumbed down and

because those lessons are more popular with a lot of people we continue to publish them. Dr. Mike Minnix, Vice President in Evangelism for the Georgia Baptist Convention asked me to send him a sample of The Bible Notebook commentaries. He was interested in seeing what kind of commentaries I had written. He had added sermons from The Sermon Notebook to their web site. His concern, he said, was that he was seeing a lot of “fluff” in commentaries. I agreed and pointed out the commentaries you see in which the margin is wider than the column.

If you want to stir a bunch of people up to get a certain response, especially if you want an immediate response, a fiery, emotional sermon may be in order, but if you want to make a long-term contribution to that person, teach him the Word of God - and you can teach with conviction and power. You can preach with divine unction and still leave someone something to think about - food on which to grow. Popular preaching may focus attention on the preacher but expository preaching focuses on the needs of the people. Jesus had precious time left and he sought to teach His disciples what they would need for the coming weeks, months, and years.

2) Jesus taught in the temple. The scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, and Herodians considered this their special domain. They had to prove to Rome that they could maintain order, and control of the temple was essential. Yet, Jesus, without ecclesiastical authorization, began teaching the people in the temple. His enemies thought the temple was theirs. He knew it was His.

I wonder if there is a defining moment, or possibly a pivotal point in the life of every person who rejects Jesus, a moment that will haunt him for all eternity, adding to the torment of hell. I wonder what Judas has spent most of the past two thousand years thinking about the one moment he can never get out of his mind. Do you believe these scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees ever really get any relief from the memory of the last days of Jesus’ life in Jerusalem? I seriously doubt that the soul sentenced to hell forever spends all his time reminiscing about his immorality, his dishonesty, his drugs or alcohol. I do believe he can never escape that time when he ultimately and decisively said, No to Jesus Christ.

3) Jesus used David to make his point. Matthew’s genealogy proves that Jesus is the son of Abraham according to the Covenant, and the son of David according to the royal line (see the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7).

This is very significant - and the timing and place make it even more so. Jesus was teaching not only His apostles now, but a large crowd. What question had the leading men of the temple just asked Him? “By what authority are you doing these things?” (cleansing the temple). No doubt they were wondering by what authority He was teaching this great crowd of people.

They were looking for a Messiah, but not the kind He proclaimed Himself to be. They wanted another David who would drive out the Romans and expand their borders to cover all the area David had conquered. What Jesus is saying is that if David had been there that day he would have called Jesus Lord.

The crowd loved listening to Jesus, which made it even more imperative for the Sanhedrin to silence

Him. Permanently. They were willing to interrupt preparations for Passover in order to have God's true Passover Lamb murdered. They think they are in control - or at least, they are afraid of losing control. Little do they realize that He is actually in control. They could have done nothing to Him against the will of the Father.

12:38-40 - BEWARE OF THE SCRIBES. *“In His teaching He was saying: “Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.”*

1) Jesus warns the crowd to beware of the scribes, and by implications others who profaned the temple. He was keenly aware of the abuses of the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. Some of the people may well have been aware of it, but they could do very little about it. A Jewish friend often brings up the hypocrisy he has seen in Christians. I may have surprised him when I agreed with him. I don't like hypocrisy either! I don't like it in church members who profess to be Christians but, as they used to say, “never darken the doors of the church.” I don't like hypocrisy in those who are in church every Sunday and though they profess to love the Lord but often compromise. Most importantly, I don't like hypocrisy when I see it in my self. Any time I let someone compliment me on something when I am not deserving and do not correct them I am being hypocritical. The scribes of whom Jesus warned the people were not benignly hypocritical, they were blatantly hypocritical and abusive. They wallowed in self-love, self-righteousness, and self-aggrandizement.

2) Jesus not only warned the people, He inflamed the scribes and their ecclesiastical cohorts. The time was at hand. Jesus must be falsely accused, tried, condemned, and nailed to a cross. These were the people who would cause it to happen. He is giving them all the incentive they would ever need. To protect their precious temple they would frame the Lord of the temple! To Him, it was a place of worship; to them it was a source of power, honor, and wealth.

The Widow's Mite

12:41-44 OBSERVING...PEOPLE. *“And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.’”*

1) Jesus observed how people were putting money into the treasury. Jesus showed a keen interest in the treasury. Why? To what end? Does this say that He was observing **how much** people put into the treasury? NO. He was observing **“how** the people were putting money into the treasury. This surely does not mean the mechanics of their giving. He was not checking them out to see whether they paid by cash, check, or credit card..

“How” may imply that some gave ostentatiously, seeking recognition and praise for their generosity, while others gave privately, desiring no recognition. Others may have given sacrificially. Jesus observed **how** they gave. He observes how we give. Do we bring the tithes and offerings to the Lord’s house on the Lord’s Day and give it without any fanfare? Or do we make it a point to let others know what we give? Jesus is not deceived by those who do not bring their tithes and offerings systematically, but save up and make a big show of giving to a popular cause. A pastor told me about the local politician who came into the church office one Fall and told him that he wanted to do something nice for the church. He said, “I’ve been looking at the carpet in the sanctuary and I think I will replace it.” The pastor told him he appreciated the offer and he would present it to the deacons see if they wanted to recommend to the church that they accept his offer. The politician, who was a member of that church became that pastor’s enemy that day. He was not the only pastor who found himself on that man’s hit-list. I met the man once and heard his negative comments toward a staff member who had moved - “I wonder what it cost God to move him?!!!”

2) As He watched, “a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent.”

3) Jesus gave His appraisal of the poor widow’s gift: “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.”

I have never done that. I have been a tither for almost as long as I can remember. There have been times when we had to do some very careful book work in order to tithe. There have been times when we had to put off purchases for another week or a month in order to give out tithes and offerings. For years, we have paid a tithe on my salary, included taxes, plus all allotted expenses. The total is considerably more than ten percent, but my point is not how much I give - it is what I have never given. I have never done what this widow did. I may have given “when it hurt” a few times, but there was always a little something left. I have never given my all.

CHAPTER XIII

The Olivet Discourse. 13:1-37

Chapter 13 is known as the “Olivet Discourse” because it was delivered on the Mount of Olives (see vs. 3). Also called “the little Apocalypse,” this passage is a parallel to Matthew 24; 25 and Luke 21:5-36. This is the longest record of Jesus’ teaching in the Gospel According to Mark. This discourse is summarized in the Believer’s Study Bible Notes:

In this prophetic discourse Jesus speaks of both the near and the distant future. The near future is the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the distressing happenings which accompany that event in A.D. 70. The distant future is the Great Tribulation, which the near event foreshadows. This discourse was

intended to give “all” disciples (v. 37) instruction on how to behave as they await the return of the Messiah and the end of the age. The theme which occurs throughout the discourse is that of the exhortation to be vigilant or spiritually alert (vv. 5, 9, 33, 35, 37).

These exhortations, along with the repeated emphasis on no one knowing the time of the Messiah’s return (vv. 33, 35), make it clear that Jesus is interested in His disciples living a certain way, and not in having them know the time of His return. While believers wait, they are to: (1) be on guard against being deceived by those who claim to be Christ (vv. 5, 6, 21-23); (2) not be alarmed by contemporary events, which God controls (vv. 7, 8); (3) endure persecution and faithfully proclaim the gospel (vv. 9-13); and (4) always be ready (vv. 32-37) [BSB].

Jesus Teaches on Things to Come

13:1-2 - THE TEMPLE. *“As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” 2 And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.”* Jesus came to the temple each morning and then left the city to return to Bethany each afternoon or evening.

1) As they were leaving one of His disciples called His attention to the “wonderful stones” and the “wonderful buildings.” There is little doubt that most of the people who came to the temple, especially the men, were awed by the stones, just as the women would have been awed by the entire facility. Josephus gives a detailed description of the temple in Jewish Wars. Some of the stones were over 60 feet long, and the marble porch pillars were 40 feet high and carved from a single solid stone. Some report that some of these stones measured 12 feet by 20 feet by 40 feet. It would have been more amazing if the disciple had not commented on the stones and the building. We are told that

The walls withstood six days of battering without any visible effect, and the foundation was so solid that it is believed part of the original temple footings still remain. Jews were convinced of the permanent stability of the structure, not only because of its sturdy construction but also because it represented God’s residence with them. The disciple’s exclamation at the amazing architecture seems to suggest the impossibility that the buildings could ever fall, as Jesus had implied in earlier statements about the temple (see Matt. 23:38)” [NCWB].

2) Jesus responded with a prophesy about the stones and the temple. He said, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.” This had to be a shocking revelation. All who saw these stones and this magnificent temple must have thought that the temple would stand for ages. Surely, they could not foresee any contemporary force battering down these walls. Little did they realize that the time was coming within the lifetime of

many who were witnessing those stones that very day, including the Apostle John.

Herod's temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. One Roman writer wrote, "You have never seen beauty until you have seen the temple of the Jews in Jerusalem." It was still only under construction when Jesus walked with his disciples beneath its stately porches, observing the "wonderful" stones.

"Begun in 19 B.C., it was finally completed in A.D. 64, only six years before Titus' army moved in and demolished it along with the rest of the city (Josephus's Jewish Wars, 7.1.1). As he watched the foreign soldiers dig up the sacred temple and raze the city, Eleazar wrote that he wished they all would have been killed rather than have had to witness such a sight (Jewish Wars, 7.1.1). Since this magnificent structure had stood as a proud symbol of the Jewish people, the spirit of the Jews crumbled with it. Jesus warned his disciples about this ultimate humiliation of their nation long before it happened" [NCWB].

13:3 - 4 - WHEN WILL THESE THINGS BE? *"As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?'"* We are not told where the other apostles were at that time but Mark tells us that after leaving the temple, Jesus and four of His disciples stopped on the Mount of Olives and sat down, either to rest or simply to look back at the temple. There must have been a number of questions murmured as the disciples were leaving the temple after the shocking revelation by Jesus. They believed the Temple was indestructible because the walls were seemed impenetrable. As soon as they were alone with Jesus, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Him about what He had prophesied. It is interesting that Andrew is included with Peter, James, and John, the three who normally made up the inner circle. The order of the names is also interesting. Peter and James may have been mentioned first because they were the older of the two sets of brothers.

These disciples asked Jesus two questions. (1) When will these things (the destruction of the temple) be; and (2) what will be the sign all things are going to be fulfilled. Students of the Word disagree on what is meant by "all things." Some see this as historical, and assume that Jesus meant things associated with the destruction of the temple. Others see this as a reference to end-time events. From Matthew 24, many infer that they had in mind all end-time events, including the return of the Lord, for His church, His final return to earth to bring all lost people under His judgment. It is also possible that they associated the destruction of the temple with the end of the Age (cf. Matt. 24:3).

"In reply Jesus skillfully wove together into a unified discourse a prophetic scene involving two perspectives: (a) the near event, the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70); and (b) the far event, the coming of the Son of Man in clouds with power and glory. The former local event was a forerunner of the latter universal event. In this way Jesus followed the precedent of Old Testament prophets by predicting a far future event in terms of a near future event whose fulfillment at least some of His

hearers would see (cf. Mark 9:1, 12-13)” [BKC].

13:5-8 - MANY WILL COME IN MY NAME. *“And Jesus began to say to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. ‘Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He!’ and will mislead many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. ‘For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.”*

1) The very first words out of the mouth of Jesus as he “began” to teach them was “See to it that no one misleads you.” The HCSB has, “Watch out that no one deceives you.” There could hardly be a better way to begin a lesson on Eschatology, the study of last things. There are two dangers of which we should be warned at the beginning of any study on last things. First, there is the warning against those who will deceive you because they have been deceived themselves, and they sense some holy calling to conform everyone else to their own theological position. The second warning is in order because of those who actively wage war on others who do not agree with their position. I have heard many pastors condemn those who disagree with them, sometimes condemning them with an animosity totally void of the love God expects of His children.

I have had people try to force me to agree with their positions on various events in the Middle East when I really did not see either the connection or why they thought it was so important to make a connection. One man was a deacon who called a pastor from Garland, Texas and asked him to come hear me preach from the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. This visiting pastor all but shouted his Amens from the beginning of the sermon to the end, and then went to the deacon’s home and “cut me to pieces”, according to the deacon’s rather confused wife. The deacon left the church, but returned two years later and when I visited him in his place of business he said, “I had to change my mind about some of the things that were happening in the Middle East. Some of those countries didn’t do what I expected them to do.” I could have added that a lot of countries over there do not do what I expect them to do.

I am preaching through the Book of Revelation at present, and I tell our people that I am not going to answer all their questions about the prophecy in Revelation, or about end-time things in general. I cannot answer all of my questions about Eschatology. In this series of sermons I am skimming the surface, looking for the blessings promised in Rev. 1:3. I determined when I was in college and seminary that I would let the Lord lead me to the position He wants me hold, rather than simply adopt the position of some pastor I respected. I read the Scripture, read books, talked with people I respected, and still did not find all the answers to my questions. The late Dr. Leo Eddleman helped me as much as any other person. He held the premillennial position and he told me that when he was president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary if he used the word premillennial faculty members made you feel like you should go out behind the chapel and wash your mouth out with soap. In the years following my graduation, I talked with Dr. Eddleman often about various subjects. He stressed that he subscribed to the basic tenets of premillennialism, but the subject is deep and clothed in mysterious symbolism. We simply do not know when Jesus is coming again. However, as he pointed out, the rest of the New Testament tells us very clearly what we ought to be

doing in the meantime. God forbid that we should violate either the First or the Second Great Commandment by condemning a brother or sister in Christ who does not agree with us in every detail. For example, I subscribe to the Premillennial position on Eschatology, and I believe in a pre-tribulation Rapture, but if you disagree I can still have fellowship with you. In fact, if you tell me you are an Amillennialist or a Postmillennialist, we can still agree on many other issues, and we can love and support one another in worship, ministry, missions, and education.

2) Many, Jesus says, “will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He!’ and will mislead many.” There have been many false messiahs and they invariably mislead people. There are many other false prophets who do not profess to be the Messiah, but still mislead many people in subtle ways.

3) The world will see wars and hear rumors of wars, and many people will point to them and insist that they are signs that the world is coming to an end, or that the Lord is about to return. Jesus says right the opposite of that: “*When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end.*” I read somewhere that there are at least forty hot spots in the world today, where war is a very real threat. We must look elsewhere for proof that the Rapture is at hand.

4) Wars, earthquakes, and famines “are merely the beginning of birth pangs.” Islamic terrorists attacked the United States on nine-eleven, 2001, and America has led a coalition in a war on terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq. Insurgents from various Islamic nations have slipped into Iraq to wage urban warfare and suicide attacks on American soldiers, coalition soldiers, and western civilians. Numerous countries live in fear of a neighboring country.

Famine is a constant threat, especially in Third World countries. Earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, typhoons, and volcanoes claim lives and prompt modern day prophets to make predictions about end-time events. What Jesus is saying here is that every generation will witness these destructive forces - but you cannot look to any of them as proof that the end is near. The year 2004 closed with news of the most deadly tsunami on record. In the early days of 2005, there were new reports that defy the imagination. On July 7, rescue workers finally reached an Indonesian town that had been cut off since the tsunami hit. They found that the whole town has been destroyed and over seven thousand people had been drowned. The total number killed was set at 150,000, but that number could rise as thousands more are expected to be found, and as authorities wait to see if famine and disease will claim thousands more. Toward the end of January, Indonesia added 70,000 to their estimates. It is possible, some have predicted, that the number of death from starvation, bad water, disease, and other related causes could be much higher than the number killed outright by the tsunami. While we may expect more earthquakes, tsunamis, and other natural disasters, there is no way we can look at what has happened in the Indian Ocean and say that that is a specific sign that the end is at hand.

13:9 - BE ON YOUR GUARD. “*But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.*” How could anyone there that day know what believers would be facing in their immediate future. Peter and John would be dragged before the Sanhedrin and ordered

not to preach in Jesus' name; Stephen would become one of the early victims of a vicious young Pharisee named Saul, a young Pharisee from Tarsus who was doing graduate work in Jerusalem. James would become the first Apostle to be martyred, and Peter would be thrown into jail. Paul, was on the road to Damascus to expand the persecution of the saints to other cities when he met the Lord in one of the most dramatic conversion experiences ever recorded.

If you want to read a commentary on Jesus' words in this verse, just read the account of the persecution to which Paul was subjected. According to tradition, all the apostles were martyred - Paul was beheaded, Peter crucified upside down, and John was reportedly boiled in oil on the Isle of Patmos to which he had been exiled for preaching the Gospel. Christians were slaughtered by Roman gladiators and torn to pieces by half-starved lions for the entertainment of the emperor and citizens in the Roman arena; and impaled and set aflame to light Nero's garden at night. The Lord's warning is still valid today. Christians have been slaughtered throughout the centuries, but it is possible that more people have been killed for the cause of Christ in the last century than in any in all the previous centuries put together. The VOICE OF MARTYRS magazine chronicles the persecution of the saints and informs Christians of persecutions going on today.

Dr. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has made the shocking statement that the seminary must train a generation that may well go to jail for preaching the Gospel. He bases that on the postmodern mind-set that prompted Canada's parliament to pass Bill C-250, a "hate speech" code that includes sexual orientation among protected classes. The statute makes it illegal for pastors or Christian broadcasters to say that homosexuality is sinful. As he says, this is not around the world, this is just across an invisible border to the north. Mohler says:

"I think Southern Seminary's great challenge right now - not in some long distant future - is to do everything we can as a seminary, as a faculty, as a community to train, to educate, to encourage and to inspire a generation that may very well go to jail for preaching the gospel" [Jeff Robinson, Baptist Press, Southern Baptist Texan, Dec. 20, 2004, p. 12].

Jesus did not make this prophecy to discourage believers or to turn away lost people. He made the statement to prepare His followers to take advantage of every situation to be a witness for Him. Paul reached people while a prisoner he would never have met elsewhere.

13:10 - TO ALL NATIONS. *"The gospel must first be preached to all the nations."* Many today see this as the last sign that must be fulfilled before the Lord returns for His church. The Greek construction is emphatic, as in "all people worldwide."

"In proclaiming the gospel the disciples would be persecuted but they must not despair and give up. Despite all opposition, it is a priority in God's plan for this Age and will be accomplished in accordance with His purposes. It is the responsibility of each generation (cf. Rom. 1:5, 8; 15:18-24; Col. 1:6, 23). But preaching the gospel worldwide does not require or guarantee its worldwide acceptance before or at the end of the Age (cf. Matt. 25:31-46)" [BKC].

The Gospel is being preached all over the world today, in person, by radio and television, by audio and video tape, and HAM radio. Modern satellite systems have increased the spread of the Gospel phenomenally. As far as biblical prophecy is concerned, there is nothing that would prevent our Lord's return at any time.

13:11 - DO NOT WORRY. *“When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.”* We have to be careful not to expand this beyond what Jesus had in mind. I spent a lot of summers working for the Agricultural, Stabilization, and Conservation Society (U.S. Department of Agriculture). One day I drove across town from the office and picked up a farmer to go out to his place where we would take measurement and so that I could plot the fields on an aerial photograph. They do a lot of that by satellite now.

When I discovered that the farmer was pastor of a local church I asked him about his church. Finally, I asked him how he prepared his sermons. He said, “Well, you see, I got intellect. I don't have to study, I just preach ex..., ex...ex...” I decided to help him, “Extemporaneously?” He said, “That's it!” Jesus did not personally say that we should not study and prepare sermons and Bible lessons, but the Bible clearly tells us to “Study to show yourself approved unto God” so that we can rightly interpret the world of God for others (2 Timothy 2:15).

What Jesus says is that we are not to live in fear and dread of what we should say if we are arrested and forced to go to court or stand before an official to defend ourselves for preaching the Gospel. Under those circumstances, the Holy Spirit will put the words in our hearts. However, if you expect the Holy Spirit to help you at a time like that you need to have a personal relationship with Him before trouble comes. At the same time, those who are not being led by the Holy Spirit may be in far less danger of being persecuted than those who are.

13:12 - BROTHER WILL BETRAY BROTHER. *“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death.”* As shocking as these words must have been when Jesus delivered them that day, this was a warning they needed to hear. Brothers have indeed betrayed brothers and caused their death. In the old Soviet Union, children were taught in school to spy on their parents. Communism was an evil system whose leaders taught that it was a moral thing to report family members who expressed any interest in anything they considered a threat to their system. Today, Muslims betray, and sometimes kill family members who become Christians. They believe they are serving their god when they betray a neighbor or family member in many Islamic countries.

13:13 - YOU WILL BE HATED. *“You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”* The Bible clearly teaches that the world is at enmity with God, and that the world hates those who serve Him. An amazing and disturbing thing has happened in America. America was founded upon Christian principles - the Founders leave little room for doubt about that. George Washington was a man of faith. Historical revisionists may have deleted part of his farewell address to remove any reference to God, but David Barton of WallBuilders has

collected an incredible library of the works of the Founding Fathers which prove that Washington was a man of faith - not a deist as sceptics claim. Abraham Lincoln has been respected for his commitment to Christ for decades, but now the faith of early presidents has been called into question.

Now for that amazing thing that we are witnessing today. President George W. Bush is believed to be the most committed Christian to occupy the White House in over one hundred years. He reads his Bible, prays, makes decisions, and does not spend a lot of time questioning his decisions. And he is hated with a passion that is hard to comprehend. There has been some speculation that enemies of the Cross felt that they had successfully forced Christianity off the public stage and back into the church and homes of believers. They want it out of sight so no atheist will be offended by it. They praise Islam and other religions while trying to snuff out every evidence of Christianity. Now, just as they thought they had succeeded, President Bush has brought Christianity back to center stage again. The intensity of the hatred for this godly man proves that Satan is still alive and well on planet earth, as the old Hal Lindsey book proclaims.

Dan Rather, long time anchor on CBS news, rushed to judgment with an anti-Bush one hour program based on lies. Rather, who first got the attention of the liberal elite in the media with his vicious attacks on Richard Nixon, but acted like a little boy before his football hero when he interviewed Bill Clinton, sought to destroy president Bush. Numerous individuals, politicians, liberal educators, columnists, and entertainers, have appeared on TV programs to express their hatred for George W. Bush. One reason for their hatred is that this man is a Christian who is not ashamed to profess his faith in public, quote Scripture in speeches, pray with heads of state, and encourage faith-based initiatives in meeting the needs of those who are suffering. Those who hate him most vehemently will never list that as a reason, in part because they do not understand that themselves. To them it is all about the environment, the economy, the war in Iraq, education, or social security.

