

MEN IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

By Pastor Glenn Pease

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1. PETER-A DARING DISCIPLE Based on Matt. 14:22-36

Back in 1959 Ford Motor Company admitted they made a big mistake in making the Edsel. It cost 250 million to bring it to market, and they lost 200 million during the 2 and 1/2 years they produced it. It was the number one lemon in the history of the U. S. auto industry. But smart owners turned their lemons into lemonade. They formed an Edsel owners club in all 50 states; they published a quality magazine and had annual conventions, and they made their Edsels collectors cars worth much more than they were new.

The point is, mistakes can be costly, but they can also be profitable. The whole idea involved in Rom. 8:28 that God works in all things for the good of those who love him is this very point. God

will even work with us in our mistakes to make them profitable and learning experiences. This means we do not need to fear failure so much that we refuse to take a chance and do what is of some risk. Our very failure could be the stepping stone to success. This is not some kind of mystical religious principle, but it is the wisdom of very practical minded men. Years ago a writer interviewed IBM president Thomas J. Wadson, and this is what he said:

"It's not exactly my line," Watson said, "But would you like me to give you a formula for writing success? It's quite simple, really. Double your rate of failure." "You're making a common mistake. You're thinking of failure as the enemy of success. But it isn't at all. Failure is a teacher-a harsh one perhaps, but the best. You say you have a desk full of rejected manuscripts? That's great! Everyone of those manuscripts was rejected for a reason. Have you pulled them to pieces looking for that reason? "You can be discouraged by failure-or you can learn from it. So go ahead and make mistakes. Make all you can. Because, remember that's where you'll find success. On the far side of failure."

There are numerous illustrations of this in the secular world, and there are volumes that deal with the subject. But the best illustration of this in the New Testament is the life of Peter. We have more recorded mistakes and blunders of Peter than all the rest of the 12 put together. He was the master of mistakes, and yet Jesus chose him to be the leader of the 12. There is no list of the Apostles where Peter is not first. Is there any connection between all of his mistakes and his being the number one man in leadership? Yes there is, and the mistake we want to examine is a prime example.

Peter was the only man Jesus ever rebuked for lacking the faith needed to stay on top of water. Why would Jesus make this man he had to rebuke more than all the others the leader of the others? He

did so because Peter was the only one of the 12 willing to take the chance. Yes, he sank while all the rest were safely in the boat. But that is because he was the only one willing to take the chance of leaping out of the boat. The risk taker fails more because they do more. You can criticize Peter and be justified in doing so, for Jesus rebuked him for his little faith that led him to doubt and then sink. Peter did fail here, and needed to be rescued, but look at the whole picture.

The only reason Peter failed is because he took a chance, and he was the only one who did. We focus on his failure and neglect the fact that Peter was the only man besides Jesus whoever succeeded in walking on water. His faith weakened in the storm, but the text tells us clearly in verse 29, "Then Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus." Peter was the greatest success in the world at walking on water. That took tremendous faith. But what we see here is that faith can be very flimsy, and confidence can collapse very rapidly in a fearful situation.

Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon, said at a press conference in July of 1970, "I particularly remember the elation of finding out that we indeed weren't going to sink into the surface, and we could continue with all the other planned activities." These were among the coolest men on the planet, and yet they had their fears as they set foot on the moon. How much more so for Peter who set foot on the lake where there was no mystery about it? He knew that sinking in water was inevitable. Had the water been as still and calm as glass it still would have been a fearful step out of that boat. But in a raging storm it would seem to be an act of folly to even attempt it. But Peter risked doing the impossible with Jesus, and he did it.

Peter was rebuked, for Jesus wanted him to go all the way and experience total victory by his faith, but he failed and began to sink.

Jesus was not disgusted with Peter. Yes, he got a F in completion, but he got an A for effort. He was the only one who took the test. The rest sat like bumps on a log, and they did not fail, but they also never had a chance to succeed. Peter did what none of the others ever did, he walked on water. Jesus chose him to be the leader because he was willing to take a chance. His very failure was a mark in his favor, for only those who try can fail.

We don't want to give a false impression that the rest of the 12 were of no value because they did not rise up and leap over the side of the boat. They are no less chosen of Christ, but they are less exalted. Peter is made number one because he had a courage that the others lacked. Not all Christians are risk takers, and it is not sinful that they are not. Jesus did not need 12 men leaping into the lake. He only needed one risk taker of that degree, for he only needed one head man. We are not trying to put anybody down, but only striving to see what it was about Peter that made him the one Jesus chose to be the leader of the 12. What we see is that Peter was more willing to fail and take chances for Christ. His failures were not good, but they represent a quality of character that Jesus was looking for in a leader. He was ready to risk losing for the sake of winning.

We can't all be Peter, just as none of the other disciples could be. They were often chicken compared to him. But all Christians can learn from Peter's example to move in the direction of boldness and risk taking. In one sense this whole incident was much ado about nothing. Who cares about walking on water? It is one of the most useless miracles in all the Bible. Jesus never did it again, and nobody else was ever challenged to do it again. It healed nobody and helped nobody. In terms of benefit, you can place this miracles on the bottom of the pile. Who could feel the loss if it never would have happened? Obviously a miracle of so little worth must have great value in terms of education.

This whole scene was deliberately set up by Jesus to teach a lesson. He sent them out into the lake in a boat alone. This time he was not going to be sleeping in the boat when the storm hit. This was a whole new lesson for them to see how they would cope alone, and how their faith would respond with him absent. He was not going to be at their side in the flesh forever, and they needed to develop a faith that went beyond sight. They had just seen Jesus feed