If you are Christlike in your behavior you must expect the world to hate you. Any expression of Christian faith that becomes popular with the world will merit careful scrutiny. Popular religious fads demand a critical look.

13:14-18 - THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION. *“But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. 17 “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 18 “But pray that it may not happen in the winter.”*

1) The ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION points to the past and to the future. First of all, the “abomination of desolation” is referenced in Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 (Matthew 24:15 affirms the connection to Daniel). In the Old Testament, “abomination” denotes idolatry with its obscene practices (Deut 29:16, 17; 1 Kin 11:6, 7; 2 Kin 16:3; 23:13; Ezek 8:9-18). “Of desolation” refers to

something that is left desolate or deserted and it points to the consequence of the abomination. We need to remember this about the Abomination of Desolation: This prophecy of Daniel has been fulfilled, and yet it is still awaiting the final fulfillment.

a. The first fulfillment was in 168-167 B.C. when the Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, erected an altar to Zeus over the altar of burnt offering and sacrificed a sow on it, and sprinkled its blood in the temple. That defilement, as bad as it was, was but a forerunner of the Antichrist.

b. A second fulfillment occurred in the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. There are some remarkable similarities to that abomination when the walls of the City of Jerusalem were breached and the city was invaded by the Romans. Herod's Temple, which was completed in A.D. 64, was destroyed in A. D. 70. There are many parallels between the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which occurred at that time and the coming ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION, which is coming during the great Tribulation. For example, the people of Jerusalem are told that when they see the enemy coming they should flee - Let him who is on the house top not come down to enter his house to gather his belonging. He must flee the awesome force that is marching toward the temple.

c. The ultimate fulfillment will take place in the future. It is apparent that Jesus is speaking here of the Great Tribulation and of the fury of the Antichrist, who desecrate the temple and breaks a covenant of three and one-half years with Israel (cf. Dan 9:24-27; 2 Thess 2:3, 4; Rev 13:14, 15). Some believe this event takes place in the middle of the Great Tribulation. John MacArthur points out that the expression, "standing where it should not," denotes continuous action and that it means that this abomination will continue during the second half of the Great Tribulation, or three and one-half years.

2) Those who may be on their house top are warned to flee as they are. In the First Century, people in Judea might well go up on top of their flat-roofed house to visit or rest where they might find a cool breeze at certain times of the year. Perhaps there is a warning here for those who would be up on their housetop when the Roman army under Titus approached Jerusalem. They must flee to the mountains or be caught inside the city during the siege. Perhaps many Christians did just that to avoid the carnage that would come when the Romans finally broke into the city. Some will see the complete fulfillment of this prophecy in the First Century. This is basically what I was taught in college and seminary.

Dr. E. R. Pinson, one of my all time favorite Bible teachers, was a very private, shy man, rather dry in class, but if you wanted to learn the Word of God you loved his classes. When I read that Dr. Pinson had just celebrated his ninety-second birthday I called to wish him a happy birthday. As we talked, he told me that he was teaching Revelation to a Sunday School class. He said, "Johnny, for the first time in my life, last Sunday I stood before a class and said, "I am a Premillennialist." Can you imagine a ninety-two year old man changing his mind about anything?! More importantly, Dr. Pinson did not get his theology from some other theologian. He became more and more convinced as he studied the Scripture that this is what the Bible teaches.

We will see that the primary emphasis here is on what believers must do when some future

Abomination of Desolation approaches Jerusalem. They will not have time to go down and enter the house and pack their belongings. They must flee immediately. Those who are working in the field must not return to their homes for their possessions (v. 16). This is going to be especially hard on pregnant women or those who are nursing babies at that time (v. 17). They had better pray that it does not occur in the winter when the roads may be muddy, and when people might die of exposure (v. 18).

Every thing mentioned might well have applied to the time of the siege of Jerusalem and the fall of the city before Titus. It might, if we did not have additional information presented in the following verses.

13:19-20 - A TIME OF TRIBULATION. *“For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days.”*

1) There have been many tribulations, but there is coming a Great Tribulation, like the world has never seen - “since the beginning of the creation), vs. 19. There have been countless vicious, campaigns against helpless victims, the earliest of which may well have been Nimrod, founder of Babylon. When the Japanese invaded Korea and China prior to World War II, we read of atrocities that are all but unbelievable. Christians and Jews were primary targets of Hitler. The world remembers only six million Jews who were brutally murdered, mention is seldom made of all the other millions killed by this evil servant of Satan. When mentioned this to retired three-star General Dutch Shoffner and added that fifteen million were killed by the Nazis, he said, “I have twenty-two million” (and he spent a lot of time in Germany). Communist leaders have been responsible for several times that many deaths. The world has seen tribulations, but there is a coming Tribulation that will be far worse than anything we have seen.

What force on earth could be worse than Hitler and Stalin? Take a serious look at Islam - especially radical Muslims who seek to destroy all opposition to their commitment to conquer the world in the name of a god that does not exist. Our media gives Islam a pass because it is “a religion of peace”, but those peaceful Muslims are doing very little to help stop those terrorists who are committing horrible atrocities on a regular basis.

2) Unless the Lord had intervened to shorten those days no one would be saved, 18a. Current wars are not described here. There have been many wars in which the targeted victims had little or no hope, as when Germany invaded Poland, but this prophecy speaks of a time when no believer in the world would be saved if the Lord does not shorten the days.

3) God shortened the ABOMINATION “for the sake of the elect”, 18b. By the elect, He means those who have been saved by the grace of God, through their faith in Jesus Christ.

13:21-23. FALSE CHRISTS. *“And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.”*

1) According to some reports, there were three leaders inside the gates of Jerusalem who claimed to be the Messiah. They reportedly stole each other's grain supply, which meant that a lot of people starved. Many others resorted to eating rats to survive.

2) False Christs and false prophets will arise and work such great wonders that many will be deceived. The purpose is to lead people astray, including the elect, vs. 22.

3) Jesus warns us to pay attention to everything He has told us, vs. 23. We have been forewarned, so there is no excuse for anyone who rejects Him.

The Return of Christ, 13:24-37

13:24-27 - IN THOSE DAYS. *“But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.”*

1) Jesus will return after the Great Tribulation, vs. 24. The coming of Jesus Christ depicted here is not to be confused with that presented in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 or 1 Cor 15:51-58 where Paul writes about the “rapture” of the church. This passage deals with the return of Jesus Christ following the Great Tribulation to inaugurate the kingdom age (Rev 19:11-21).

Jesus says that the sun will be darkened, which means that the moon will not reflect the light of the sun. It is believed by many creation scientists that at the time of the Deluge in Noah's day enough volcanic ash was blown into atmosphere to shut out the sunlight for a significant period of time. This may have caused the temperature to plunge so low that animals in the polar region would be flash-frozen. Even giant mammoths have been discovered in ice banks with green grass in their teeth, and undigested grass in their stomachs. If this was the case the area effected most severely would have been in areas farthest from the Equator. If those conditions had existed all over the world all those in the Ark would have frozen to death.

When Bobby was a young boy he was riding his bike on a street in Greenville, Mississippi one night when he looked up - and was surprised to see a full moon and there was a reddish tint to it. Bobby was immediately reminded of a sermon he had heard in which the preacher announced that before

the end of the world the moon would turn to blood. Bobby panicked. He couldn't take his eyes off the moon - until he hit the utility pole. He thought for a few minutes that his world had already come to an end.

The way Scripture dealing with end-time events has been presented from time to time has not only frightened children, it has confused adults. However, we must not avoid the subject because the Lord gave us this prophecy to encourage us, not to discourage us. Even though the return of Christ will follow the most amazing and shocking physical phenomena imaginable - actually, what will happen will defy the imagination - the Lord gave us this information for some very good reasons:

- a. We need to know He has a plan.
- b. We need to know what His plan is.
- c. We need to know He is in control.

2) The stars will be falling from heaven, vs. 25.

3) Then those living at that time will "see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory", VS. 26. This time He will not be coming as Suffering Servant, but as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Never again will some enemy of the Cross rant and rave against Jesus on some satellite news program. Never again will fanatical Muslims attack Christians, and never again will some talking head on some TV news program try to convince the world that Christians are the real villains. Never again will a Hitler slaughter millions of his own citizens. Never again will a Stalin or some other Communist leader murder millions of their own citizens or attack a neighbor. When Jesus returns He will put every enemy under his foot. That means He will treat them as His foot stool, showing complete mastery over all enemies. All believers should be rejoicing in that blessed hope. Jesus is coming again. I may not know everything He is going to do, but this much I do know - whatever He is up to I am in on it!

4) At His return He will send his angels and they will "gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven." When is all of this going to happen? I am glad you asked, and I have an answer - I don't know. I do not have all the answers, and I do not know anyone else who does. I have known a few who seemed to think they did and those kind of people cause some apprehension for me.

Here are some things we do know. God has never given anyone permission to look over His shoulder at His Eschatological calendar, so we do not know the day or the hour when the rapture will take place. What we do know is that the Great Tribulation, a seven year period of persecution like the world has never seen. It will begin soon after the saints are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and removed from the earth.

We also know that all those people who have claimed to know the date of the Lord's return in the past have one thing in common - They have all been wrong! The man who criticized me because I

did not agree with him on some of his predictions had to come back and admit that some of those countries in the Middle East did not do what He expected them to do. The man who tried to convince me that, though he never went to church and could not understand the rest of the Bible he could explain Revelation - well, he was not very convincing.

The following comparison may help.

THE RAPTURE AND RETURN OF CHRIST COMPARED

Phase One - the Rapture

Phase two - The Return of Christ

Jesus comes to receive His church
In the air (the Rapture).

He returns with His bride and angels to earth

The seven year Great Tribulation
begins immediately after the Rapture

The Millennium Kingdom established after
His return.

This event can happen at any time

Many signs precede this event (Rev. 6-19)

This offers comfort to believers

It is a message of judgment for unbelievers

The church is primary entity

Israel is primary entity

Judgment seat of Christ for believers

Sheep and goat's judgment, Mt. 25:31-46
Antichrist and world judged, Rev. 19:11-21

Only believers effected

All people effected.

The church taken Into the Lord's
presence in heaven

All believers to reign with Christ

The major theme of 1 Thessalonians

The major theme of 2 Thessalonians

13:28 - PARABLE FROM THE FIG TREE. *“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.”* The disciples had asked (v. 4a), “When will these things happen?” Jesus exhorted them to learn a lesson

(Lit., parable) from the fig tree. “Though the fig tree was sometimes used as a symbol for Israel (11:14), Jesus did not intend such a meaning here (in Luke 21:29 the words “and all the trees” are added). In contrast with most of Palestine’s trees, fig trees lose their leaves in winter and bloom later in the spring. Thus whenever the stiff, dry, winter twigs become tender, softened due to the rising sap, and leaves appear, then observers know that winter is past and summer is near” [BKC]. The parable offers hope, renewal, and the promise of life.

13:29 - HE IS NEAR. *“Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door.”* In the original language the main clause can be “it is near” (the second advent) or “He is near” (Christ). “From our present vantage point in history we know that Jesus was not only pointing to the end of Jewish oppression, but to the final end of all of man’s trouble, when he comes back to earth (1 Thess. 2:14-16; Luke 11:52)” [NCWB].

13:30 - THIS GENERATION. *“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* What did Jesus mean by “this generation”? Search me! I have no idea, but I heard it often enough during my early years in the ministry. To many people it denoted the generation in which those apostles were living. Indeed, many anticipated His imminent return.

Others thought Jesus was referring to the final generation before the Great Tribulation. According to the various sages who were speculating on end-time events, “this generation” began when the Jews returned to Palestine in 1946 - or was it 1948? How long was a generation? Twenty years? Forty years? Maybe we had better change that to 1963 and make it forty years. Jesus would return in 1993! Commentaries consider various possibilities:

“Both Matthew and Luke record this discussion as well as Mark, but their words do not make it any easier to interpret. Again the argument is over what Jesus meant by the expression, “this generation.” It probably has a dual significance. Most immediately, it refers to the generation of Jews in Jesus’ day, for they were the ones who would see the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70). More distantly (and secondarily), ‘this generation’ could refer to any Jews living until the end of the age, for ‘this generation’ could mean ‘the Jewish race’ [NCWB].

13:31- WILL NOT PASS AWAY. *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”* The created universe will pass away, including the heavens and the earth. God’s word, however, will not pass away. The physical world will come to a cataclysmic end according to Peter (2 Peter 3). As God promised in Isaiah 40:8, His word will stand forever. There is another interesting truth here:

“Here is Jesus’ strongest statement concerning the divine authority by which he spoke. Not even Paul or Moses could make such claims. It is more than any human would dare to say. This claim reinforces everything Jesus had been saying. These things will happen because he has said they will. Just as the buds on the fig tree tell you spring is coming, so the occurrence of the events he has predicted will tell us that Jesus himself is coming back soon” [NCWB].

13:32 - THAT DAY. *“But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”*

1) “That day or hour” is generally understood to refer to the Son of Man’s second coming (Mark 13:26). However, we must remember that the Second Coming of the Lord will be the culmination a series of preliminary events.

“In light of Old Testament usage and this context (vv. 14, 29-30) it is preferable to understand “that day” as referring to “the day of the Lord.” The “day of the Lord” includes the Tribulation, the Second Advent, and the Millennium (cf. Isa. 2:12-22; Jer. 30:7-9; Joel 2:28-32; Amos 9:11; Zeph. 3:11-20; Zech. 12-14)” [BKC].

It will begin suddenly and unexpectedly (cf. 1 Thes. 5:2), so no one except the Father knows the critical moment.

2) No one knows the day or hour of Christ’s return for His church.

- a. Not even the angels in heaven.
- b. Nor the Son
- c. Only the Father knows.

I have been amazed at the people who announce that they know what the angels do not know - or did not know at that time. They know what the human Jesus did not know. I knew a pastor who hauled around a large chart in the trunk of his car - just in case someone asked him! Numerous people have made predictions based on the speculations of man, and all those who have tried to pin-point the exact time for the return of the Lord have one thing in common - they have all been wrong (if they looked to any date in the past).

The fact that so many people have been deceived, deceived themselves, or deceived others does not mean that we should ignore the subject. The fact that someone else spends his life eating junk-food does not mean that I should not seek nutrition through food. A lot of sincere people have shied away from this subject - and I did for a number of years. I had heard very little preached other than the fact that Jesus is coming again, and that I will spend eternity with Him in heaven. Through college and seminary all I heard was the amillennial position. Of course, there was the position Dr. Howard Spell, academic dean and Bible teacher (not religion teacher!) at Mississippi College professed. When asked, he said, “I am pro-millennial. However the Lord works it out I am for it.” Many people who have not studied Eschatology would probably appreciate Dr. Spell’s answer, and others of us who have spent a lot of time on the subject may appreciate his response, if not his position. I have heard people say, “I am a pan-millennialist, I believe it is all going to pan out in the end.” I am pro-millennial - whatever He is up to, I want to be in on it. I also believe He will pan it out in the end.

That answer never did satisfy me, so I began to study the Bible, I read what others had to say, and

unfortunately, I was turned off by some of the things I read! I discovered in time that, though I had met some theological quacks whose primary focus was Eschatology, I am convinced that the Lord has led me to the premillennial position through the study of the Word of God, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Though we may be able to discern, in a general way, the nearness of His return (13:28-29), no one knows the precise moment when that day or hour will arrive (vs. 33) except the Father. Not even the angels (cf. 1 Peter 1:12) nor the Son know. You mean that Jesus does not know when He is returning? This verse does not say that Jesus does not know at present when He will return for His church. What it says is that the human Jesus did not know the exact time of His return. It is amazing how many people there have been who know more than Jesus did!

“This openly expressed limitation on Jesus’ knowledge affirms His humanity. In His Incarnation Jesus voluntarily accepted human limitations, including this one (cf. Acts 1:7), in submission to the Father’s will (cf. John 4:34). On the other hand Jesus’ use of “the Son” title (only here in Mark) instead of the usual “Son of Man” revealed His own awareness of His deity and sonship (cf. Mark 8:38). Nevertheless He exercised His divine attributes only at the Father’s bidding (cf. 5:30; John 8:28-29)” [BKC].

It is interesting that Mark is the only writer to record Jesus’ admission that He did not even know when he was coming back to earth. No doubt many people have asked, how could he be God and not know everything? Luther believed that this was something Jesus knew but did not have the authority to communicate.

“Calvin heads the list of those who insist on a literal interpretation of what Jesus said. If Jesus meant exactly what he said, this is the strongest possible warning we could have against speculating on the precise time when he will return. If he himself did not know, how are we to figure out the date from what he said? That date is locked in the mind of God. As in other areas of his life on earth, Jesus deliberately denied himself this knowledge (Phil. 2:5-8). “The Son of man” as man had emptied himself of certain divine prerogatives—one of which was prescience concerning the actual time of his return” [NCWB].

13:33 - TAKE HEED. *“Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come.”* Since no one on earth knows when Jesus is going to appear to rapture His church, Jesus warns us to “keep on the alert.” We do know Jesus will return with the saints to establish His reign at the end of seven years of tribulation, but we do not know when Jesus will appear in the air to rapture His church, but we do know this will immediately precede the Great Tribulation. What do we need to do? Watch and pray - be alert. How seriously do most Christians take the Lord’s admonition? Do we really expect the Lord’s return? Do we say with John, “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus”?

13:34 - 37 - BE ON THE ALERT. *“It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the*

morning - in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'"

1) The Parable or illustration of the Absent House Owner, unique to Mark, was given to urge us to be alert, v. 34. It reinforces the Lord's admonition to be alert, to be faithful in all things, to be vigilant, to anticipate the Lord's imminent return.

“For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey—The story starts out just like the story of the man who gave talents (money) to his servants for them to invest while he went on a trip (Matt. 25:14, 15) and commanded the porter to watch—Whether Jesus intended the ‘porter’ to be equated with our church leaders and pastors in this analogy is difficult to say; however, his story does suggest that someone has responsibility for warning and reminding people of his return” [NCWB].

2) We must watch for the Lord's return, 13:35-36. In the parable, the slaves and the door keeper were urged to be alert for the return of the master. Here, we are told to be on the alert for the Lord's return - for ye know not when the master of the house comes, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning.

“The reference to the four watches corresponds to the Roman system of reckoning time. The evening was 6-9 P.M.; the midnight watch was 9 P.M. till midnight; when the rooster crows was the third watch (midnight till 3 A.M.); and dawn was 3-6 A.M. (These names of the watches were derived from their termination points.) This differs from the Jewish system of dividing the night into three watches. Mark used the Roman system for his readers' benefit (cf. 6:48)” [BKC].

3) Jesus calls on all to be alert, v. 37. He was talking to His disciples here, but the message is clearly to be applied to all believers. “Watch” might imply that the master was going to be away for some time, but Jesus may return at any time.

CHAPTER XIV

Death Plot, 14:1-2

The religious leaders had been plotting against Jesus for months (3:6; 11:18; 12:12). They had tried to refute His message, deny His claims, and exposed Him before the crowds as a fraud. Having failed in that, they decided that the only way to silence Him is to kill Him. Their plans are about to become a reality. Little did they realized that, now that the appointed time had come, Jesus would be sure that they had the provocation they had sought to demand His death. He will be put to death.

It will be accomplished by:

- (1) The betrayal by Judas (vv. 10, 11).
- (2) The desertion of all those close to Jesus (vv. 27-31, 50).
- (3) The trials before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate (vv. 53-65; 15:1-5).
- (4) His crucifixion (15:16-41).

“The experience of the suffering and death which lay ahead was not unforeseen (cf. 8:31; 9:30-32; 10:32-34); it was rather the plan of God and the intent of Jesus. As the Messiah, Jesus’ mission was to “give His life a ransom for many” (see 10:45 and note). The suffering and death of Jesus are the necessary prelude to the resurrection, in which the Messiah is vindicated and victorious” [BSB]

14:1- THE PASSOVER. *“Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him.”* Passover week fell in the month of Nisan on the Jewish calendar. Passover was the first of the three annual festivals. It commemorated the final plague on Egypt when the firstborn of the Egyptians died and the Israelites were spared because of the blood smeared on their door posts (Ex. 12:11, 21, 27, 43, 48).

“Passover took place on the fourteenth day (at evening) of the first month (Lev. 23:5). The animal (lamb or kid) to be slain was selected on the tenth day of the month (Ex. 12:3) and slaughtered on the fourteenth day and then eaten (Deut. 16:7). None of the animal was to be left over on the following morning (Ex. 34:25). The uncircumcised and the hired servant were not permitted to eat the sacrifice (Ex. 12:45-49). The Passover was also called the feast of unleavened bread (Ex. 23:15; Deut. 16:16) because only unleavened bread was eaten during the seven days immediately following Passover (Ex. 12:15-20; 13:6-8; Deut. 16:3-8). Unleavened bread reflected the fact that the people had no time to put leaven in their bread before their hasty departure from Egypt” [HBD].

It is very difficult for the modern American to appreciate the scope of the participation of the masses in the observance of Passover.

“An example of the massive participation of the Jewish people in the feast is the fact that during the reign of Nero approximately 265,000 lambs were killed for one Passover alone. Since one lamb was supposed to feed at least ten adults, nearly three million people must have taken part in that single feast. Some people believe that Jesus actually died at the precise moment when the Passover lamb was slaughtered; however, this has been a matter of argument for some time.” [NCWB].

The chief priests and the scribes sought how they might arrest Him and put him to death. There was one high priest, but there were a number of chief priests. Among them would have been those who had already served in that capacity. The Roman governor at this time appointed the high priest each

year and those in their favor would receive the appointment. Annas, had served and then secured an appointment for his sons and for his son-in-law, Caiaphas.

According to Matthew (26:3), they met in the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest at the time, to decide on a course of action. This was a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court and their purpose was to decide how to go about killing Jesus. According to Matthew (26:2), Jesus was aware of their deliberations, or at least of the results of them, for he told his disciples: “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified” (KJV).

14:2 - NOT DURING THE FESTIVAL. *“For they were saying, “Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people.”* Matthew’s account of these final two days is much more exhaustive than Mark’s. It was agreed that any plans for his death would have to wait at least seven days. “With somewhere between two and three million people crammed inside the walls of the capital for a week, anything might happen—especially when they were mostly men who had come in from all over the country. The feverish festival atmosphere was ripe for riot and violence. Even the Romans were particularly sensitive to the mood of the occasion and took heavy precautions against revolt at this time” [NCWB].

That is the reason the Jewish authorities were so hesitant to arrest Jesus until after the festival was over. It is interesting that though they seem to have been talking about a plan, it does not seem to have gotten off the ground since they accepted Judas’s proposal - apparently without any debate.

The important thing to remember is that they failed in their plans to have Him crucified after Passover. He was crucified during this week, not after it, as the religious leaders had originally planned. In dying when He did, Jesus reinforced the fact that his death replaced the animal sacrifice which had made man acceptable before God. Jesus is the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:6-8). He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth.

JESUS ANOINTED IN BETHANY, 14:3-9

14:3 - A WOMAN WITH AN ALABASTER VIAL. *“While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very Costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.”* This anointing episode is not to be equated with an earlier anointing in Galilee (Luke 7:36-50). It is the same episode recorded in John 12:1-8, but with some significant differences, especially concerning when the anointing occurred. In John’s account, this event occurred “six days before the Passover.”

“That would mean that it happened at the beginning of the Passover festival, Nisan 14 (Thursday). This means it occurred the previous Friday. Mark’s placement seems to suggest that the episode occurred on Wednesday of Passion Week (cf. Mark 14:1a). In light of this it seems reasonable to follow John’s chronology and to conclude that Mark used the incident thematically (cf. introduction to 2:1-12; 11:1-11) to contrast the responses of this woman and Judas. Consequently the time

reference in 14:1 governs the leaders' concern to arrest Jesus, not this event" [BKC].

Jesus was apparently being honored with a festive meal in the home of Simon the Leper, a man apparently cured by Jesus previously, a man who was well known to the early disciples. The unnamed woman was Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus (cf. John 12:3). She came with an alabaster jar, a small stone flask with a long slender neck, containing about a pint of costly perfume (lit., "ointment") made of pure (unadulterated) nard, an aromatic oil from a rare plant root native to India.

Mary broke the slender neck of the stone bottle and poured it over Jesus' head. John wrote that she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair (cf. John 12:3). "Both are possible since Jesus was reclining on a dining couch at the table (cf. Mark 14:18). Anointing a guest's head was a common custom at festive Jewish meals (cf. Ps. 23:5; Luke 7:46) but Mary's act had a greater meaning" [BKC].

14:4-5 - INDIGNANTLY REMARKING. *"But some were indignantly remarking to one another, 'Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they were scolding her."* One can almost anticipate the response to this magnanimous gesture. One could also reflect on what our thoughts might have been under the circumstances. A quick calculation told them that Mary had just poured the equivalent of a year's salary over the head of Jesus. That these disciples would be surprised is understandable. At the same time, remember that these are not the scribes and Pharisees who were trying to trap Jesus, they were His disciples, most of whom were His twelve apostles. Furthermore, they were not just calculating the value of the perfume, they scolded the woman who had performed this incredible act. The comment that they actually scolded Mary is unique to Mark's account.

Concern for the poor is legitimate. The Lord expects us to be concerned for the poor. However, the motive behind their expression of concern for the poor here is not honest or pure. According to John 12:4, Judas was the primary spokesman for the group, and John tells us that Judas was a thief. He was their treasurer and he was stealing from Jesus and the other apostles. Jesus' response to the attack on Mary was to praise her loving devotion toward Him, which He interpreted in light of His impending death.

14:6 - LET HER ALONE. *"But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me.'" Jesus was well aware of the value of the perfume, but He was also well aware of the love Mary had for her Lord. On one occasion, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was given a large sum of money and he promptly gave it to one of the ministries he had begun. Later, someone gave him another large sum of money with the clear understanding that this was for his own personal use - he must not give it away. He expressed his appreciation and promptly gave that to his orphanage or one of the other charities he had started. When someone makes a large donation to a cause some would not put at the top of their list of priorities, it is not uncommon for some people to criticize them because of what they perceive to be a greater need. There is no doubt that individuals and churches have often wasted the Lord's money on things that seemed frivolous when there were people with serious needs all around them. Some may be motivated by the plaque they envision*

with their name on it. Some may give a work of art, a monument, or a chandelier simply because of their appreciation of its worth or beauty.

We must be very careful when we assign motives to others, and we must avoid being judgmental when we see someone do something for the Lord which we would never think of doing. We can thank the Lord for those who do all they can to help meet the needs of the poor, but we must also be aware of the fact that the poor in America become a political football. Wealthy Hollywood liberals attacked President Bush during the 2004 presidential race as viciously as any presidential candidate has ever been attacked. The hatred certain people have for George W. Bush defies reason, except for the fact that many people hate God and they hate anyone who is in a position to keep the knowledge of God before the people of the United States.

Some wealthy liberals took advantage of their celebrity status to condemn President Bush's tax cut. They said, "I don't want a tax cut when there are so many poor people who need the money." Someone pointed out that there is nothing to prevent these people from giving whatever amount of money they wanted to give to help poor people. After all, it is a part of the image of the successful Hollywood star to support some charity.

Would it not have been amazing if Judas had more concern for poor people than Jesus! Of course, his motives were far from pure. Jesus, Who knew what was in every person, appreciated what Mary had done because He knew what was in her heart. He also knew what was in Judas' heart. I thank God that He knows what is in the heart of politicians and those who spend millions trying to get them elected. They all want to do great things for the poor. They have created a situation in which they need the poor to get elected and the poor need them to fund their programs. Would it not be great if only those in need received assistance? The average person in American probably does not mind paying taxes to support the have-nots. What he resents is having to pay taxes to support the will-nots, those who will not work as long as there is a government program that will pay them without requiring them to work. God knows our hearts, why we give to causes, and why we criticize those who give more than we do.

14:7 - YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE POOR. *"For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me."* One can only imagine what some politician, social scientist, or liberal entertainer would do with that today. Only an enemy of Christ could accuse Him of being insensitive to the needs of the poor - He was one of them! The Son of Man had no place to lay His head, "no place to call His own." What Jesus is saying here is that you will have the rest of your life to minister to the poor, but you have a very limited amount of time to minister to Me.

14:8 - SHE HAS ANOINTED MY BODY. *"She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial."* We are not told what Mary understood about what was about to happen. If she had a clear understanding of what Jesus was facing within the next few days she was way ahead of the apostles and other disciples. The contrast here **is not** between **Jesus** and **the poor** but between the words **always** and **not always**. "Opportunities to help the poor will always be present and the disciples should take advantage of them. But Jesus would not be in their midst much

longer and opportunities to show Him love were diminishing rapidly. In a sense she had anointed His body beforehand in preparation for its burial” [BKC]. The Nelson Study Bible Notes capture the spirit of the words of our Lord:

“Jesus’ statement does not show callousness to the poor (Deut. 15:7–11). His compassion for those overwhelmed by sickness and poverty appears frequently in the Gospels, and He encouraged others to meet their needs (10:21). But He also wanted people to give freely and of their own volition. No one can coerce a gift from another; no one should criticize another’s gift; and no one can read the heart of a giver. A giver’s motive is known only to God” [NSB].

14:9 - WHAT THIS WOMAN HAS DONE. *“Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”* Mary erected a monument to herself that would survive as long as the Gospel is preached, as long as the Gospel itself, because it is now a part of the Gospel story. We must not take what Mary did lightly. For someone who makes fifty to one hundred thousand dollars a year to make a donation of fifty dollars to the Lord is no big deal, but this perfume was of great value. It is possible that it had been carefully saved toward the time when it would be used to anoint her body for burial. In fact, they may have been saving it so that there would have been enough to anoint Mary, Martha, and Lazarus all for burial.

“Because what she did involved forgetting about herself and what the gift might cost her for the rest of her life, Jesus promised that her act would be remembered for all time. John demonstrates what Jesus meant when he identifies Mary as the one “who poured the costly perfume on Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair” (John 11:1, TLB). Wherever the Good News is preached and whenever it is published in a new language, the story of Mary’s gift of love is repeated again and again, and she is remembered as the one who poured perfume on Jesus”[NCWB].

14:10 - JUDAS ISCARIOT. *“Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them.”* Judas, denied an opportunity to steal more from the treasury and rebuked for scolding Mary, “went off” in search of the chief priests in order to betray Him. The name Judas means “Praise Yahweh”, but whatever his parents hopes might have been when he was born, Judas did not praise the Lord. The Holman Bible Dictionary carries the following article on Judas:

“The last of these was Judas Iscariot. All of the Gospels place him at the end of the list of disciples because of his role as betrayer. Iscariot is an Aramaic word which means “man of Kerioth”, a town near Hebron. He was the only disciple from Judea. He acted as treasurer for the disciples but was known as a miser and a thief (John 12:5-6). He was present at the Last Supper, during which Jesus predicted his betrayal (Luke 22:21; Matt. 26:20-21). The price of the betrayal was 30 pieces of silver, which Judas returned to Jewish leaders; then he went out and hanged himself. He died in sorrow but without repentance. The money, which could not be returned to

the treasury because it was blood money, was used to buy a potter's field in Judas' name (Matt. 27:3-10; compare Acts 1:18-19)" [HBD].

In the account of the betrayal, arrest, trials, and crucifixion of Jesus one group of people play an important role. Those are the chief priests. Without a doubt, Annas was chief among the chief priests at the time. The Holman Bible Dictionary carries the following brief note about Annas, son of Seth, was a priest at the time John the Baptist began his public preaching (Luke 3:2).

"Evidently, Annas, whose name means "merciful," was appointed to the high priesthood about A.D. 6 by Quirinius, governor of Syria. Though he was deposed in A.D. 15 by Gratus, he continued to exercise considerable influence. When Jesus was arrested, He was taken before Annas (John 18:13). After Pentecost, Annas led other priests in questioning Peter and the other church leaders (Acts 4:6)" [HBD].

Annas does seem to have had power and influence at the time. He had served as high priest, had secured the appointment from the Roman authorities for his sons and for his son-in-law, Caiaphas. Some believe he served another term after Caiaphas.

14:11- THEY WERE GLAD. *"They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time."* That they were glad may well be understating it. They were ecstatic. They had met to plan the murder of Jesus, but sought to avoid doing it until after Passover because of their fear of the people, a concern we can appreciate more today after having witnessed by television how quickly a riot can break out in the Middle East today. Judas was not only willing to betray Jesus, he was now driven to do so. Not only would he betray the Lord for money, he would begin looking for a time and place where they could find Him when He was not with the crowd.

What a contrast we have in these verses. Mary had her legacy, and now Judas has his. Mary will always be remembered for anointing the Lord Jesus Christ for His burial. Judas will always be remembered as the son of perdition, the apostle who betrayed Jesus.

The Last Passover, 14:12-21

14:12 - THE PASSOVER. *"On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, 'Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?'"* The first day of Unleavened Bread was Friday, the 15th of Nisan. "However, the qualifying clause (a common feature in Mark's time notations; cf. 1:32, 35; 4:35; 13:24; 14:30; 15:42; 16:2) referring to the day Passover lambs were slaughtered indicates that Nisan 14 (Thursday) was meant (cf. comments on 14:1a)" [BKC]. Since the Passover meal had to be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem, Jesus' disciples asked where He wanted them to make the preparations, assuming that they would eat this "family feast" with Him (v. 15).

14:13 - A MAN CARRYING A PITCHER OF WATER. *“And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, ‘Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him.’”* In the Gospel According to Mark, Jesus often assumes authority over elements, disease, sin, demons, and even death. Here, once again Jesus demonstrates that the Human Jesus is also the Divine Messiah. The Son of Man is indeed, the Son of God. He told his disciples to go into the city where they would see a man carrying a pitcher of water. There was obviously no reason to expect them to see more than one man carrying a pitcher of water. That was women’s work, and when they saw a man carrying a pitcher of water they followed him.

14:14 - WHERE IS THE GUEST ROOM. *“And wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher says, ‘Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’”* Remember that Jesus and His disciples had probably spent Wednesday night in Bethany and on Thursday morning He sent two of them, Peter and John (Luke 22:8), into Jerusalem with instructions for locating and reserving a room. For some reason, possibly for security, (Mark 14:11; John 11:57) the location was is not given and the homeowners remained anonymous. “The Teacher” implies that Jesus was known to the owner of the house - he was probably a disciple himself.

14:15 - LARGE UPPER ROOM. *“And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there.”* Once again, Jesus’ supernatural knowledge is demonstrated. This is something Jesus may have arranged in advance without telling His disciples, except for the fact that He did not send them, either secretly or privately, directly to the address. He told them to look for a man carrying a pitcher and follow him to his house (see Luke 22). There they would find a large upper room furnished. The room would accommodate Jesus and His disciples. Was this also the upper room where the 120 waited for Pentecost? If so, the tradition that this was the home of John Mark may have merit.

The room was furnished, meaning that it was set up with a table and couches. The owner man have even provided the food. If so, that would be additional evidence for a prearranged place to observe the Passover.

14:16-17 - PREPARED THE PASSOVER. *“The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening He came with the twelve.”* Peter and John found everything exactly as Jesus said, and they prepared for the meal regardless of the provisions the owner of the house may have made available to them. Clearly, Peter and John prepared for the meal, not the owner of the house. Preparation for the Passover meal involved roasting the lamb, preparing the unleavened bread and wine, and preparing bitter herbs along with a sauce made of dried fruit moistened with vinegar and wine and combined with spices. When preparations were completed they returned to inform Jesus that everything was ready for the Passover supper and He led the twelve apostles back to the upper room for the final Passover with His disciples.

That evening (Thursday, the beginning of Nisan 15) Jesus and the Twelve arrived in Jerusalem to eat the Passover meal which began after sunset and had to be finished by midnight. “Mark abbreviated

the events of the meal (cf. Luke 22:14-16, 24-30; John 13:1-20) in order to focus attention on two incidents: (a) Jesus' announcement of His betrayal as they dipped bread and bitter herbs into a bowl of fruit sauce together (Mark 14:18-21), and (b) His new interpretation of the bread and wine just after the meal (vv. 22-25)" [BKC].

14:18 - ONE OF YOU WILL BETRAY ME. *"As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, 'Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me.'" The Bible records that Jesus knew what was in every person, and from this statement it is obvious that He knew what was in Judas' heart.*

According to the custom of the day they reclined on low couches for the meal (14:3; John 13:23-25):

"it was a first-century requirement for the Passover meal, even for the poorest people (cf. Mishnah Pesachim 10. 1). While they were... eating, dipping bread into the bowl (cf. Mark 14:20) before the meal itself, Jesus, with solemn introductory words (I tell you the truth; cf. 3:28), announced that one of the Twelve would betray Him (cf. 14:10-11). The added words, one who is eating with Me, unique to Mark, allude to Psalm 41:9 where David laments that his trusted friend Ahithophel (cf. 2 Sam. 16:15-17:23; 1 Chron. 27:33), who shared table fellowship with him, had turned against him. To eat with a person and then betray him was the height of treachery" [BKC].

14:19 - 21 - WOE TO THE MAN. *"They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, 'Surely not I?' And He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.'" Jesus' statement set off a flurry of questions as the twelve began to question Him and each other.*

The disciples were deeply grieved by the words of Jesus. This must have the most shocking thing eleven of them could imagine. "One by one (even Judas; cf. Matt. 26:25) they sought to clear themselves. The form of their question in Greek (lit., "It is not I, is it?") expects a reassuring negative answer from Jesus. But He declined to name the offender to the group. (The identification in Matt. 26:25 was doubtless made only to Judas.) Jesus repeated His disclosure that His betrayer was one of the Twelve... one who was dipping bread into the same bowl with Him" [BKC]. His announcement emphasized the treachery of the betrayal and also gave the betrayer an opportunity to repent.

The Lord's Supper, 14:22-31

14:22 - HE TOOK SOME BREAD. *"While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, 'Take it; this is My body.'" Jesus, our Passover, is instituting the Lord's Supper. The Passover looked ahead to the coming Messiah. The Lord's Supper looks back to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While the were eating, Jesus*

- a. Took bread
- b. Blessed it
- c. Broke it
- d. Gave it to them and said,
- e. “This is My body

All professing Christians do not agree on what Jesus says in this passage. The Catholic Church take a position known as Trans-substantiation, believing that once the bread is blessed it literally becomes the body of Christ, and the wine, or the fruit of the vine, becomes literally the blood of Christ. The Lutheran Church holds to a theory called Con-substantiation, which states that when the elements are blessed they become, not literally, but spiritually, the body and blood of Christ. Baptists and other evangelicals believe that the Lord’s Supper is a memorial to Jesus’ broken body and shed blood. On what to they base their position? The words of Jesus seem clear enough: “This do in remembrance of Me.”

14:23 - 24 - MY BLOOD. *“And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, ‘This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.’”* After giving them the bread and telling them to eat it, Jesus:

- a. Took a cup
- b. Blessed it
- c. Gave it to them
- d. They drank from it
- e. He said, “This is My blood of the covenant.”

Then, Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” Paul deals at some length with the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Cor. 11. For more on the “Last Supper”, see also Luke 22.

14:26 - TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES. *“After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”* At the conclusion of the Last Supper, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn. The Hallel (praise) Psalms were sung or chanted antiphonally, or responsively in connection with the Passover—the first two (Psalms 113-114) before the meal, the remaining four (Psalms 115-118) after the meal to conclude the observance.

Music was a vital part of worship. The most amazing hymnal ever written was the Book of Psalms, just as the most remarkable hymn writer was David, the shepherd king. However much music may have evolved over the centuries, there are some things that should always characterize hymns of faith. In the first place, the greatest emphasis is placed on the lyrics. Millions of people have read the Psalms as prose and been blessed beyond measure by the message. We are still singing five hundred years old hymns today (Martin Luther’s A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD). Charles Wesley, Fannie Crosby, and B. B. McKenney were led of the Lord to write hundreds of great hymns. There are gifted hymn writers in ever age, including the current age.

Music today is important in worship. At the same time we must never let the music overshadow the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you ever get to the point that you leave a worship service with the impression that the music (singing, praise, choruses) was the worship part of the service and the sermon was something tacked on at the end, then you may well not have worshiped. I was preaching in revival services in Greenville, Mississippi a number of years ago the first time I heard anyone elevate music over the preaching of the Gospel. The very talented young man who had been invited to direct the music for the week made the statement, “When the music is over the worship part of the service is over.” I said, “No. When the Holy Spirit leads the pastor to a passage of Scripture and then guides him as he prepares a sermon, and when the Holy Spirit anoints the preacher and empowers him to preach that sermon, and when the Holy Spirit speaks to the hearts of those who listen to that sermon, don’t ever say that is not worship.”

The great emphasis of the New Testament was the preaching of the Word, the teaching of the Word, and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you think God speaks to you through the music and not the sermon you may well not have heard the word of God at all. In Romans 10, Paul is very clear about the place of preaching - it is when the Word of God is being preached that God will speak to the hearts of believers.

It is refreshing to know that Jesus sang a hymn with His disciples immediately before going to the Mount of Olives for an appointment set in eternity past, an appointment He must keep, but one to which no human being could look with pleasure. We are not given the time, but at the conclusion of the Passover meal, Jesus talked with his disciples, instituted the Lord’s Supper, and sang a hymn, (conversation after the meal included Jesus’ Farewell Discourse and prayer, John 13:31-17:26). “It was probably near midnight when He and the Eleven (minus Judas) finally left the Upper Room and the city. They crossed the Kidron Valley (cf. John 18:1) to the western slopes of the Mount of Olives (cf. Mark 11:1a) where Gethsemane was located (14:32)” [BKC].

14:27 - YOU WILL ALL FALL AWAY. *“And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, because it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.’”* Jesus quotes Zech 13:7 here, which graphically represents the desertion of the disciples as Jesus is arrested, tried, tortured, and crucified. Just as sheep scatter in panic when their shepherd is slain, the disciples will scatter in panic, fear, doubt and disillusionment.

14:28 - TO GALILEE. *“But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”* Immediately after announcing that they would all desert Him, he assured them of their return and a reunion with Him in Galilee after His resurrection. The modern student may think these disciples were especially ignorant, or blind. Jesus prophesied His resurrection repeatedly, yet when He was crucified, they were at a loss. They were disappointed, disillusioned, and defeated - Peter, who had denied Him before the crucifixion, announced after the death of the Lord that he was returning to his life as a fisherman. They would not understand until the post-resurrection appearances, and many things they could not comprehend until the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

14:29 - BUT PETER SAID. *“But Peter said to Him, “Even though all may fall away, yet I will*

not.” This is the kind of statement we have come to expect from Simon Peter. He may or may not have been the oldest of the disciples, but he was certainly the most vocal. He also had a habit of speaking without thinking. He also had a way of speaking in the flesh rather than in the spirit. I had only been pastor of my second church out of seminary a few weeks when a man responded to the invitation. He had visited before that service and I knew his name and I was more than a little pleased as he walked toward me. There was no indication that he was under conviction of sin, no indication of repentance. He smiled, shook his head from side to side, took my hand and said, “Well, I finally decided to come, and I want you to know you can count on me.” I spent a considerable amount of time with this man and considered him my friend. He even took time off work to go with me to Baton Rouge to make a hospital call. Then he missed a service, then two or three services, and then he was out of church all together.

As a young pastor I learned something from my friend, and years later he still considered me his friend. He did not leave because of the pastor. He dropped out of church, either because he became a backslider, or because he was never saved. Since that time I have seen a lot of people profess their faith in Jesus Christ, not by boasting of how God could depend on them, but by saying, “I am going to need your prayers because I know I cannot live a Christian life on my own.” This is far more encouraging.

14:30 - YOU YOURSELF WILL DENY ME. *“And Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times.”* Once again, Jesus shows supernatural knowledge of future action or events. Regardless of Peter’s assurance that he would never deny Him, Jesus announced that he would indeed deny Him, not once, but three time, and that before the rooster crowed twice the next morning.

14:31 - PETER KEPT SAYING. *“But Peter kept saying insistently, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And they all were saying the same thing also.”* Simon Peter was absolutely convinced that he would never deny the Lord. We should not imagine that Peter was deliberately trying to deceive the Lord, or that he was simply making a commitment to encourage the Lord without considering the consequences of his statement. I believe Peter was making a statement based on the danger he perceived, and that he was ready and willing to stand with Jesus against any physical danger. Simon Peter, and all the others disciples (without Judas now) pledged their support up to and including death for Jesus. They were not cowards in the usual sense of the word. Little did Peter realize that he would be facing issues for which he was not prepared to deal.

JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, 14:32-42

14:32 - UNTIL I HAVE PRAYED. *“They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here until I have prayed.”* Jesus and the eleven apostles, having left the upper room, came to Gethsemane. The word means “press of oils,” referring to a press for crushing oil from olives). It was to a garden enclosure in an olive grove near the foot of the Mount of Olives (cf. v. 26; John 18:1) to which they went. This was a secluded spot and it seems to have been a favorite meeting places for Jesus and His disciples when they were in Jerusalem (Luke 22:39; John 18:2).

Judas knew this place and he knew Jesus would be there. Jesus told His disciples to sit down near the entrance and wait, literally, “until I have prayed.” Then He selected Peter, James, and John (cf. Mark 5:37; 9:2) to go along with Him. It would be interesting to know if Jesus had left his disciples at the entrance on other occasions.

14:33 - 34 - MY SOUL IS DEEPLY GRIEVED. *“And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, ‘My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.’”* For those who specialize in organization and leadership, this holds a special interest. It is obvious that Peter, James, and John were a part of Jesus’ inner circle, or as some would see it, the upper tier. In which case it would be interesting to know what Andrew, Peter’s brother thought about that. Without any basis for it, I cannot help but believe that if there was one of the apostles who would not be jealous of these three it would be Andrew.

More importantly, Mark stresses that as they left the others and began to enter the Garden, Jesus “began to be very distressed and troubled.” The Bible Knowledge Commentary notes that:

“As the four walked into the “garden” Jesus became noticeably distressed (from ekthambeoô; “to be alarmed”; cf. 9:15; 16:5-6) and troubled (from adeômoneoô, “to be in extreme anguish”; cf. Phil. 2:26). He told the three that His soul (psycheô, inner self-conscious life) was overwhelmed with such sorrow (perilypos, “deeply grieved”; cf. Mark 6:26) that it threatened to extinguish His life. This prompted Him to tell them to remain where they were and keep watch (greôgoreite; cf. 14:38), be alert” [BKC].

It is as though the full impact of the Cross and all its implications suddenly fell upon Jesus and He was all but overwhelmed by it. It is also possible that the prospect of alienation from His Father horrified Him on one thing He had never experienced before.

14:35-36 - NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT YOU WILL. *“And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. And He was saying, ‘Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.’”* Jesus left eight of his apostles at the entrance to the Garden, and then after going into the Garden some distance, He told Peter, James, and John to wait for Him there. He then went a little deeper into the Garden and, prostrating Himself on the ground (Matt. 26:39; Luke 22:41) He began praying - aloud with great emotion:

“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:7-10).

Mark records only a brief summary of Jesus’ prayer. He must have prayed for at least an hour (Mark

14:37). Mark records it, first in narrative form (v. 35b), then in a direct quotation (v. 36). Jesus prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him. “The words ‘if possible’ (first-class condition in Gr.) do not express doubt but a concrete supposition on which He based His request. He made His request on the assumption that the Father was able to grant it. The issue remained whether it was God’s will to do so (cf. Luke 22:42)” [BKC].

Jesus was totally committed to the will of the Father. He prayed, “not what I will, but what You will.” It is one thing to pray, “Thy will be done” when you are praying for someone else, but another when you are praying about something that will dramatically impact your life. It is not so difficult to pray, “Thy will be done” when we are praying about something a small problem, yet another to pray it when everything you have is in the balances. The Human Jesus did not look forward to the arrest, persecution, and crucifixion, but the divine Christ was totally committed to the will of the Father.

14:37-38 - KEEP WATCHING. *“And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’”* After praying for an hour or more, Jesus returned to where He had left Peter, James, and John and found them sleeping. He addresses Peter, possibly because He is recalling how fervently Peter had declared his support, and his willingness to die with Him. If they could not watch for one hour, how could they expect to share in all the suffering which faced Jesus.

Jesus had some specific things for which He must pray. Peter, James, and John were going to face some severe tests and they needed to be praying that they would not “come into temptation.” There is little doubt that Peter, James, and John “said a prayer” before they went to sleep in the Garden. Jesus here instructs them to “keep watching, and praying.” They needed to continue in prayer, pray without ceasing, in order to be prepared to face the temptations that faced them. Little could they imagine how distraught and disillusioned they would be within a matter of hours.

14:39 - 40. THE SAME WORDS. *“Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.”* Once again, Jesus left the three apostles who were closest to Him, the ones we would most expect to continue praying as Jesus was praying. However, when He returned to where He had left them He found them asleep again. They did not know how to answer Jesus when He found them sleeping the second time.

14:41 - 42 - THE THIRD TIME. *“And He came the third time, and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ‘Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!’”* They proved the point that Jesus had made the first time He found them asleep: “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” However, rather than rebuking them this time, He announced that the hour had come. Either Jesus knew this supernaturally, or He had seen or heard the crowd. It is also possible that there was a little time passed between the time He said, “It is enough,” and the statement that “the one who betrays Me is at hand.”

Jesus announced that the Son of Man was about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners - those sinners were the religious leaders, including leaders of the Sanhedrin, and Judas, who had agreed to betray the Son of Man. It is possible that Jesus, Peter, James, and John moved back to where the other eight disciples were waiting and either waited for the crowd there or moved out to meet those who sought the death of the Lord. The issues about which He had prayed were now coming to a head.

His Betrayal and Arrest, 14:43-52

14:43 - JUDAS. *“Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.”* Judas had already withdrawn from the upper room before Jesus departed for the Garden of Gethsemane, but he knew where Jesus would go. The account in the Gospel According to John explains it:

Now **Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples.** Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. **So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him,** went forth and said to them, **“Whom do you seek?”** They answered Him, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He said to them, “I am He.” And **Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them.** So when He said to them, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground (John 18:2-6, NASB., emphasis added).

From John’s account, it is obvious that Judas knew, or guessed that Jesus would withdraw to Gethsemane for prayer, since he had often done so before.

“So the heartless betrayer of Christ took advantage of his intimate knowledge of the Savior’s devotional life to lead the Pharisees’ hatchet men to the hallowed garden of prayer. But if the armed and lighted troops were savoring a bloody battle and conquest, they would be severely disappointed, for the omnipotent Son of God would voluntarily give himself up” [NCWB].

John tells us that Jesus, knowing all things that should come upon him, did not wait for them to find Him, but went to meet them. He asked, “Whom do you seek?” “Having a complete foreknowledge of what was to come and being fully cognizant that all things would happen as they had been predetermined, Jesus unswervingly walked into his own death. Unlike the other Gospels, there is no question in John about whether or not he would drink the cup the Father had given him (John 18:11)” [NCWB]. Jesus would do just as the Father had commanded.

“He would lay down his life voluntarily, and he would also take up his life again because he had received the authority to do so from the Father (see 10:18). All the things that happened in connection with Jesus’ betrayal and crucifixion transpired

according to the prearranged, divine plan. The hour was predetermined; it could not happen before or after the Passover” [NCWB].

The chief priests, scribes, and other religious leaders had zealously and scrupulously guarded the Passover, lest they do anything to desecrate it or to disqualify themselves, or anything that would incite the crowds to turn against them, had planned carefully with Judas so that the betrayal would come after the Passover meal had been celebrated. They were now ready to carry out their murderous plot against the Lord’s long promised Messiah, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

In 2004, Mel Gibson produced the movie, *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST*, which provoked the most vicious attacks America has ever seen against a movie. The movie was anti-Semitic, many said. It was too violent, others said. And brutal it was, from the arrest on through the crucifixion itself, this movie shocked most people with portrayal of the intensity of the violence associated with the arrest, trials, scourging, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The movie grossed over 700 million dollars during the year.

14:44 - 46 - WHOM I KISS. *“Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard.’ After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, ‘Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. They laid hands on Him and seized Him.”* Judas and the leaders of the Sanhedrin carefully arranged their encounter with Jesus, and went out prepared to take Him by force. They thought they were in charge. Little did they know Who was really in charge. Little did Judas know that Jesus fully understood his role in the betrayal of the one he had professed to serve. Judas was the son of perdition, but we must ask the question, did Judas have an option? Was he chosen to betray the Lord without having any choice? The Lord, who has foreknowledge of all things, knew the Son of Man would be betrayed by one of His followers. Was Judas created specifically to betray the Lord, commit suicide, and go to hell? Did he have no choice in the matter? The point we should consider is that Judas made the decision for his own selfish, greedy reasons. He was a thief who was always looking out for himself first. He was stealing money from the treasury, and drooled over the value of ointment Mary used to anoint Jesus. Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas was a devil and would be his betrayer (see John 6:64, 70). The NCWB comments on the account in John’s Gospel:

“The method of death—crucifixion—was prearranged, so Jesus knew that he would be lifted up on the cross (see 12:32, 33). Thus, it was clear that his executors would be the Romans (for they were the unique administrators of this kind of capital punishment) and not the Jews, who executed by stoning (18:32). The Jews attempted to stone Jesus many times, but they never succeeded because it was not in accord with the divine plan. Now the time had come for Jesus to hand himself over to his executioners” [NCWB].

The son of perdition betrayed the Son of God to sinners parading in religious garb, with murder in their hearts. No more dastardly deed has ever been committed. Many have betrayed others, but no one has betrayed a greater Person, or a more innocent person - and that after Judas had followed Him three years. He had listened to the Sermon on the Mount, heard all the parables, and witnessed

first-hand the miracles of Jesus. He had seen Him raise the dead, walk on water, and cast our demons. And yet, he betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver.

14:47 - ONE OF THOSE WHO STOOD BY DREW HIS SWORD. *“But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.”* John 18:10 identifies the swordsman as Simon Peter - had he not declared that he was willing to die for his Lord? He knew that to fight against this mob would mean death, and he was ready and willing to die in defense of the Lord. Remember this the next time someone tells you that Peter denied the Lord out of fear for his life.

14:48 - JESUS SAID. *“And Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber?”* They had seen Jesus for three years, they had listened to Him as He taught the people. They had never seen violence in Him, until he cleansed the temple. Yet they came after Him with a large company of men. You would have thought they were on a mission to arrest someone as vicious as Barabbas!

14:49 - I WAS WITH YOU IN THE TEMPLE. *“Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures.”* They might have arrested Him in the temple, but they held back because they were afraid of the people.

14:50 - THEY ALL...FLED. *“And they all left Him and fled.”* Wait a minute, when Peter declared that he would never deny the Lord, even if it meant that he would have to die with Him, did not all the other disciples affirm their support as well? Yet, at this point they all fled. Why did they flee? The first answer one normally hears is that they feared for their lives. However, Jesus had secured safe passage for them all. They feared when there was no reason to flee - and very possibly for reasons they did not fully understand.

14:51-52 - A YOUNG MAN. *“A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.”* There is one way Mark could have known about this young man, one way he could have known the details. Of course he might have heard about it, but why record it here? What does it contribute to the story? There really is no reason for including such an insignificant element in the story unless the naked young man who fled was John Mark himself. “Furthermore, such an experience would certainly have remained vivid in the mind of the victim. This brief, autobiographical, human interest reference adds testimony to the truthfulness and authenticity of the entire book” [NCWB].

Jesus on Trial, 14:53-65

14:53 - THEY LED JESUS AWAY. *“They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together.”* The delegation from the Sanhedrin took

Jesus and led Him from Gethsemane to the residence of the high priest, Joseph Caiaphas. There He would appear before the high priest, and all the chief priests and scribes who had gathered to deal with Him. We have been reading about the chief priests. Now we come to the high priest. The Holman Bible Dictionary carries the following note:

“Priest in charge of the Temple (or tabernacle) worship. A number of terms are used to refer to the high priest: the priest (Ex. 31:10); the anointed priest (Lev. 4:3); the priest who is chief among his brethren (Lev. 21:10); chief priest (2 Chron. 26:20); and high priest (2 Kings 12:10)” [HBD].

Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest at this time, would preside over the Council (Sanhedrin). All we know about Caiaphas is that He was the son-in-law of Annas and a leader in the plot to have Jesus arrested and executed. Little is known about Caiaphas beyond what we learn here in the New Testament. He was apparently appointed high priest about A.D. 18 and removed from office about A.D. 36 or 37 [HBD], however, some believe the Roman governor appointed the high priest at this time and that there may have been an annual appointment.

This was an official meeting of the Sanhedrin. They may well have been informed the night before to be ready to meet at any time, as soon as the temple police returned with Jesus. It is interesting how various commentaries seek to explain the meeting of the Sanhedrin at such an unusual hour. For example, the Bible Knowledge Commentary suggests that

“The 71-member Sanhedrin (cf. comments on Mark 8:31), including the presiding high priest, was hastily assembled in an upstairs room (cf. 14:66) for a plenary night session. This was an “informal” trial that required a “formal” ratification after dawn (cf. 15:1) to satisfy strict Jewish legal procedure allowing trials only in the daytime. A quorum consisted of 23 members (Mishnah Sanhedrin 1. 6) but on this occasion the majority were probably there even though it was around 3 A.M. on Nisan 15 (Friday), a feast day. This hasty night meeting was deemed necessary because: (1) In Jewish criminal law it was customary to hold a trial immediately after arrest. (2) Roman legal trials were usually held shortly after sunrise (cf. 15:1) so the Sanhedrin needed a binding verdict by daybreak in order to get the case to Pilate early. (3) With Jesus finally in custody they did not want to delay proceedings, thereby arousing opposition to His arrest. Actually they had already determined to kill Him (cf. 14:1-2); their only problem was getting evidence that would justify it (cf. v. 55). Perhaps also they wished to have the Romans crucify Jesus to avoid the people’s blaming the Sanhedrin for His death” [BKC].

Many other questions arise as we look at the sequence of events. Some see one religious trial and one civil trial, other see two religious trials and two civil trials. The case can be made for three religious trials and three civil trials, as Jesus is shuffled back and forth between hearings. The BKC states that the Sanhedrin needed an early trial in order to get Jesus before the Roman court when it convened early in the morning. One thing this commentary overlooks is the fact that the Sanhedrin was given a lot of latitude up to the point of the death sentence. If they had only wanted Jesus fined

or scourged they could have done that, but they wanted Him dead, and they would settle for nothing less. The above commentary noted that the earlier trial was “informal” trial which preceded the “formal” trial. Try another answer: all three of the religious trials were illegal because they were convened before they could legally conduct business. They would have wanted to hide their vile deeds from the crowds, and they did want to have their case prepared to present it to Pilate as soon as the Roman court convened.

14:54 - PETER FOLLOWED. *“Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire.”* There are some very sad statements in the Bible: “Rachel weeping for her children.” “Has a nation changed its god.” “Judas went out and hanged himself.” And of course, “Peter had followed Him at a distance.” We can add Peter’s denials of Jesus to the list. Peter, had been ready to fight to the death to protect Jesus, but after he was arrested Peter followed from afar, and when he arrived at the courtyard he ended up denying Christ three times.

From John, we learn that it was John who enable Peter to gain entrance to the courtyard or the high priest. John was known to the high priest - how we are not told. There were both officers and servants present in the courtyard, warming themselves by a charcoal fire. Peter joined them at the fire.

“And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest—Houses in those days were usually built around a square courtyard connected to the street by a passageway through the house. A heavy street gate kept intruders out of the passageway and a smaller gate guarded by porters insured that no one got into the courtyard. The courtyard, or Hall, was roofless but paved, and it was here that the servants had built a fire. When Jesus stood in front of the high priest he must have been in an open room just off the side of the courtyard, since he seemed to be aware of what was happening around the fire and even turned to look at Peter (Luke 22:61). Matthew (26:58) and John (18:18) add interesting details to the full account of this incident. While Peter sat by the fire, Jesus was answering to Annas” [NCWB].

14:55-56 - TO PUT HIM TO DEATH. *“Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent.”* They had no scruples about convicting Jesus on the basis of false testimony, but they did not want to be betrayed by inconsistent testimony. They would have to get their stories straight before bringing charges before the Roman court. For a price there are always people who will lie, or fine tune their testimony to suit their purpose.

My grandfather was asked to take a letter with him when he went to visit a relative in jail, awaiting trial. He was searched and someone read the letter and immediately arrested him on conspiracy charges. The attorney who wrote the letter was planning to have a witness to lie in court for his client. The lawyer got two years in a federal penitentiary. My grandfather spent a small fortune trying to prove that he had not even read the letter; he was just delivering it for the attorney. The prosecutor put a witness on the stand who testified that he had heard my grandfather say that he

would not having anything to do with the planned murder of a federal agent, but that he had plenty money for the man who did it. When the witness walked left the stand he paused by the defense table and in a low tone, called my grandfather by name and said, "I have told my last ____ lie on you." My grandfather was pronounced not guilty after two years of trials and a ton of money for legal fees. I never learned what motivated the man to lie in court, but I knew enough about my granddaddy to be convinced that he was telling me the truth. False testimony identifies one with the father of liars.

What motivated the false witnesses to testify against Jesus? Money, prestige, the favor of the Sanhedrin, or maybe he owed someone a favor. Perhaps some would lie for the opportunity to be a part of a conspiracy of this magnitude.

14: 57-59 - FALSE TESTIMONY. *"Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, 'We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.' Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent."* Lying did not bother these religious leaders - the thought of getting caught did! I doubt that a penalty for perjury concerned them as much as failure in having Jesus condemned to death. Caiaphas had already announced that it would be better for one person to die than for all of them to suffer the consequences if they failed to maintain order.

One witness stated that he has heard Jesus say, "I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands." Jesus had indeed made a statement similar to this (John 2:19) but He was referring to the "temple" of His body (John 2:20-22). These witnesses, like those present at the time, misinterpreted His words as a reference to the Jerusalem temple. Destruction of a worship place was a capital offense, according to Josephus (The Antiquities of the Jews 10. 6. 2). Though their testimony was invalid, it opened the way for questions about Jesus.

14:60 - DO YOU NOT ANSWER. *"The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, 'Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?'"* Caiaphas had no desire to hear anything that would exonerate Jesus. His sole purpose was to get Him to say something he could use against Him. "The high priest's question was a wise move at this point in the trial. With the prosecution's case stalled on another contradicting testimony, the only hope of a conviction seemed to lie in getting Jesus himself to say something that could be used against him. However, even this ploy failed" [NCWB].

Repeatedly, during the presidential campaign of 2004, reporters and politicians demanded that President George Bush apologize for anything and everything to do with the war on terrorism, especially the war in Iraq. Politically astute observers were of the opinion that they had no interest whatsoever in his apology. What they wanted was a quote they could cut and paste to put the president in the worst possible light. Secretary of Defense responded to a soldier's question in a gracious manner, but when the media got through with the response everyone thought his answer was short and insensitive. Only when the complete answer was played did one see the concern of a sincere leader. The media and the opposition party wanted to trip up Donald Rumsfeld in order to make the president look bad.

14:61-62 - HE KEPT SILENT. *“But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, ‘Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.’”* For over seven hundred years the Lord knew this day would come, and He knew that the Messiah would stand before His accusers and refuse to defend Himself.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.

- - - Isaiah 53:7

If Jesus’ silence angered the high priest and chief priests, his response enraged them. They were looking for just the right charge and He gave it to them with his confession, “I am,” which is reminiscent of the proclamation by the Lord at the burning bush, “I AM.” If that were not enough, He gives them all the ammunition they need when He declared, “you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” They were determined to condemn Him and have Him put to death. He was committed to the Cross, and the time was at hand. There was no way He was going to miss this time. They only thought they were in charge.

14:63-64 - BLASPHEMY. *“Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?’ And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.”* For the high priest to tear his clothes was a symbolic declaration that someone had committed blasphemy against God. It is possible that the high priest pulled back his official outer robe and tore his inner garment. What he is doing is putting on a show for the Sanhedrin, he was not as out of control as it may seem. He knew exactly what he was doing. It is amazing how many times some politician puts on a show of outrage today over something that until the cameraman showed up did not seem to bother him too much. “The high priest was not allowed to do this on private occasions or when he had personal problems, but only in his official capacity as high priest. The traditional writings of the Talmud described exactly how he was to make the gesture” [NCWB].

“They all” includes the high priest, the chief priests, scribes, and all those associated with the Council (The Sanhedrin). There is no doubt that if there had been any member of the Sanhedrin who would not have agreed, that person would not have been asked to attend this illegal meeting of the Council.

14:65 - SOME BEGAN TO...BEAT HIM. *“Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, ‘Prophesy!’”* And the officers received Him with slaps in the face.” Mel Gibson’s, THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST, portrays as graphically as one can imagine the intensely brutal treatment to which Jesus was subjected. Late night talk shows

focused on questions like, was the movie anti-Semitic, or do you really believe men are evil? The Bible is very clear on both accounts: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). “All” includes both Jews and Gentiles. All people are guilty of the death of Jesus Christ.

Those who were slapping Jesus, spitting on Him, and hitting Him with their fists at this point were Jews, not Gentiles. When one sees how quickly a street can fill up with Palestinians or Iraqis, we might appreciate how quickly a crowd could become a mob in Jesus’ day. However, the mob here may not have involved the crowds that welcomed Him into the city at the time of the Royal Entry. These were officers and leaders associated with the Council, or Sanhedrin and their associates.

Peter's Denies His Lord, 14:66-72

Commentaries try to fix the time of Peter’s denial, based on the legal time when the Sanhedrin could meet. However, if they met illegally we would not be held to their time schedule. It would seem from the accounts in the Gospels that Peter’s denials of Jesus took place during the Sanhedrin trial while he stood outside by the fire. Annas and Caiaphas may have lived in the same building complex so that would only have been a matter of taking Jesus across a courtyard or into another chamber in order to have him before the court

There were three religious trials:

- (1) Before Caiaphas
- (2) Before Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas
- (3) before Caiaphas (and the Council).

There were three civil trials:

- (1) Before Pilate
- (2) Before Herod
- (3) Before Pilate

14:66 -68 - PETER...DENIED IT. *“As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, ‘You also were with Jesus the Nazarene.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.’ And he went out onto the porch.”* **THIS IS PETER’S FIRST DENIAL OF JESUS.** Jesus is on trial in a court room, probably overlooking the courtyard where Peter and the servants were warming themselves. A servant girl said, “You were with Jesus the Nazarene.” Peter, the man who insisted that he would never deny the Lord, not only denied knowing Him, he very strongly denied knowing Him. We are not told why the servant girl thought she recognized Peter, nor why the apostle who was prepared to fight to the death in the Garden would so quickly deny Him now.

14:69 - AGAIN HE DENIED IT. *“The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to*

the bystanders, 'This is one of them!' But again he denied it." **THIS IS PETER'S SECOND DENIAL OF JESUS.** The same servant girl identifies Peter again, this time, however, she identifies him to bystanders.

14:70 - I DO NOT KNOW THE MAN. *"And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, 'Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too.' But he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this man you are talking about!'"* **THE IS PETER'S THIRD DENIAL OF JESUS.** This time bystanders picked up the charge, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too!" Peter's denials, as passionate as they were, did not convince the people. As a matter of fact, it is altogether possible that if he had acknowledge having been a disciple of Jesus the first time he might have been forgotten by this time. They may well have asked questions about what was going on, but it seems that his protests caused the people to focus on him.

How was it that they recognized Peter as a Galilean? I grew up in the mid-south and live now in the deep south. There are times when someone moves to the area, or visits and as soon as they begin to speak we begin thinking, "He's not from around here." I could not understand why people in a restaurant in Omaha were so amused by my "southern drawl." Simon Peter was as Semitic as any person in that courtyard. His dress may have been very similar. What was different? It may well have been that there was a difference in his speech. His northern accent - he was a Yankee!

Each time Peter denies Jesus, his denial is more animated. The third time he goes beyond a strong denial. He began to curse and swear that he was not one of Jesus' followers.

14:72 - A ROOSTER CROWED. *"Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, 'Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.' And he began to weep."* Immediately! There is that word again. How often things happen "immediately" in Mark's Gospel account. A rooster crowed a second time and "immediately" Simon Peter remembered the prophecy of Jesus: "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." What did Peter do? Well, he did not do what a lot of people do when they are caught in a sin. He did not say, "I did not do it, he did it!" That is what fallen human nature does. It denies guilt and blames others. When David was confronted with his sin, what did he do? He did not deny his sin. He confessed to sin, transgression, and iniquity, and pleaded for forgiveness. Perhaps this is one of the reasons David is called a man after God's own heart. When confronted with sin a lost person may deny it, he may blame someone else, or he may take up the current mantra, "I made a bad decision." Peter went out and wept bitterly, implying repentance and confession - essential to forgiveness.

I stopped by a Children's Sunday School department a number of years ago and as I took a seat, a teacher asked, "Why did Peter deny Jesus?" When no one answered, the man supplied the answer, "Because he was scared." I did not say anything at the time, but I have some very strong opinions on that subject. Simon Peter was a "man's man." He made his living fishing on a dangerous body of water. He drew a sword to fight a crowd to protect Jesus. Simon Peter was no coward, as we normally view cowards. I believe he did deny Jesus because of fear, but it was a very special kind of fear - the kind of fear that paralyzes grown men and mature women today. The following sermon

outline with notes was taken from THE SERMON NOTEBOOK.

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

Johnny L. Sanders, D.Min.

Denying Christ, Luke 22:54-62

SUBJECT: THE FEAR OF RIDICULE

TITLE: WHY WE DENY CHRIST

TEXT: Luke 22:54-62

INTRODUCTION. I love Bible stories. Like most people who grew up on Bible stories, I have my favorites. But I have a confession. If I had been writing the Bible - or creating my own religion - there are three stories I would be tempted to omit. It breaks my heart to think of Abraham, the father of the faithful, urging Sarah to affirm his story that she was his sister, not his wife, when they entered Egypt, lest Pharaoh kill him and take her for his wife. To save his own life he would have sacrificed his own wife, even though God had entered a covenant with him and that covenant included Sarah.

It blows my mind that he would do something like that - Abraham of all people!

I would have also been tempted to skip the story of David and Bathsheba. When I think of David, I prefer to see the young shepherd slaying Goliath. David and his battles against the Philistines; David's great respect for the Lord's anointed; David and his mighty men. I prefer to think of the Star of David on the Israeli flag. I do not want to think about His sin with Bathsheba, nor the murder of her husband in an ineffective effort to cover up his sin.

Moving to the New Testament, there is one story I would have skipped if I had been writing the Scripture, or if I had been trying to create my own religion. That is the story of Simon Peter's denial of Jesus Christ. How could he have done that? Peter, of all people! What he did was shameful, but as shameful as it was, I am convinced that this is one of the most misunderstood stories in the Bible.

I asked a Sunday School class once why they thought Peter denied Christ. The teacher, quickly replied, "Because he was afraid!" While I will not try to refute the claim that Peter denied his Lord because of fear, I am convinced that we really need to try to determine just what kind of fear it was that led Peter to deny Christ.

I. THERE IS NO DENYING THE FACT THAT PETER DENIED CHRIST.

A. When Jesus Was Arrested, Peter Followed from a Distance, Luke 22:54.

Some would say he followed from a distance because he was afraid. The fact that he followed Jesus suggests that he cared what happened to Him. His following from a distance would certainly allow the inference that the motive was fear.

B. The Issue Is not Whether Peter Denied Christ, But Why He Denied Him.

If you are willing to settle for the traditional view that Peter feared for his life, you may make a case for your position. At the same time you may be missing a very important truth. I am convinced that there is more to this story than meets the eye. To miss the real reason Peter denied Jesus is to deny yourself an application you need every day of your life.

II. PETER DID NOT DENY CHRIST BECAUSE OF COWARDICE.

A. In the First Place, Peter Was No Coward.

1. Cowards did not make their living fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

Dangerous storms often sweep in from the mountains and hit the surface of the Sea of Galilee with frightening force. To fish the Sea of Galilee in the vessels of the day was to take one's life in his own hands. I doubt that anyone who knew Peter would have ever called him a coward - not to his face anyway,

2. Simon Peter Was Ready to Die for Jesus Just before He Denied Him.

- a. He went with Jesus to Jerusalem.
- b. He faced the crowds with Him.
- c. He tried to defend Jesus with a sword, John 18:10.

Peter did not just find that sword on a tree limb. He had taken it with him, and if he had taken it with him he must have been planning to defend his Lord to the death. After all, when he drew the sword he was facing overwhelming odds. There is no avoiding the fact that Peter was not only ready to die defending Christ, he actually attacked - the best defense is a good offense! But there is more - and this is important:

B. Peter's Life Was not in Danger When He denied Jesus.

1. Jesus had requested and had been assured the safety of His apostles.
2. Simon Peter did not deny Christ to anyone who could have done anything to him.

Why then did Peter deny His Lord? Without a doubt, fear was a motive, but what

kind of fear? If he did not fear for his life, of what was he afraid?

I have a confession. I am not sure that I have ever made this confession before. When I was a youth and young adult, I loved boxing, the manly art of self-defense. When I was a student at Mississippi College - a ministerial student, remember - I went home for a week-end. Late one afternoon I was sparing with someone in the front yard when a man walked up and asked, "What would you do if someone threw a punch at you like this? - and he threw the punch. I blocked it, and said exactly what he wanted to hear. I said, "Hold it, if you are going to throw punches like that you need to put the gloves on." This man, who had just moved onto our farm took that as a challenge. He was a few years older and a lot taller and heavier. I learned that he had boasted that a lot of people who had put the gloves on with him had never put the gloves on again. It seemed that he wanted to show some of our hands what he could do with a college boy.

Now here is my confession: I experienced some fear. At the same time, I was confused by the fear. I knew what it was like to have butterflies before a football game, but this was different. I asked if he wanted to box or spar, and he said, "Let's block," and immediately started throwing punches at my face. I soon found out what he meant by "block." I was sparing while he was fighting.

I discovered that my fear had nothing to do with my being hurt, but a lot to do with my making a fool of myself, or even worse, compromising my witness. I continued to spar, but he was fighting. He was a southpaw and he was throwing long left leads at my face, but I quickly saw that I could keep him from hitting me. Still I did not throw a serious punch - because of fear. Then it dawned on me: my fear at that moment was that I might hurt him.

The man became more and more aggressive, but could not land a solid punch. Finally I felt my back touch a fifty-five gallon oil drum someone had dropped off in the edge of the yard. Then I knew I had to stop him, but something kept holding me back. I was able to stop him without hurting him and after several attempts I convinced him that he needed to stop before he got hurt. A week or two later I learned that the man had just suffered his first epileptic seizure. I then experienced another kind of fear, the fear of what might have been.

While it did not bother me that the Lord did not intend for me to become a boxer, I did learn something about fear. Of course, if the man had been as good as he thought he was I might well have experienced some fear for my own well being. But I discovered that one can be afraid for someone else - that kind of fear does not disturb me. I also learned that one can be afraid of fear, that is, he can fear that he might show fear. Most twelve year old boys have experienced that kind of fear.

No doubt there have been many soldiers on the battlefield who feared showing fear

more than they feared the enemy. In the same way, I am convinced, Simon Peter was wrestling with a fear he was having trouble defining.

III. SIMON PETER DENIED CHRIST BECAUSE OF A SPECIAL KIND OF FEAR.

A. Briefly, Let Us Review the scene, Luke 22:55-62.

1. Peter's life was not in danger.
2. Jesus had seen to it that His disciples would not be arrested or punished.
3. Peter denied Jesus to servants, not officials.

What was the most those servants could have done to Peter? They had no authority to arrest him, punish him, or kill him. What is the worst thing they could do? Well, they could laugh at him. That is about it - but with many people that is enough.

B. The Reason Peter Denied Jesus Was the Fear of Ridicule.

1. It took a vision from the Lord to prepare Peter to go to the home of Cornelius, Acts 10.
2. Paul rebuked Peter for his shameful behavior in Antioch of Syria (see Galatians 2).

Peter was eating with Gentiles until some Judaizers arrived from Jerusalem, and when he saw them he withdrew from the Gentiles in such a way that he was placing the victory at the great Jerusalem Conference of A. D. 51 in jeopardy (Acts 15; Gal. 20). Fear of ridicule! Peter could face death, but he could not face ridicule, their judgmental glances, their silence. He could not stand the thought of those Judaizers whispering about him behind his back. Their stare was more than he could bear.

Before condemning Simon Peter, is there anyone with whom you would not want to be seen eating?

IV. WE DENY JESUS FOR THE SAME REASON PETER DENIED HIM.

A. Some Today, as Then, Deny Jesus for Fear of Persecution or Death.

1. In Islamic countries, to confess Christ is to risk persecution and death..
2. There are many who deny Christ without the threat of persecution.

In America, Christians are not openly persecuted or killed, but if there is no spiritual

awakening, I am convinced that our children or our grandchildren may pay a price for their faith.

B. Most People Deny Jesus Christ Because of the Fear of Ridicule.

1. We may deny Jesus with our words.
2. We may deny Him with our life.
3. We may deny Jesus our of embarrassment.

I once heard a man tell about a fellow student at Mississippi College back while America was still trying to recover from the Great Depression. John's parents were sharecroppers, and a dollar folded inside a letter was about all they could do to help him. They worked and sacrificed to send what little they could to help John. They were proud of him because he was the first of their family to go to college, and he was not at just any college, he was at Mississippi College. You see, God had called him to preach and this was a source of joy to his family.

By John's junior year he had become very popular on campus. He had worked and bought clothes that his family could not afford. He had made friends he could not invite to his home - they had a bath, he had a path. They had running water in their homes, he had to run for water.

In time, John began to stay at school and at one point he had not been home for several weeks. He had not written and they had no phone. It was cotton pickin' time and his parents saved enough money for his father to catch a bus to Clinton to go and check on John. They could not conceive of John not coming home as often as possible, nor could they understand why he had not written.

The speaker I heard tell the story related how John was coming out of Crestman Hall with a group of friends as his father came walking across the campus in his overalls and rubber Red Ball boots. As the group approached the unusual visitor on the campus, John's father spoke, "John?" When John did not look around, he called out, "John!" John's jokes and laughter increased in volume. "John," called the now shocked father. John never looked around.

One of John's companions said, "John, it sounded like that old man back there was calling you."

"Nah, not me."

I don't know how John could have denied his father like that. Nor do I know why we deny our Heavenly Father just as emphatically at times. I had rather deny that I

have ever denied my Savior out of a fear of ridicule, but as shameful as that denial is, I have been guilty more times that I like to recall.

To my scientist friend I want to bear a witness, but I do not want to appear too ignorant of science. To my sophisticated friend I do not want to appear too unsophisticated. To my liberal friend I do not want to come across as a right-wing extremist. To my lost neighbor I do not want to be too aggressive and risk “turning him off.” To that unsaved group at the gym I do not want to be seen as a fanatic. Well, to be honest, none of those things bother me as much as they might have at one time, but there is always the temptation to deny Christ - Satan will see to that.

To fail to confess Jesus Christ is to deny Him. This applies to witnessing to lost people, but it also applies to our taking a stand on moral issues, on theological issues, and on church matters. I seem to recall that Francis Shaeffer quoted Martin Luther on this subject. I think he said something like:

“If you fail to confess Christ at the point of attack, you have denied him, no matter how loudly you profess to know Him.”

V. WE MUST DEAL WITH THE REAR OF RIDICULE IMMEDIATELY.

A. Peter Repented (wept bitterly), Luke 22:62.

B. This Message Has an Application for Every Individual Today.

1. We must confess Jesus at home.
2. We must confess Him at church.
3. We must confess Him at work.

C. When We Fail We Must Confess This Sin, Repent, and Seek God’s Help.

1. We must confess all sin, 1 John 1:9.
2. Like Peter, we must repent.
3. Filled with the Holy Spirit, moved by the Word of God, we will boldly confess Jesus.

With Paul, we may then say, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation...”

CONCLUSION. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed.

Surely, He might have predicted that you and I would deny Him at one time or another. But just as Simon Peter repented and became a powerful voice for our Lord, you and I may repent, and regardless of any past failures, confess him more faithfully and more fruitfully than we ever imagined. This is one of those sins one does not like to admit. There are people who will confess to problems with lust, alcohol, drugs, or violence, but cringe at the thought of admitting to hypocrisy. There are Christians who had rather not admit to the fear of ridicule, but if you do not confess it you will never receive forgiveness. If you do not receive forgiveness, you will continue to deny Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XV

Jesus Before Pilate, 15:1-15

15:1 - BINDING JESUS. *“Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate.”* The religious leaders had decided early on that Jesus should be put to death to avoid any kind of uprising that could bring the wrath of Rome down on the heads of the Sanhedrin. They had paid Judas when he offered to betray Jesus. Those who arrested Jesus abused him shamefully and painfully. He was dragged in to appear before Caiaphas, then taken to Annas, and then back to Caiaphas and the Council. They were ready when Pilate opened his court for the day and as soon as possible, presented their case against Jesus. The Roman government allowed the Sanhedrin a lot of freedom in dealing with Jewish matters, but only the Roman court could pass the death sentence. That is why they had put so much effort into the conspiracy to have Jesus condemned and then taken to Pilate to have Him condemned to death. They wanted Him dead - immediately!. No other sentence was acceptable to them.

15: 2 - ARE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS? *“Pilate questioned Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ And He answered him, ‘It is as you say.’”* As governor, Pilate had sole responsibility for the Roman court’s decisions. Pilate, Roman governor of Judea, is remembered in history as a notorious anti-Semite and in Christian creeds as the magistrate under whom Jesus Christ “suffered” (1 Tim 6:13). The New Testament refers to him as “governor,” while other sources call him “procurator” or “prefect” (an inscription found in Caesarea in 1961). The Holman Bible Dictionary offers enough insight for us to see the type of person to whom the high priest and the chief priests brought Jesus.

“Pilate came to power about A.D. 26, close to the time when two of his contemporaries, Sejanus in Rome and Flaccus in Egypt, were pursuing policies apparently aimed at the destruction of the Jewish people. Pilate’s policies were much the same. His procuratorship consisted of one provocation of Jewish sensibilities after another. He broke all precedent by bringing into Jerusalem military insignia bearing the image of Caesar in flagrant defiance of Jewish law. He removed them only when the Jews offered to die at the hands of his soldiers rather than consent to

such blasphemy. He brutally suppressed protest by planting armed soldiers, disguised as civilians, among the Jewish crowds. Against such a backdrop, it is not hard to understand the reference in Luke 13:1 to “The Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifice (NIV).” Pilate was finally removed from office as the result of a similar outrage against Samaritan worshipers who had gathered on Mount Gerizim, their holy mountain, to view some sacred vessels which they believed Moses had buried there. When the Samaritans complained to Vitellius, the governor of Syria, Pilate was ordered to Rome to account for his actions to the emperor and is not mentioned again in reliable contemporary sources” [HBD].

In view of his record, his hatred for the Jews, and his anti-Semitism, it is surprising that Pilate permitted himself to be pressured by Jewish religious leaders into sentencing Jesus to be executed. Some have suggested that a possible explanation is that he already felt his position in the empire to be in jeopardy (the threat is implicit in John 19:12).

Pilate seems to have had no personal inclination to put Jesus to death, and the New Testament writers are eager to show that he did not (Luke 23:4, 14, 22; John 18:38; 19:4, 6; Matt. 17:19). The Gospel writers show that Jesus was innocent from the standpoint of Roman law and that Christianity was not a threat to the Roman political and social order. The Jewish leaders maneuvered Pilate into doing their work for them (compare Luke 23:2).

“Pilate is represented in all the Gospels as questioning Jesus especially on the subject of kingship, but he remained unconvinced that Jesus was in any way a serious claimant to Jewish or Roman political power. The inscription he insisted on placing over the cross according to all the Gospels was Pilate’s last grim joke at Jewish expense: “This is the King of the Jews.” Anti-Jewish to the end, Pilate was telling the world, “What a sorry race this is, with such a pitiful figure for their king!” [HBD].

15:3 - CHIEF PRIESTS. *“The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly.”* A prosecutor must be convincing if he expects to get a conviction. Today, the prosecutor may seem subdued, to protect his case, while the defendant’s attorney may rant and rave before the television cameras about the horrible injustice to which his or her client is being subjected. Cable new channels provide them ample opportunity for that. Here, the chief priests presented an animated and pious case against Jesus. They are not taking any chances - they must convince Pilate to sentence Jesus to death.

Anyone who thinks human nature has changed should have watched the confirmation hearings for Dr. Condoleezza Rice, President George Bush’s appointee for Secretary of State. Former Klansman, Robert Byrd attacked this black woman. Senators Barbara Boxer and Ted Kennedy viciously sought to destroy Dr. Rice, even though they admitted that they could not prevent her approval, they verbal assault on this godly woman was brutal.

15:4 - PILATE QUESTIONED HIM. *“Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, ‘Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!’”* It is interesting that Pilate did not simply rubber stamp the findings of the Sanhedrin and sentence Him to death at their recommendation.

These trials were usually held in public. They opened with an indictment by the plaintiff followed by the an interrogation of the accused, and testimony from the defendant and other witnesses. When all the evidence had been presented, the governor or a judge would consult with his legal advisers and then pronounce the sentence, which had to be carried out immediately.

“Instead of confirming the Sanhedrin’s death sentence (cf. John 18:29-32) Pilate insisted on hearing the case. Only one of three accusations that had already been made (cf. Luke 23:2) merited Pilate’s attention, namely, Jesus’ alleged claim to be “a king.” So Pilate asked Jesus, Are You (emphatic) the King of the Jews? To Pilate such a claim was tantamount to treason against Caesar, a crime punishable by death” [HBD].

Preponderance of evidence may help convict the accused of a crime, but what we have here is a preponderance of charges. Pilate said, “See how many charges they bring against You!” There was an overkill, and Pilate was aware of it, if not amused by it.

15:5 - BUT JESUS. *“But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed.”* Jesus may have been far less offensive to Pilate than the chief priests and other Jewish authorities, whom he apparently detested. Pilate was amazed because Jesus offered no defense. This may imply that if Jesus had called witnesses and defended Himself, they would not have had enough evidence to convict Him. However, Jesus had an appointment with a cross that must be kept. That appointment was centuries, even thousands of years old. Jesus may well have convinced Pilate of his innocence and avoided the cross. He might also have called on a legion of angels to deliver his from the cross. No power on earth or any other place could have put Him on the cross against His will; no court could have condemned Him against His will - and no force could have kept Him off the cross.

There may have been another reason that Pilate was amazed. Though Jesus did not offer a defense, we may infer from the account that He was unafraid of what Pilate might do to him. A friend with the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Department once told me something I found interesting. He said, “If a man can go into court, take the stand, and look the judge and prosecutor in the eye and lie with a calm voice, without blinking, looking down, or showing any nervousness at all, he could get a way with almost anything. Judges and prosecutors with a lot of experience have come to look for certain signs that a witness is lying, or that an accused person is guilty of whatever charges that were brought against him. Pilate had never seen anyone stand before him like Jesus before.

15:6-8 - BARABBAS. *“Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them.”* The Feast of Passover was observed in commemoration of the release of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage. At some point, the Roman governor began releasing a prisoner during the Feast as a symbolic gesture of goodwill. To Pilate, this seemed to be a way out of his predicament. He hated the Jews and had no desire to honor the wishes of the religious leaders, but at the same time he knew they could create problems for him with Caesar if he did not handle this problem right. So, he offered to release a prisoner, obviously thinking that the people would ask

for Jesus. Instead of Jesus, they began asking Pilate to release Barabbas, a notorious murderer and insurrectionist. Barabbas must have been well known to the people, as were the crimes of which he was accused. They still asked for Barabbas.

Was this the same crowd that has been spreading their garments in the streets and singing Hosannas to Jesus during the Royal entry? At this time of the morning the religious leaders may have had their crowd present for this trial. Remember that they had been afraid to take Jesus by force when He cleansed the temple because they did not know how the crowds might react. Of course, another possibility is that many in this crowd were followers or friends of Barabbas and they wanted him to be freed so that he could continue his crimes against Rome, but it seems more likely that they were friendly to the chief priests..

15:9 - KING OF THE JEWS. *“Pilate answered them, saying, ‘Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’”* Who said Pilate didn’t have a sense of humor? You can almost hear the cynicism dripping from every word. They crossed him up when they asked for Barabbas instead of Jesus, so rather than using Jesus’ name, Pilate asked if they wanted him to release the King of the Jews. Pilate may have been surprised that the crowd did not side with him rather than their own leaders. He could see through their scheme, why could the people not see through it? The answer to that question may be that this was their crowd.

15:10 - HE WAS AWARE. *“For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.”* Pilate, knowing that the religious leaders had ulterior motives for handing Jesus over to him - they wanted the governor to sentence Him to die. He could see that the chief priests had presented trumped up charges against Jesus, so why could the people not see it? Envy was but one of their motives in wanting Jesus put to death.

15:11 - CHIEF PRIESTS STIRRED UP THE CROWD. *“But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead.”* They may not have recruited this crowd, but they knew they would have a lot of influence on them. Today, the media can run a report and then conduct a survey and predict the results they are going to get. They know how to manipulate the masses. The religious leaders were experienced in controlling the people. They had the people demanding the death of the Prince of Peace, convinced that they were serving the Lord’s cause when they were doing it.

15:12-14 - WHAT SHALL I DO WITH HIM? *“Answering again, Pilate said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?’ They shouted back, ‘Crucify Him!’ But Pilate said to them, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Crucify Him!’”* Little did Pilate realize the ramifications of this question. We must never forget that we do not choose God, He chooses us, No one finds God because He seeks Him. We only know Him through God’s revelation of His redemptive love - which is a ministry of the Holy Spirit. He asked the crowd what they would do with Jesus and they demanded, “Crucify Him.” The world’s crowd still wants to see Jesus crucified.

1) Pilate asked what they would have him do with the King of the Jews.

- 2) The people once again demanded that Pilate crucify Him.
- 3) Then Pilate asked what evil He had done for him to deserve to be crucified.
- 4) They shouted even more loudly, “Crucify Him.”

In another account they cried, “Let His blood be upon us and our children.” Is it possible that their request was granted, and that a lot that has been attributed to anti-Semitism has had to do with their rejection of the Messiah?

15:15 - WISHING TO PLEASE THE CROWD. *“Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.”*

Pilate wished to satisfy the crowd for his own political reasons. He did not trust them, and he did not like them, but it was important for him to maintain order. Rome expected him to keep the peace. So, to please the crowd, Pilate freed Barabbas. A lot of sins are committed today by people who are trying to please a crowd.

In order to please the crowd, Pilate had Jesus scourged. Anyone who has seen Mel Gibson’s THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST, can better appreciate what scourging could do to an individual. This movie portrayed the brutality of scourging as no other movie ever has. Scourging was a particularly cruel and barbaric punishment. The victim was stripped to the waist, his hands were bound to a pole, and he was whipped. “The whip or scourge itself was an inhumane instrument consisting of a handle with several leather thongs attached, which were weighted on the ends with jagged pieces of bone, metal and rock. Frequently, the agony of the scourging resulted in death. Victims lost eyes and teeth, were occasionally disemboweled and were almost always horribly disfigured. The scourging combined with the crucifixion makes the sufferings of the Lord as extensive as any imaginable” [BSB].

Jesus Is Mocked and Beaten, 15:16-21

15:16-20 - A CROWN OF THORNS. *“The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.”*

- 1) The soldiers took Jesus to the palace, v.16a.

“After the flogging of Jesus, presumably outside in the public square, the Roman soldiers took Him, battered and bleeding, into (esoô, “inside”) the palace (lit.,

“courtyard”; cf. same word in 14:54, 66). The rendering “palace” is justified due to Mark’s explanatory comment, that is, the Praetorium, equating the two places. The Latin loanword, Praetorium, meant the governor’s official residence (cf. Matt. 27:27; John 18:28, 33; 19:9; Acts 23:35) [BSB].

- 2) They called together the whole Roman cohort of soldiers, 16b. “Ordinarily a cohort was 600 men, 1/10 of a 6,000-soldier legion. But in this case it may have been an auxiliary battalion of 200-300 soldiers that had accompanied Pilate to Jerusalem from Caesarea” [BKC].
- 3) They dressed Jesus in royal purple, and set a crown of thorns on his head, v. 17. After brutally scourging Jesus, they added insult to injury, by putting a purple robe on Him and plaited a crown of thorns and set it on His head in order to facetiously proclaim him king.
- 4) They mockingly acclaimed Jesus, “King of the Jews,” v. 18.
- 5) They “kept on beating His head with a reed,” driving the thorns into his scalp, v. 19. They kept on bowing before Jesus as one would pay homage to a king.
- 6) They took off the purple robe and put His own garments on him again, 15:20a.
- 7) Then, they took Jesus away to crucify Him, 15:21.

15:21 - SIMON OF CYRENE. *“They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.”* There was a time when many people could picture this in their minds because of the movies made about Jesus. When I was in elementary school at Sledge, Mississippi, my teacher announced that a movie about Jesus would be shown at a theater at Crowder, about as far from Sledge as you could go and still be in Quitman County. I lived seven miles west of Sledge in Tunica County and walked a mile and a quarter to catch the school bus at a county line grocery store. I could ride the bus, but the bus could not go into Tunica County.

I have forgotten whether the movie was **THE ROBE**, or **THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD**, but I remember very clearly that my principal and my teachers were very pleased that so many students brought the required note from home granting permission to ride the school bus and see the movie about the life and death of Jesus. One can only imagine what the ACLU and other enemies of the Cross would do with that today! This is the price we pay for permitting America to slip deeper into the post-Christian era of her history during our watch.

In the movies, Jesus is carrying the complete cross and before long he is struggling under the load. Suddenly, a Roman soldier takes hold of a man along the way and forces him to carry the cross for Jesus. We all knew the man was Simon of Cyrene.

- 1) Simon was a native of Cyrene, an important coastal city of North Africa that had a large Jewish colony (Acts 2:10). We are not given much information about Simon, but he was probably a pilgrim

who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival but had to stay in the country at night because there was no room in the city - like Jesus and His disciples. Only Mark mentions the fact that Simon had two sons, Alexander and Rufus. Paul mentions Rufus in the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 16:13), as well as Rufus' mother and his own mother, who were faithful servants of the Lord. Paul mentions that Rufus was well known, and being the son of Simon would be part of the reason for that.

2) Simon was forced to bear the cross. Ordinarily a condemned man carried the crossbeam of his own cross through the streets of Jerusalem, to the place of crucifixion where it was then attached to the upright post. Some have suggested that the cross piece may have weighted as much as 100 pounds, but the weight may have been somewhat less than that. Jesus began carrying His cross (or cross piece) (John 19:17) but was so weak from being scourged that His strength gave out near the city gate. THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST brilliantly, and shockingly captures something of the intensity of the scourging. The soldiers randomly seized Simon along the way and forced him to carry the beam the rest of the way.

The Crucifixion of Christ, 15:22-41

See also, John 19:17-30

15:22 - GOLGOTHA. *“Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.”* The soldiers took Jesus to a place just outside the city wall (John 19:20) called Golgotha, a Greek transliteration of an Aramaic word meaning The Place of the Skull.

“The word “Calvary” comes from the Latin Vulgate rendering Calvaria, a variation of calva, “a skull.” Golgotha was a rounded, rocky knoll (not a hill or mountain) vaguely resembling the shape of a human skull. Its exact location is uncertain. It was either at the present Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the traditional site dating from the fourth century, or “Gordon’s Calvary,” a more recent suggestion. The traditional site is more probable” [BKC].

15:23 - WINE MIXED WITH MYRRH. *“They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it.”* This concoction was made available to criminals condemned to the cross by the women of Jerusalem in order to deaden the pain to some degree. Jesus refuses the drink, preferring to face the full agony of the cross a clear mind.

15:24 - THEY CRUCIFIED HIM. *“And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments*

among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take.” Old Testament prophecies come alive as we look to Jesus on the cross. As a matter of fact, the Roman soldiers fulfill numerous Old Testament prophecies, without knowing it of course.

1) They crucified Him - prophesied one thousand years earlier by David (Ps 22:18). “With restrained simplicity Mark wrote, And they crucified Him” [BKC]. No one living in the Roman Empire at this time would need a description of a crucifixion and Mark offered none. The news networks and the talking heads on the major networks would have provided every detail. What we know is that a condemned man was stripped of all clothes except for a loincloth, laid on the ground on top of the crossbeam, and then both outstretched forearms were nailed to the crossbeam. The wrists were considered a part of the hand, and the nails were driven through the wrists so that they would not pull through while the criminal was on the cross.

Next, the crossbeam was raised and fastened to an upright post already stuck in the ground. Then, and the victim’s feet were nailed to the upright. Not usually shown in paintings is a wooden peg that was driven into the upright part of the cross. The purpose of the dowel was to allow the man to sit on it for brief times to take pressure off his hands and feet. The purpose, of course, was to extend the pain and suffering as long as the criminal could hold out. They wanted him to suffer for days as onlookers witnessed the intensity of the suffering. The criminal would hang by his hands until his diaphragm was closed off to the point that he could not breathe. Then he would push up with his feet to get a breath. Finally, he would sag back down, seeking whatever relief possible from this peg. Death from extreme exhaustion and thirst was slow and very painful, using coming only after two or three days of anguish, sometimes more. Sometimes death was hastened by breaking the victim’s legs (John 19:31-33).

2) They divided His garments - fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 22:18:

“They divide my garments among them,
And for my clothing they cast lots.”

This was prophesied in the Crucifixion Psalm, Psalm 22, one thousand years before Jesus died on the cross. This is incredible. God knew one thousand years before the crucifixion of His Son that the promised Messiah would hang from a tree. Actually, He knew it a long time before that - He revealed it one thousand years earlier. One thousand years before the crucifixion - at a time when no nation used crucifixion as a means of execution - God not only revealed that His Son would hang on a tree, but that his garments would be divided by casting lots. “A victim’s personal belongings became the property of the execution squad. In Jesus’ case the four-man squad (cf. John 19:23) cast lots, probably dice, for His clothes—an inner and outer garment, a belt, sandals, and perhaps a head covering—to see what each one would get” [BKC]. Unwittingly these soldiers fulfilled Psalm 22:18 while adding to Jesus’ humiliation.

3) The method by which they divided his garments was casting lots - Once again, fulfilling prophecy.

This may be a good place to list the key events in Jerusalem which culminated in the death of Christ.

- (1) The Passover meal is eaten with the disciples (Luke 22:14-16, 24-30).
- (2) Jesus washes the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-20).
- (3) Judas leaves the Upper Room (John 13:21-30).
- (4) Jesus institutes the memorial Supper (Luke 22:17-20).
- (5) The disciples accompany Jesus to Gethsemane (14:26, 32-42).
- (6) Judas betrays the Lord (John 18:2-12);
- (7) Annas, the former high priest, examines Jesus (John 18:12-14, 19-23).
- (8) Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin condemn Jesus (14:53, 55-65).
- (9) Peter denies the Lord three times (John 18:15-18, 25-27).
- (10) Jesus is formally condemned by the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66-71).
- (11) Jesus appears before Pilate (John 18:28-38).
- (12) Jesus appears briefly before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12).
- (13) Pilate sentences Jesus (Luke 23:13-25).
- (14) Soldiers scourge and mock Jesus (John 19:1-14).
- (15) Jesus is placed on the cross after refusing to drink of the wine and myrrh (15:23-32).
- (16) The veil of the temple is torn (Matt 27:51-56).
- (17) The side of Jesus is pierced (John 19:31-37).

15:25 - THE THIRD HOUR. *“It was the third hour when they crucified Him.”* Using the Jewish method of counting hours from sunrise (and sunset) Mark alone recorded that Jesus’ crucifixion took place at the third hour, that is, 9 A.M. This seems to conflict with the time reference “the sixth hour” in John 19:14. But John probably used the Roman method of counting hours from midnight (and noon); thus he put Jesus’ trial before Pilate at “about the sixth hour,” that is, approximately 6:00 A.M. The interval between 6:00 and 9:00 A.M. was filled with the soldiers’ mockery (Mark 15:16-20), Pilate’s verdict on the two robbers (15:27), and preparations for the crucifixions.

15:26 - KING OF THE JEWS. *“The inscription of the charge against Him read, ‘THE KING OF THE JEWS.’* It was a Roman custom to write the name of the condemned man and his crime on a board and attach it to his cross (John 19:19). All four Gospels record the words of Jesus’ notice but with minor variations, “probably because it was written in three languages (John 19:20). Mark recorded only the official charge against Him... THE KING OF THE JEWS (cf. Mark 15:2, 12). Pilate’s wording was intended as an insult to Jewish aspirations for independence (cf. John 19:21-22)” [BKC].

15:27-28 - TWO ROBBERS. *“They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. [And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with transgressors.”]* There was no way Pilate would know that he was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12 when he had Jesus crucified between two robbers. These two thieves, like Barabbas, were perhaps guilty of insurrection (vs. 7; John 18:40). Whether or not they were convicted of treason at the same time Jesus was being tried, they were familiar with His case (Luke 23:40-42).

15:29-31 - SAVE YOURSELF. *“Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, ‘Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!’ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, ‘He saved others; He cannot save Himself.’”* Let us be frank, Jesus could have saved himself. He endured this suffering and humiliation because of his love for us.

“He could have chosen not to take the pain and humiliation; he could have killed those who mocked him — but he suffered through it all because he loved even his enemies. We had a significant part in the drama that afternoon because our sins were on the cross too. Jesus died on that cross for us, and the penalty for our sins was paid by his death. The only adequate response we can make is to confess our sin and freely accept the fact that Jesus paid for it so we wouldn't have to. Don't insult God with indifference toward the greatest act of genuine love in history.”[Life Application Bible Notes - LABN].

Jesus could have saved Himself - and shocked those who mocked Him - but He could not have saved Himself and us. Jesus' comments about the temple were misunderstood by some and misrepresented by others. Here, they bring it up again: “You who *are going to* destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!” They mocked, jeered, and laughed at the Son of God, demanding that He save himself. Little did they realize that they were only three days away from witnessing far more than they could comprehend. Sadly, many would still deny the evidence of the resurrection - and many still deny it.

15:32 - COME DOWN. *“Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!” Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him.”* Jesus had performed many miracles during His earthly ministry, but for these people, there would never be enough to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah.

“Unprecedented miracles do not create faith, for faith is a personal relationship of trust in a personal God. Faith is not reluctant intellectual assent prompted by an overwhelming display of power. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus had resisted the temptation (Mt 4:7) to perform a sign which might attract the multitudes to a spurious faith. Consistent with that earlier decision, He refused to appeal to a shallow faith. He followed God's plan of atoning death and resurrection, not human plans of magical displays of power. The church must follow Christ's humble servant approach to provoke faith, not the world's call for dazzling entertainment” [DISCIPLES STUDY BIBLE - DSB].

Those who were crucified on either side of Jesus “were also insulting Him.” This is of course interesting, because in other Gospel accounts one thief joins the people in mocking Jesus while the other thief calls on Him for mercy - and receives it. When James and John asked Jesus for the places of honor next to him in his kingdom, one on His right hand and the other on his left, Jesus told them that they didn't know what they were asking (Mark 10:35-39).

“Here, as Jesus was preparing to inaugurate his kingdom through his death, the places on his right and on his left were taken by dying men — criminals. As Jesus explained to his two power-hungry disciples, a person who wants to be close to Jesus must be prepared to suffer and die as he himself was doing. The way to the kingdom is the way of the cross. If we want the glory of the kingdom, we must be willing to be united with the crucified Christ” [LABN].

15:33 - DARKNESS FELL. “*When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.*” Darkness fell over the whole land from 12:00 noon until 3:P.M.

15:34 - JESUS CRIED OUT. “*At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?’ which is translated, ‘MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?’*” Of the Four Gospels, only Mark and Matthew recorded this one of Jesus’ seven sayings from the cross. At the ninth hour (3 P.M.), Jesus cried out - with a loud voice - Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani? (Ps. 22:1 in Aramaic). Mark translated the saying into Greek for his readers, which in English means, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? This was more than the “cry of a righteous Sufferer affirming His faith that God would cause Him to triumph (contrast Ps. 22:1 with Ps. 22:28). Nor did Jesus merely feel abandoned. Instead, Jesus’ cry combined:

- (a) Abandonment by God the Father in a judicial not relational sense, and
- (b) A genuine affirmation of Jesus’ relationship to God.

“Bearing the curse of sin and God’s judgment on sin (cf. Deut. 21:22-23; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13) He experienced the unfathomable horror of separation from God, who cannot look on sin (cf. Hab. 1:13). This answers Jesus’ question, “Why?” Dying for sinners (Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18), He experienced separation from God. Also Jesus’ cry affirmed His abiding trust, reflected in the words, “My God, My God” [BKC].

Interestingly, this is the only one of Jesus’ recorded prayers in which He did not use the address the Father as “Abba” (Mark 14:36). He was not renouncing Him. Jesus claimed the Father as His God. He died forsaken by God for the moment so that His people might claim God as their God and never be forsaken forever (Heb. 13:5).

In the Life Application Bible Notes, the author states that “Jesus did not ask this question in surprise or despair. He was quoting the first line of Psalm 22” [LABN]. In quoting from the first line of Psalm 22, Jesus may not have been in despair in the sense that He had abandoned hope, but he was absolutely traumatized. The human Jesus was experiencing an anguish of heart no one else could ever imagine. No one else could possibly know what Jesus knew, no one else could have experienced fully what it meant for the Father to turn His back on His only begotten Son.

Psalm 22, the Crucifixion Psalm, is one thousand year old prophecy expressing the deep agony and anguish of the Messiah’s death on he cross. “Jesus knew that he would be temporarily separated

from God the moment he took upon himself the sins of the world. This separation was what he had dreaded as he prayed in Gethsemane. The physical agony was horrible, but the spiritual alienation from God was the ultimate torture” [LABN].

15:35 - ELIJAH. *“When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, ‘Behold, He is calling for Elijah.’”* Jesus’ cry in Aramaic would not have meant anything to the Roman soldiers, but the most of the Jewish crowd would have understood the Aramaic. The traditional interpretation is that some Jewish bystanders simply misunderstood what Jesus was saying because the words sounded so much like the name, Elijah. There is another possibility, and that is that some of these people did not misunderstand Jesus, but sought to mock Him. Considering the attitude of the crowd, spurred on by the chief priests and other religious leaders, these people may have deliberately misinterpreted Jesus’ cry as a call to Elijah. It is said that there was a popular belief among Jews of the period that Elijah came in times of distress to provide relief to the righteous who suffered.

15:36 - LET US SEE. *“Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, ‘Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down.’”* This seems to affirm the opinion that at least “some of the bystanders” not only had no sympathy for Jesus, they sought to add insult to injury by mocking Him even as he suffered like any other person on a cross - but far more than anyone else ever has from a spiritual stand point.

In response to Jesus’ additional words “I thirst” (recorded in John 19:28-29), a bystander, possibly a Roman soldier, “soaked a sponge with wine vinegar diluted with a mixture of eggs and water, a common inexpensive beverage, and raised it on a stick to Jesus’ mouth so He could extract some refreshment from it (cf. Ps. 69:21). Jesus’ cross was probably higher than normal, holding Him two or three feet off the ground. If the drink prolonged His life, the spectators would have a chance to see if Elijah would take Him down” [BKC].

“In Mark the words ‘leave Him alone’ were spoken by the soldier to the bystanders just before he offered a drink to Jesus. The verb is plural, ‘You (pl.) leave...’ In Matthew 27:49 the same words are spoken by bystanders to the soldier apparently while he was giving Jesus the drink. The verb is singular, ‘You (sing.) leave...’ Both expressed the taunt about Elijah coming to rescue Him” [BKC].

15: 37 - BREATHED HIS LAST. *“And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.”* Many older students of the Word of God will recall the King James Version, “And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.” The NASB and the HCSB, both word for word translations, have “breathed His last.” Matthew has, “Yielded up His spirit.” The idea is the same: when Jesus had completed the substitutionary atonement for our sins, He “yielded up His spirit.” No one took away His life, He gave it willingly.

15:38 - THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE. *“And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”* This is especially significant. Everything in the sacrificial system had pointed to Calvary, to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Everything in the sacrificial system was fulfilled in the

death of Jesus for our sins. The veil in the temple was not torn from bottom to top as it would have been if a man had torn it, but from top to bottom - no one could have reached the top to tear it from the top.

A young girl confessed to the murder of her father after detectives pointed out to her and her mother that no intruder had entered their home as they had initially claimed. How did he know that? Because the screen over the window had been cut from the inside, not from the outside. Anyone who has ever cut a screen door or a window screen knows that you can tell whether a screen has been cut from the inside or the outside, and you can also tell the direction of the cut.

Jesus Christ had just paid the once-for-all price for our sins. The perfect High Priest, Jesus, had just made the supreme, once-for-all sacrifice for man's sin. He had sacrificed Himself. The supreme High Priest had offered Himself, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Jesus is my High Priest, and He is the only Priest I will ever need. I showed a tape on Mormonism over twenty years ago. The speaker spoke often about Mormonism, and he invited Mormons to attend his lectures. On one occasion a group of Mormons filed in and sat down. At the conclusion of the service the speaker asked for questions. The Mormons looked from one to another before a more mature Mormon stood up and declared, "But we have the priesthood!" The speaker responded, "But sir, if you have the wrong god your priesthood doesn't matter."

Geoli Settimbrini was a Roman Catholic priest, serving in services in Italy, when he turned to another priest and declared, "Everything we are doing, Jesus has already done!" He received a lot of attention from his superiors, but after some period of time he was relieved of his responsibilities. Later, he migrated to the United States where he got a job as a janitor while he studied and sought the Lord's will for his life. When I met him he was speaking on Christians' issues and on a friend's recommendation I invited him to speak in our church. We had him in our home and visited for some time. He had come to understand that Jesus is the only priest we need. We can go to the Father through Jesus and Jesus alone.

The priesthood of believers is clearly taught in the Bible. We can go to God for ourselves, we can go to Him for others, and we can reach out to others in behalf of the Father.

15:39 - THIS MAN WAS THE SON OF GOD. *"When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'"* This is absolutely amazing! This comes from a Roman officer who was responsible for the crucifixion, commander of the execution squad, a man of authority, and a man hated by the Jews. He had listened to the taunts and mockery of the crowds. He had witnessed the words of Jesus, had seen the darkness cover that whole part of the world for three hours, and had heard the words of Jesus to His mother, to John, to His mother, and to the Father. He was convinced that this truly was "the Son of God."

Mark alone pictures the centurion "who was standing right in front of Him", watching Jesus as He breathed His last. The Scripture is often complimentary of the office of centurion and the character of a number of men who held that position.

One question comes to mind as we read the words of the centurion. What did he have in mind when he proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God? What did he understand? He may not have used the phrase “the Son of God” in its distinctive Christian sense, as a reference to Jesus’ deity (Luke 23:47).

“Because of his pagan background he probably viewed Jesus as an extraordinary “divine man” much like the Roman emperor who was acclaimed “son of God” (cf. comments on Mark 12:16). Consequently some interpreters translate the phrase with an indefinite article, “a son of God” (NIV marg.). However, Mark regarded the declaration in its distinctive Christian sense; the centurion unwittingly said more than he knew. The centurion’s confession is the climax of Mark’s revelation of Jesus’ identity (cf. comments on 1:1; 8:29-30). This confession by a Gentile Roman officer contrasts with the mocking response of those mentioned in 15:29-32, 35-36. This Gentile’s confession also exemplifies the truth of the torn curtain” [BKC].

15:40 - SOME WOMEN. *“There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome.”*

1) From Mary Magdalene’s surname we know that she was from Magdala, a village on the Sea of Galilee’s western shore. Jesus had released her from demon possession (Luke 8:2).

2) The second Mary (the “other Mary”; Matt. 27:61) is distinguished from the others by the names of her sons James the younger (lit., “the small one,” in stature and/or age) and Joses, who apparently were well known in the early church.

3) Salome (name means “pacific”) was the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John (see Mark 16:1; Matt. 27:56 and compare with John 19:25). She became a disciple of Jesus and was among the women who witnessed the crucifixion and then helped prepare the Lord’s body for burial (or witnessed as others buried Him). “Some believe that she is mentioned in John 19:25 as Mary’s sister, thus she would have been Jesus’ aunt with James and John His cousins” [HBD].

Those misguided people who call the Bible a sexist book have not considered the Bible in light of the times in which the Scripture was written. Women played a prominent role in the ministry of Jesus. Enemies of Jesus have suggested a homosexual relationship among the disciples of Jesus - because they were all men. Others have implied, some very strongly, that Jesus was immoral, that he had an on-going immoral relationship with Mary Magdalene. It would be interesting to know how many of the women who supported Jesus and the Apostles were family members.

Women and men are given different responsibilities in the Bible, but at no time does God claim that women are inferior to men. These, and other women served the Lord when and where they were most needed.

15:41 - MINISTER TO HIM. *“When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister*

to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.” These women (vs. 40) and many others had served Jesus in Galilee and they had “come up with Him to Jerusalem.” “Many other women who did not accompany Him regularly were also there. They had come... to Jerusalem for the Passover festival with Jesus, perhaps hoping He would establish His messianic kingdom (cf. Mark 10:35-40; 15:43)” [BKC]. Mark mentioned the women as eyewitnesses of the Crucifixion, probably in anticipation of their being eyewitness at Jesus’ burial (15:47) and His resurrection (16:1-8). It seems that their devotion surpassed that of the 11 apostles, who had deserted Him (14:50). Mark may have intended these words as an encouragement to faithful discipleship among women in the church at Rome.

Jesus Is Buried, 15:42-47

15:42-43 - ASKED FOR THE BODY OF JESUS. *“When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.”* Jesus’ burial officially confirmed the fact of His death. This was a vital part of the Gospel, central to Christian preaching in every age (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Joseph may have lived in Jerusalem at this time, but he was originally from Arimathea, a village 20 miles northwest of the city. He was a wealthy (Matt. 27:57), reputable member of the Council, a non-Jewish designation for the Sanhedrin. He had obviously not approved of the Sanhedrin’s decision to kill Jesus (Luke 23:51). He regarded Jesus as the Messiah, though so far he was a secret disciple (John 19:38). What we do know is that Joseph:

“took courage and went to Pilate boldly, a description unique to Mark. His action was bold because: (a) he was not related to Jesus; (b) his request was a favor that would likely be denied on principle since Jesus had been executed for treason; (c) he risked ceremonial defilement in handling a dead body; (d) his request amounted to an open confession of personal loyalty to the crucified Jesus which would doubtless incur his associates’ hostility. He was a secret disciple no longer—something Mark impressed on his readers” [BKC].

1) The Sabbath began at sundown on Friday and ended at sundown on Saturday. “Preparation Day” is a term used for Friday, the day before the Sabbath (Saturday). Mark may be explaining this to his non-Jewish readers. Since no work was allowed on the Jewish Sabbath, Friday was used to prepare for it.

2) Jesus died just a few hours before sundown on Friday. This account confirms the fact that Jesus was crucified on Friday. “Evening” referred to the hours between mid-afternoon (3 P.M.) and sunset, when Friday ended and the Sabbath began.

3) It was against Jewish law to do physical work or to travel on the Sabbath.

4) It was against Jewish law to let a dead body remain exposed overnight (Deuteronomy 21:23). Under Roman law the release of a crucified man's corpse for burial was determined only by the imperial magistrate.

“Usually such a request by a victim's relatives was granted, but sometimes a body would be left on a cross to decay or be eaten by predatory animals or birds and the remains were thrown into a common grave. Jewish law required a proper burial for all bodies, even those of executed criminals (cf. Mishnah Sanhedrin 6. 5). It also dictated that those hanged were to be taken down and buried before sunset (cf. Deut. 21:23). Aware of these regulations, Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and requested Jesus' body for burial. He did this as evening approached (lit., “when evening had already arrived,” i.e., probably about 4 P.M.). This gave urgency to his intended action” [BKC].

5) Joseph made arrangements to bury Jesus' body before the Sabbath began.

“If Jesus had died on the Sabbath when Joseph was unavailable, his body would have been taken down by the Romans. Had the Romans taken Jesus' body, no Jews could have confirmed his death, and opponents could have disputed his resurrection” [LABN].

After Jesus died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea asked for his body and then sealed it in a new tomb hewn for himself, a tomb never used before (once again, the prophecy from Isaiah 53 was fulfilled). The irony is that this highly honored member of the Sanhedrin was also a secret follower of Jesus Christ.

“Not all the Jewish leaders hated Jesus. Joseph risked his reputation to give a proper burial to his Lord. It is frightening to risk one's reputation even for what is right. If your Christian witness endangers your reputation, remember Joseph. Today he is remembered with admiration in the Christian church. How many other members of the Jewish Sanhedrin can you name?” [LABN].

15:44-45 - PILATE WONDERED. *“Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.”* Pilate had been amazed at Jesus' behavior before His crucifixion. Now, he was surprised that He was already dead by the time Joseph came to him to request His body for burial, so he asked an official to check to be sure Jesus was dead. There are many people today who still deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They claim that He only swooned, possibly from the loss of blood and loss of sleep. Then, when they put Him in the cool tomb, He was revived. Of course, that does not explain how he got out of the tomb. What we should remember is that His death was confirmed by the centurion, Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea, the religious leaders, and the women who witnessed his burial. Jesus suffered actual physical death on the cross, was raised the third day, and appeared numerous times to various people, including five hundred at one time.

15:46 - JOSEPH...LAID HIM IN A TOMB. “*Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.*” Joseph had to work fast to complete preparation of the body of Jesus for burial before the beginning of the Sabbath at 6:00 P.M. Since he was a wealthy man, he probably had servants to help him to prepare the body for burial before sunset, about two hours away. Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to Jesus by night (John 3), also a secret disciple and a fellow member of the Sanhedrin, joined Joseph in this endeavor (John 19:39-40).

“After Jesus’ body was removed from the cross, it was probably washed (cf. Acts 9:37) before it was wrapped tightly in strips of linen cloth with aromatic spices placed between the wraps. All this was in accord with Jewish burial customs (John 19:39-40). Then the body was carried to a nearby garden and placed on a stone shelf inside Joseph’s own previously unused tomb (Matt. 27:60; John 19:41-42) hewn out of rock” [BKC].

Once the body was placed in the shelf hewn from the rock, the tomb was sealed with a circular flat stone that rolled down a sloping trench, directly in front of the entrance. All we have to do to appreciate just how well the stone must have fit the opening is to study how well the stones fit in the pyramids or other structures, like arches and viaducts of the antiquity. To roll that stone back up again would require the strength of two or more men.

15:47 - WHERE HE WAS LAID. “*Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus were looking on to see where He was laid.*” These two women who had witnessed Jesus’ death (15:40) saw (lit., “were observing,”) where Jesus was buried. These women could do very little - but what they could do, they did do. By law, they could not speak before the Sanhedrin in Jesus’ defense, nor could they appeal to Pilate. They could not protect Jesus from the mob and they could not deliver him from the Roman guards. But what they could do, they did. They stayed at the cross when some of the disciples had fled. We must remember that John was standing with Mary, the mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross. If John was there, some of the other may have also been there, only less conspicuous. After His death, these women followed Jesus’ body to its tomb. “They prepared spices for his body. Because these women used the opportunities they had, they were the first to witness the resurrection. God blessed their devotion and diligence. As believers, we should take advantage of the opportunities we have and do what we can for Christ, instead of worrying about what we cannot do” [LABN].

Apparently the other women had returned home or to the place where they were staying in Jerusalem. They may have gone to prepare for the Sabbath (Luke 23:56).

CHAPTER 16

The Resurrection, 16:1-13

(See also, MATT. 28:1-8; LUKE 24:1-12; JOHN 20:1-10)

NOTE: The testimonies concerning the Resurrection vary to some degree from one Gospel account to another. Enemies of the Cross may point to these differences and reject the Resurrection on the grounds that they contain contradictions. Bible scholars, and even attorneys who have studied the testimonies of eyewitnesses to the Resurrection, do not see contradictions, they see various, acceptable, believable differences in details (e.g., the number and names of the women who came to the tomb, the number of angelic messengers who appeared, and the women's reactions to the Resurrection announcement). Each Gospel writer recorded what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write, which means that not one of the Gospel writers reported all the details of the post-Resurrection appearances. What the natural variations prove is that the evidence is credible. The variations in the recorded testimonies reflect normal eyewitness accounts of an event. If one goes to court today and five witnesses are called and each one gives the same detailed account of something they witnessed, the first thing that comes to the mind of the judge, attorneys, and hopefully the jury, is that these people have conspired to tell one particular version of the event to the court, and that their testimony is probably perjured. Natural variations in the accounts help affirm the authenticity of the testimonies. The natural variations in the accounts in the Gospels help to confirm the Resurrection as an historical event.

The women's arrival at the tomb (16:1-5)

16:1 - WHEN THE SABBATH WAS OVER. *“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him.”* “When the Sabbath was over would mean sunset Saturday evening. Luke (23:56) says that because it was the Sabbath the disciples rested the entire day. The women who came early in the morning to the tomb were Mary Magdalene, Salome (the mother of James and John (Mark 15:40 and Matt. 27:56), and Mary the mother of James (James the younger, 15:40). They had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him. These women never expected to see Jesus alive again. They went out to the tomb solely for the purpose of anointing the dead body, or to complete the process begun by Joseph and his servants.

“Luke (23:56) indicates that they actually bought and prepared the necessary spices the day he died, sometime during the few hours that remained between the time of his death Friday afternoon and sunset that evening, which marked the beginning of the Sabbath. According to Luke, by the time they had everything ready, it was already the Sabbath, so they had to wait until Sunday morning. It seems to have been their intention to anoint the body immediately, but there was not enough time” [NCWB].

The Sabbath ended at sunset, or about 6:00 P.M. on Saturday and the new day, Sunday began at that time. That evening after sunset, after the Sabbath was over, the women who had witnessed Jesus'

death and burial (15:40, 47) bought spices, and aromatic oils, to anoint Jesus' body (lit., "Him") the next morning. Here we may recall that Jesus had said that Mary of Bethany had anointed His body for the purpose for which He had come. What this proves is that they had not understood Jesus when He had taught them that He would rise from the dead (8:31; 9:31; 10:34). Some have written that bringing spices to a tomb in those days is like taking flowers today, but they miss the point. These spices were poured over a dead body to counteract the odor of decay and as a symbolic expression of loving devotion. Embalming was not a Jewish custom, as it was in Egypt.

16:2 - THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK. *"Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen."* One can imagine that these women may not have slept much the night before, or that they had simply gotten up early and headed for the tomb in which they had seen Joseph and Nicodemus bury the body of Jesus. They arrived just at sunrise on the first day of the week, meaning Sunday morning. In time the church began observing the First Day as a day of worship, the holy day, in commemoration of the Resurrection. Matthew (28:1) confirms the early hour, saying they went out at dawn. By this time Jesus would have been in the grave three days - or on a part of three separate days, having been in the grave part of Friday, the whole of Saturday, and part of the following first day. This qualified as three days, and it fulfilled the prophecy of the Lord.

16:3 - THE STONE. *"They were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?'"* The stone was flat and round like a solid wheel, and it could be rolled away from the entrance to the tomb by two or more strong men. It was set in a trench which allowed men to roll it into place to seal the tomb. There was probably a dip in the trench at the entrance, which made it impossible for these women to roll it away. The fact that they would be unable to move the stone did not deter these women. They had bought the spices and ointments and they fully expected to get into the tomb. They had to believe God would provide a way. What a blessing these ladies would have missed if they had concluded that it would have been no use to go out to the tomb since they were not physically able to move the stone.

16:4 - THE STONE HAD BEEN ROLLED AWAY. *"Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large."* God took care of their problem before they even arrived. "They were worrying about who would roll away the stone, but when they got there it was already moved. This is only the first of a whole series of overwhelming evidences that support the resurrection story. Jesus' friends could not have moved the stone and stolen his body because of the double Roman guard that was posted at the entrance. And his enemies certainly would not have removed the stone" [NCWB].

16:5 - ENTERING THE TOMB. *"Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed."* They did not waste time questioning why the stone had been rolled back. They simply entered the tomb and when they looked to the right they saw a young man sitting there, probably on the rock shelf where the body of Jesus had lain.

Matthew (28:2) calls this "young man" an "angel of the Lord," but Mark describes him as he must have appeared to the women. Matthew (28:6) also reports that the angel first met the women outside the tomb and then invited them to come in and see where Jesus' body had been lying.

“After moving the stone he had apparently been instructed to wait around and explain what had happened to Jesus. Alford suggests a likely synthesis of Matthew’s account and Mark’s when he says that the angel was probably sitting outside the tomb waiting, and then went in with the women.... The angel’s first task was to reassure the startled women. He not only told them the good news of Jesus’ resurrection, but he pointed to further proof of that fact. Not only was there an open grave; he showed them that it was also empty” [NCWB].

They would also have seen the burial cloth strips that had been wrapped around the body of Jesus, and the napkins that had been wrapped around his head. There is no indication that they questioned this. Mark tells us that these women were amazed. Who would not have been amazed? How often those who encountered Jesus or saw some manifestation of His presence or power were amazed.

16:6 - HE IS RISEN. *“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.’”* Often in the Bible when there is an encounter with a messenger from the Lord, the first thing the Lord’s messenger must say is, “Do not be afraid.” These first visitors to the tomb were amazed” and he told them not to be amazed - do not be so astonished. Matthew (28:5) tells us that the angel told them not to be “frightened”, but the word Mark uses might be translated just as easily, “Do not be shaken!”

When the angel saw the women he knew exactly why they were there - “you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here.” The angel’s encouragement began with a positive identification of the person they had come to anoint. There could be no confusion as to whose tomb this was or why they were there. This was the name they were so familiar with, the person they loved. “The declaration of his name spoke reassurance and comfort. But what greater encouragement than to hear that their Lord had risen from the dead. (See comments on Luke 24:5, 6.) behold the place where they laid him—The angel offered further visible evidence of the resurrection”[NCWB].

The resurrection of Jesus Christ provides a fitting climax to Mark’s Gospel(1:1). The Messiah did indeed come to suffer and die for the sins of His people, but His death did not mean defeat. He was vindicated and victorious through His resurrection. One of the cardinal facts and doctrines of the New Testament is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the crowning miracle of the New Testament. If Christ be not risen, our faith is vain (1 Cor. 15:14).

“The whole of the New Testament revelation rests on this as an historical fact. On the day of Pentecost Peter argued the necessity of Christ’s resurrection from the prediction in Ps. 16 (Acts 2:24-28). In his own discourses, also, our Lord clearly intimates his resurrection (Matt. 20:19; Mark 9:9; 14:28; Luke 18:33; John 2:19-22). The evangelists give circumstantial accounts of the facts connected with that event, and the apostles, also, in their public teaching largely insist upon it” [EBD - The Eastons Bible Dictionary].

There are eleven different post-resurrection appearances recorded in the New Testament:

1. To Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher alone. This is recorded at length only by John (John 20:11- 18), and alluded to by Mark (Mark 16:9-11).
2. To certain women, “the other Mary,” Salome, Joanna, and others, as they returned from the Sepulcher. Matthew (Matt. 28:1-10) alone gives an account of this. (Compare Mark 16:1-8, and Luke 24:1-11.)
3. To Simon Peter alone on the day of the resurrection. (See Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5.)
4. To the two disciples on the way to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection, recorded fully only by Luke (Luke 24:13-35; Mark 16:12, 13).
5. To the ten disciples (Thomas being absent) and others “with them,” at Jerusalem on the evening of the resurrection day. John gives an account of this appearance, (John 20:19-24).
6. To the disciples again (Thomas being present) at Jerusalem (Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:33-40; John 20:26-28. See also, 1 Cor. 15:5).
7. To the disciples when fishing at the Sea of Galilee. Of this appearance also John (John 21:1-23) alone gives an account.
8. To the eleven, and above 500 brethren at once, at an appointed place in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6; compare Matt. 28:16-20).
9. To James, but under what circumstances we are not informed (1 Cor. 15:7).
10. To the apostles immediately before the ascension. They accompanied him from Jerusalem to Mount Olivet, and there they saw him ascend “till a cloud received him out of their sight” (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:4-10).
11. In addition to the above, mention might be made of Christ’s manifestation of Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus, who speaks of it as an appearance of the risen Savior (Acts 9:3-9, 17; 1 Cor. 15:8; 9:1).

“It is worthy of note that it is distinctly related that on most of these occasions our Lord afforded his disciples the amplest opportunity of testing the fact of his resurrection. He conversed with them face to face. They touched him (Matt. 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:27), and he ate bread with them (Luke 24:42, 43; John 21:12, 13)” [EBD].

“The resurrection also provides the possibility of His return “with great power and glory” (14:62; 3:26), when He will establish the kingdom the Jews anticipated. “The resurrection of Jesus Christ is

significant for the believer because His resurrection is the guarantee of our own resurrection and glorification (cf. 1 Cor 15:20-23)” [BSB]. Note the numerous evidences supporting the historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:13-19. The Believer’s Study Bible lists these evidences:

1. The birth and continuance of Christianity: about A.D. 30, something happened to give rise to a new religion called Christianity.
2. The change in the day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday by Jews who revered the Sabbath.
3. The risen Lord testified to having been seen by women first, in spite of the fact that their testimony was considered invalid in that day.
4. The radical change in the disciples: new power, new courage, faithfulness unto death.
5. The accepted high moral character of the eyewitnesses.
6. The empty tomb—no corpse was found.
7. The numerous and various resurrection appearances.
8. The unlikelihood of mass hallucination.
9. The fact that the reported appearances lasted 40 days and then completely stopped.
10. The 50-day interval between the resurrection and the proclamation at Pentecost (Acts 2).
11. The many of fulfilled O.T. prophecies of just the cross and resurrection alone (15:3-6).
12. The accepted character and claims of Jesus: He claimed to be God (John 8:58; 10:30; 14:9). He claimed He would rise (Matt 16:21); He is either Lord, liar, or lunatic—there are no other options.
13. the articles left in the empty tomb (John 20:5-9): grave robbers probably would not unwrap a dead body they were stealing.
14. The unexpected nature of the resurrection: the disciples were not looking for or expecting the resurrection of Jesus.
15. The reliable eyewitness documents recording the facts: The Gospels (all were written by eyewitnesses or associates of those witnesses and before A.D. 100, within a maximum of 70 years after the actual event) [BSB].

16:7 - GO, TELL HIS DISCIPLES. *“But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.’”* The angel told the women to go, tell

His disciples - and Peter - that Jesus had risen, and that He would appear to them in Galilee, just as He had told them. It is amazing that as often as Jesus had told them what to expect they were totally unprepared for the crucifixion, and did not anticipate the Resurrection.

There is a point of interest here that we should not overlook. The angels singled out Peter when he told the women to go tell the disciples. Was it that Peter was the leader of the apostles? Was he the oldest apostle? Or was it that Peter had denied the Lord and had been forgiven? Many believe that Peter was a primary source of Mark's for this book, and if that was the case we can understand why Mark is the only one to report that the angel mentioned Peter's name separately. "The other writers may not have felt it was necessary to distinguish Peter from the rest of the disciples since he had always been one of them. However, it must have been a constant cause of wonder to Peter, that after denying Jesus so vehemently, Jesus should make this special effort to include him in their fellowship again. that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" [NCWB].

16:8 - THEY WERE AFRAID. *"They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."* This is especially interesting in light of some modern day claims from people who entertain congregations with tales of encounters with Jesus or angels.

No less a Greek scholar than the late A. T. Robertson wrote that the word rendered in the NASB, "gripped them" is in the imperfect tense,

"more exactly, held them, was holding them fast. Trembling and astonishment (tremos kai ekstasis, trembling and ecstasy), Mark has it, while Mat 28:8 has "with fear and great joy" which see for discussion. Clearly and naturally their emotions were mixed. They said nothing to any one (ouden ouden eipan). This excitement was too great for ordinary conversation. Mat 28:8 notes that they "ran to bring his disciples word." Hushed to silence their feet had wings as they flew on. For they were afraid (ephobounto gar). Imperfect tense. The continued fear explains their continued silence" [ATR].

Marginal notes will remind the reader that in some manuscripts, the Book of Mark ends here. Robertson notes that at this point Aleph and B, the two oldest and best Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, stop with this verse. Three Armenian manuscripts also end here. Some documents (cursive 274 and Old Latin k) have a shorter ending than the usual long one. The great mass of the documents have the long ending seen in the English versions.

As Robertson points out, "The facts are very complicated, but argue strongly against the genuineness of verses Mark 16:9-20 of Mark 16" [ATR]. However, Robertson says,

"There is little in these verses not in Mat 28:1ff. It is difficult to believe that Mark ended his Gospel with verse Mark 16:8 unless he was interrupted. A leaf or column may have been torn off at the end of the papyrus roll. The loss of the ending was treated in various ways. Some documents left it alone. Some added one ending, some

another, some added both. A full discussion of the facts is found in the last chapter of my *Studies in Mark's Gospel* and also in my *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, pp. 214-16" [ATR].

16:9 - AFTER HE HAD RISEN. *"Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons."* The fact that Mary was alone here after accompanying the other women to the tomb has caused some difficulty. The angel of the Lord had appeared to a group of faithful women and told them that Jesus had risen and would meet them in Galilee. They left to go tell the Apostles. Then, Peter and John ran to the tomb, John outrunning Peter to the sepulcher, but not entering into it. When Peter arrived, he rushed into the tomb, and John followed him. John saw the evidence (the collapsed burial cloth strips or bands) and believed - the disciple Jesus loved was the first to believe in the Resurrection. A possible explanation is that the women broke up after talking with the angel, and that Mary Magdalene followed Peter and John back to the grave. After they left, Jesus appeared to Mary, an encounter John describes in 20:11-18.

16:10 - SHE WENT AND REPORTED. *"She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping."* "Those who had been with him" denotes the apostles. Remember that Peter and John had seen the open tomb and the burial cloths in the tomb, but they had not seen the risen Lord. The apostles were "mourning and weeping." They still did not understand.

16:11 - THEY REFUSED TO BELIEVE IT. *"When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it."* Here is something else in the Gospel According to Mark that should amaze us. All four Gospel writers record this, including the fact that they refused to believe Mary Magdalene's report she had seen the risen Lord. What makes it more amazing is that those defeated, desperate, disillusioned disciples were at a loss and Peter was considering going back to fishing. Yet, after they had seen the risen Lord (and then on the Day of Pentecost, received the Holy Spirit) they would risk their lives time and again for their Savior. In fact, according to tradition all the apostles became martyrs for Christ.

16:12 - HE APPEARED IN A DIFFERENT FORM. *"After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country."* Jesus appeared to two disciples as they were walking along the road. Bible students have discussed the explanation that Jesus appeared to these two disciples "in a different form." Does this mean that Jesus appeared to them in a different form from that which Mary Magdalene saw? Or, does it mean that He appeared in a different form from that which they had witnessed before His death? A. T. Robertson notes that this "was not a metamorphosis or transfiguration like that described in Mark 9:2. Luke explains that their eyes were holden so that they could not recognize Jesus (Luke 24:16). This matchless story appears in full in Luke 24:13-32" [ATR].

16:13 - THEY DID NOT BELIEVE. *"They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either."* When the two disciples who had seen the risen Lord realized who Jesus was, they rushed back to Jerusalem to report it to the eleven.

“It's not enough to read about Christ as a personality or to study his teachings. You must also believe he is God, trust him to save you, and accept him as Lord of your life. This is the difference between knowing Jesus and knowing about him. Only when you know Christ will you be motivated to share with others what he has done for you” [LABN].

It would be easy for us to look back and decide that those early disciples must have been very slow to grasp the truth. Jesus had done everything necessary to prepare them for the Resurrection, and yet when they heard first-hand testimony that Jesus had appeared two times, they did not believe either report. Sadly, even with the written record detailing the post-resurrection appearances, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the radical change in the lives of the disciples, masses today still will not believe in the Resurrection.

The Bible clearly teaches that we must believe that Jesus died and was raised from the dead if we would be saved (Rom. 10:9-10), yet millions reject Him. Some stumble over Creation, some over the virgin birth, some over the perfect life, some over His vicarious suffering and death, and many more over the Resurrection. Yet, the preaching of the Resurrection in the First Century was the most compelling evidence that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the Savior, the only hope for the world.

Jesus Commissions His Disciples, 16:14-18

16:14 - HE APPEARED TO THE ELEVEN. *“Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen.”* Jesus appeared to the eleven as they were reclining at the table and rebuked them for their unbelief. It was the custom to recline on mats at a very low table for meals. They would prop on one the left elbow and reach for the bread or the cup with their right hand. They would lie at an angle toward the table with their feet would be behind them, or away from the table.

Jesus rebuked them because they had not believed the testimony of the witnesses who had seen the risen Lord. He does not mention the many times He had tried to prepare them for this death, burial, and resurrection.

16:15 - GO INTO ALL THE WORLD. *“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.’”* Mark gives us the Reader’s Digest version of the Great Commission as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember that I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20, HCSB).

Jesus commands all believers to go into all the world, telling everyone that he had paid the penalty for sin and that those who believe in him can be forgiven and receive eternal life. Jesus gave the Great Commission first to eleven apostles, but He expects every believer to obey Him. Today, millions of Christians are seeking to honor our Lord's commission. I am a Southern Baptist and from childhood I have been learning how the Lord led a group of godly men to adopt the Cooperative Program in order to involve thousands of churches and millions of believers in an effort to carry out the Great Commission. I was taught the spirit of cooperation in my youth and then taught it to others as a pastor. In addition, I taught and promoted the Cooperative Program in the local church, in associations, and as a member of the executive board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, I served as chairman of the Cooperative Program Sub-committee at one time. I serve on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, formerly the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. LifeWay does not receive Cooperative Program money, they put money into the Cooperative Program. What is the Cooperative Program, and how does it work?

Well over forty thousand churches are invited, and encouraged to give a percentage of their tithes and undesignated gifts to support missions through the Cooperative Program. Each church decides how much they will give. No individual, no agency, and no entity can assess an amount for any one of those churches. I have served a church that could only give one percent for a period of time because of our obligations to a building program. I also served one church for fifteen years that gave over thirty percent to missions through the Cooperative Program. Why do we do that? It is a commitment to the Great Commission. All believers must be witnesses as they go throughout the world, but some people are called by the Lord to go into various places to preach, teach, heal, dig wells, or help people operate a computer. Thousands serve throughout America and around the world and we are committed to support them so they do not have to expend a major part of their time and energy raising money to support their work.

The driving power that carries missionaries around the world and sets Christ's church in motion is the faith that comes from the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Do you ever feel as though you don't have the skill or determination to be a witness for Christ? You must personally realize that Jesus rose from the dead and lives for you today. As you grow in your relationship with Christ, he will give you both the opportunities and the inner strength to tell his message" [LABN].

16:16 - HE WHO HAS BELIEVED. *"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."*

1) THOSE WHO BELIEVE WILL BE SAVED.

The Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved? Paul and Silas answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). Here, we have the additional words, "and has been baptized." Does this mean that one must believe and be baptized in order to be saved? A. T. Robertson explains it:

"The omission of baptized with "disbelieveth" would seem to show that Jesus does not make baptism essential to salvation. Condemnation rests on disbelief, not on

baptism. So salvation rests on belief. Baptism is merely the picture of the new life not the means of securing it. So serious a sacramental doctrine would need stronger support anyhow than this disputed portion of Mark” [ATR].

When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, people asked what must we do to be saved? “Repent,” Peter said to them, “and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38, HCSB). The construction in the original (Greek) is very clear. The people asked, what must we do to be saved? Peter answered, “Repent” (second person, imperative, plural, active = “all of you repent!). There is a break, shown by the change in number and voice. “Be baptized (third person, imperative, singular, passive = each individual who does repent should submit himself or herself for baptism). Baptism is a beautiful picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the death and burial of our old life, and our being raised with Him. Paul explains it in his letter to the Roman church:

“Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in a new way of life. For if we have been joined with Him in the likeness of His death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:3-5, HCSB).

Believing is essential to salvation. Baptism is essential to the testimony of those who are saved. Baptism is not optional, it is commanded. Since it is commanded, you cannot refuse baptism and claim to obey God - in essence, denying the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The mode of baptism in the New Testament was immersion. Only immersion gives the full picture of the death, burial, and resurrection.

Years ago, there was a program on a Monroe, Louisiana television station, aired every Sunday evening, as I recall. The program was, LET THE BIBLE SPEAK. The hosts continually kept that theme before viewers. They said, “Let the Bible Speak”, and then proceeded to muzzle it. Their primary message was that all who were not a member of their church (denomination) were condemned. Their favorite subject was baptism. One evening one of their enlightened teachers insisted that baptism is essential to salvation - “you must believe and be baptized”- and then he sought to illustrate why immersion is the scriptural mode of baptism. He said, “You do not take a person out to the cemetery and lay him down by a grave and sprinkle dirt on him, you put him in the grave and cover him with dirt.”

He both made a point and at the same time refuted his basis thesis. Immediately, I thought, “Yes, but you do not take a living person and put him into a grave and cover him up with dirt so that he will die. You only bury dead people.” Baptism is a picture of a burial, and we only baptize dead people, those who have experienced the death of the old self which is dominated by sin. When we believe in Jesus Christ we join in His death, burial, and resurrection. Believer’s baptism is a beautiful portrayal of that experience. It is not the experience, it is a memorial to it, a testimony to it.

2) THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE ARE CONDEMNED.

If you have not already believed in Jesus Christ and received eternal life you are currently under a death sentence for eternity. You will not live out your life and stand before God for him to weigh your good deeds against your bad deeds to determine whether or not He will allow you to enter heaven. If you have not received Jesus by grace, through faith, you are under a death sentence at this very moment (John 3:18). That means you are going to hell, so let us remove all questions about what is going to happen. You are either going to heaven or you are going to hell - forever. Sadly, most people seem to think it is their decision. It is not! God chooses you, you do not choose Him. He came to seek and save the lost. He always takes the initiative. No one would realize his need for God apart from His revelation of sin, judgment, and the righteousness offered to you in Jesus Christ. He does not save you against your will, but he does the seeking and the saving. Our place is to trust Him and commit ourselves to Him.

There is a popular movement sweeping the country today, and it is having a dramatic impact on the church. Rick Warren has seen some phenomenal growth at Saddleback Church in California. He has also had an incredible response to his “seeker friendly” program. All you have to do is to show many pastors the nickels and noses and they will embrace the program. Many pastors read and applied the principles of THE PURPOSE DRIVEN CHURCH and some of them saw one of two things. For some, the church took off and began to grow, some became mega-churches almost overnight. Some split over the program. Next, he wrote THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE, which has been about the most popular book in America, crossing denominational lines and impacting individuals and churches.

I will risk criticism here, but I am convinced that we need to consider a few critical things about this movement, or any movement that becomes popular with the masses. A few years ago it was PROMISE KEEPERS. A lot of people freely testify to the blessings they received from PROMISE KEEPERS. My initial response was to seek information. Then, it dawned on me - born again Christians are committed to a life of obedience to God, guided by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. While others testify to the blessings they received through PROMISE KEEPERS, I felt no leadership in that direction. Many testify to blessings through the 40 DAYS OF PURPOSE. I got stuck on a few points that seemed to hold me back. The lack of emphasis on sin and its consequences, and repentance left me with some questions. If you are disobedient to God, the Holy Spirit will convict you so that you should repent. He will direct you to the Word He has inspired and He will illuminate your heart and mind so that you will understand His will and make an application of biblical principles in your life.

No matter how much good is accomplished through Rick Warren’s Saddleback approach, I would caution anyone against putting any man, any program, or any book between himself and the Word of God. A friend, fellow LifeWay Christian Resources trustee Ed Ethridge was asked, “Have you read the PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE?” When he answered, “No”, he was asked, “Why?” Ed said,

“Because I have a purpose and you will find it in Second Timothy, chapter four.”

My purpose is neither to commend or condemn Rick Warren, whom I have heard, met - and from whom I received a big bear-hug. I will, however warn anyone against getting to involved with any movement that refuses to pass along the warning repeated so often in the Bible that those who do not repent will likewise perish. The Bible is very clear - and the Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, the perfect Word of the perfect God.

Let me repeat this: if God could not have produced a perfect Book why do we call Him God, and if He could have done it and wouldn't do it, what kind of God is He? Sadly, it seems that one purpose to which some people are driven today is to get rid of sin, its consequences, and repentance. As a matter of fact someone told me of a choir that was planning a tour and had been scheduled to sing at a church in California. Before they left, they received a call from a staff member requesting a list of their songs. He said, “We don't want anything about he blood, or anything that is gory that might offend these people out here.” I believe I would have canceled the appointment. We must preach the Word, and that means all of it. The Bible is very clear:

1. All have sinned, Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8.
2. The wages of sin is death - eternal death in a real hell, Romans 6:23, John 1:18.
“The soul who sins shall die” (Ez. 18:20)
3. God loves you, John 3:16; Romans 5:8.
4. God will save you. “If we confess our sins...” (1 John 1:9)
5. The gift of God is eternal life, Romans 10:8-13.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.** For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; **he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God**” (John 3:16-18, emphasis added).

Again, the Bible is very clear: those who believe are saved forever. Those who reject Jesus are condemned to eternal death - that is hell and it is forever. God loves us enough to provide for our salvation, but if we reject it we will pay the consequences forever. That means conscious, eternal torment.

16:17-18 - IN MY NAME. *“These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”*

Jesus promised that we will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon us and we shall be His witnesses beginning where we live and then as we go throughout the world. This power is promised to those who believe “in My name.” In the Bible, to believe in one’s name is to believe in the person. Name implies one’s nature and character. True believers will:

1) Cast out demons - It happened often in the New Testament (What about today?).

2) Speak with new tongues, Paul wrote to Corinth to prevent abuse of this gift, and to tell them that there would be a time when this gift would cease (when the Scripture was completed and distributed to some degree).

3) Pick up serpents - Paul experienced this. I can assure you, however, that if I handle a snake it will be an accident - as a matter of fact, Paul’s encounter with a snake was an accident. This is not a part of some game plan to demonstrate the power of God. We are not instructed to hold snake handling services. My son told me that when he was a student at Mississippi College he heard a speaker who studied unusual types of worship. He was driving through some place in the mountains of east Tennessee when he stopped for gas at a service station. He had an opportunity to meet the owner and his two sons, James and John. He learned that they belonged to a church that had snake handling services and he was invited to attend. The next year he was driving through the town and make it a point to stop by the service station. He saw James and John but not the father. When he asked about him, James said, “He was handling a rattlesnake at church and the rattlesnake bit him and he died.” The next year he stopped by and saw John at the station but there was no sign of James. He asked and John and was told that James had been bitten by a rattlesnake and that he had died. The visiting preacher asked, “Are you going to handle any rattlesnakes?” John exclaimed, “Do you think I’m crazy?!!!”

In extreme situations, there may be a time when one of the servants of the Lord may be called on to put his life on the line for the Lord or for someone else. The Lord will protect us under many circumstances, but that does not mean that we should deliberately put ourselves in harm’s way.

4) Lay hands on the sick and they will recover - this happened often in the early church. God will still heal in response to the prayers of the saints - when it serves is people.

The late Dr. Stephen Olford, who sat on the same pew with me when we received our doctorates, was one of the most powerful preachers the world has seen since Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Someone said, “Some day someone is going to pick up the Bible and read it and believe it, and it is going to change the world.” Stephen Olford came as close as anyone in the past century. Olford was a student in London when he was injured in an accident and taken to a hospital. He received a letter from his missionary father, in which he wrote, “Only one life to live, ‘twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.” Stephen recovered and committed himself to Jesus Christ. Dr. Olford once said, “Faith is not believing God can do it, faith is believing God will do it.”

I will confess. I am guilty. I have prayed wishing when I should have prayed believing. I have a favorite story that will illustrate the point, a story I have shared in sermons and bible studies. When

I was in my mid-thirties I was pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas. Bob Moore was one of our deacons and the director of a large youth department. Bob told me one day that he had asked one of our members, Kay, to speak to the youth department one Sunday and that he would like to bring her by my study and let her share her testimony with me. It was such a remarkable testimony of faith that I shall never forget it. Kay was a devout Catholic when she moved to Nederland. She moved next door to the Hinsons and friends warned her that they were the “biggest bunch of Baptists in Nederland.” Actually, there were only three of them, Bill, Joyce, and their daughter, Billie. She kept her guard up and maintained her distance from them for a long time, but because of their faith, and because they lived what they proclaimed, there came a day when Kay got down on her knees in her kitchen and prayed, “Lord, they have something I don’t have, and I want it.” When she got up she was a born-again Christian. The testimony was even more remarkable than that, because she watched the teenaged daughter when she began dating because she was convinced that with all the temptations young people face when they are dating, if they were not for real she would see it in Billie. She would watch her and her friends, and their dates. The godly life of this teenaged girl was what the Lord had used to bring her neighbor under conviction of the fact that they had something that was missing in her life.

Some time after Kay shared this with me in my study, she stopped by to tell me how she had failed another neighbor. One morning she saw this lady coming across her yard and she knew immediately that something was wrong. Her neighbor stopped at the door and pleaded with Kay to pray for her little boy. She told her that her young son was in the hospital, he was in a serious condition, and the doctors told her that he could not live - but if he did he would be a vegetable. She was pleading with Kay to pray for God to heal her son. Kay promised to do so, and did. Several days later she was the neighbor coming across her yard and she was afraid of what she might hear. However, the lady stopped and began to thank Kay for praying for her son. He is completely healed. “God heard your prayers. Thank you for praying for John.”

Kay was disturbed. “She said, “I am so ashamed. I prayed for her little boy, and I asked God to heal him if it was His will, but I really never believed He would do it.” Kay was deeply convicted of her lack of faith. Have you ever done anything like that? I must confess that I have been just as guilty as Kay, and not just one time. Perhaps the greatest failure most Christians experience is in the area of intercessory prayer. What a blessing we can be to others if we simply believe the Lord’s promises. What a blessing we deny ourselves and others when we do not believe.

The Ascension, 16:19-20

16:19 - HE WAS RECEIVED UP INTO HEAVEN. *“So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.”*

1) The Lord spoke to them.

Although the expression, “Lord” commonly used in the Gospel According to Luke, this is the only time Jesus is referred to as “Lord” in the entire book of Mark. The use of the term raises questions

about the final verses of this Gospel account. For example, the New Commentary of the Whole Bible looks at two possibilities:

“Its presence here may indicate further the unlikelihood that Mark wrote these final verses. It is possible, however, that Mark could have used the expression for the first time here in order to dramatically punctuate his account of Jesus’ life by acknowledging the risen Jesus as his Lord” [NCWB].

Mark was referring to Jesus’ final words to the disciples before His ascension:

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:4-8, NASB).

2) He was received up into heaven.

Jesus was taken back up into heaven where he took his seat at the right hand of God. This is the first time we are given any indication in the New Testament of Jesus’ position in heaven following the completion of his earthly ministry, and His ascension. Not long after this, Stephen saw him at God’s right hand (Acts 7:55, 56). In Revelation, Jesus is seen at the right hand of the Father. This is Jesus’ exalted position in glory.

16:20 - THEY WENT FORTH AND PREACHED. *“And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.”* The disciples went out, in obedience to the Lord’s Great Commission, preaching the Gospel. The Lord was working in them and through them to confirm the Gospel they preached. This is a brief statement of what happened after the Ascension and after Pentecost.

Jesus had said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). I had written an article for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (now, LifeWay Christian Resources) on outreach around 1970. I made the statement that in Acts 1:8 Jesus restated the Great Commission for emphasis. When I was working on a verse by verse study in Acts, I had written something similar. Then, I talked with Dr. Leo Eddleman, who was writing his commentary on Acts at the time. He pointed out what I should have known. In Acts 1:8, Jesus is predicting that after they received the Holy Spirit they would carry out the Great Commission - not repeating the Great Commission, but announcing that they would honor His Commission. The Book of Acts chronicles the faithful service of but a few of the disciples, primarily focusing on Peter and

John at first, and then on Paul and his companions.

CONCLUSION

The Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. It has never needed to be amended. It is not primarily a book of history, but when it speaks to historical events it is accurate. The Bible is not to be judged by history, but history will be judged by the Bible. It is not a book of science, but there are many scientific “discoveries” made during the past two hundred years that are revealed in the Book of Job, possibly the earliest book of the Bible (ocean currents, water cycle, weight of air - see Dr. Henry Morris, THE REMARKABLE RECORD OF JOB).

The Gospels declare the Good News of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, miraculous protection, His perfect life, His amazing miracles, His authoritative teaching, His powerful preaching, and His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and present position. The Gospels also reveal His promised return, as well as some of the things that we can expect to happen before His return. For example, the Lord said there would be earthquakes, famines, and wars, but “the end is not yet.”

During the past century this world has seen two world wars, the Korean conflict, Viet Nam, and countless lesser wars and skirmishes. On nine/eleven, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States. Since that time we have been at war with an enemy like none we have ever known before. That war has taken our troops to Afghanistan and Iraq. Today is New Year’s Day, 2005, and American soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen are dying in Iraq to try to stop a fanatical, zealous, religious enemy that sees America as a primary enemy. Sadly, we have a lot of Americans, especially in the entertainment and news media who are condemning America and encouraging the enemy. We may well be seeing the beginning of the conflict that will bring the forces of the Satan, the serpent of Genesis and dragon of Revelation, against the children of God.

We have seen famine claim the lives of countless thousands of people in Africa. There is the potential for famine in many places in the world at this time.

On December 26, 2004, an earthquake in the Indian ocean launched a tsunami that swept across the ocean and without warning hit eleven countries at the peak of their tourist season. The tsunami, set off by the earthquake, traveled across the ocean floor at about five hundred miles an hour. When it hit shallow water it slowed down, but hit the beaches as thirty foot waves, still traveling at fifty miles an hour. First reports said that 11,000 were killed by the tsunami. Within hours, the numbers were climbing, 20,000, 40,000, 77,000, then 100,000, and then 120,000. Now they are reporting that the figure has passed 150,000. Indonesia estimates at least 70,000 more casualties. A million people or more were displaced, their homes and businesses were destroyed. There is potential for all sorts of disease that could cause tens of thousands of more deaths.

The talking heads of the media have asked if the earth has ever seen a more serious tsunami. The

earthquake registered 9.1 on the Richer scale, the strongest since one that hit Alaska forty years ago. Over and over, television anchors stated that this tsunami was the worst that had ever hit the earth, certainly the worst in terms of the death count.

That is not exactly right. In Genesis 6, the Bible tells us about the greatest catastrophe in the history of the world, the Flood of Noah's day. Creation scientists have tried to work out how the Flood could have occurred in such a way as to leave the evidence it left behind. Some believe there were earthquakes all over the world, tidal waves (tsunamis), and volcanic eruptions that spewed volcanic ash into the air, blocking out the sun over much of the world's surface.

The waters not only swept over beaches, they swept over all land, destroying all buildings, all plant and animal life, all human beings except those on the ark. Yes, there has been a worse tsunami - in fact many must have hit all at the same time, as continental shifts occurred, as the "fountains of the deep" gave up their water (earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes). All life was destroyed except for Noah and his family and those animals that were on the ark. When it was all over, God gave the rainbow as a sign that He would never destroy the earth with water again.

The next time, He is going to destroy the earth it will be with fire. The Gospels tell us that Jesus is coming again. When He returns the believers will be caught up to meet Him in the air. Then will come the Great Tribulation of seven years. At the end of that time, Jesus will return to put all enemies under His foot. He came the first time as the Suffering Servant. He is coming again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ will spend eternity with Him. Those who reject Him will have their wishes granted - forever. It is either heaven or hell. Either will be forever.

The Gospel According to Mark has presented the Good News of Jesus Christ. We have the testimony of Scripture, the testimony of Jesus Himself, the testimony of a virgin birth, a perfect life, His teachings, His death, burial, and resurrection, the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Take one more look at Jesus as He is proclaimed in the Gospel of Mark. Now answer this question:

Who Then Is This?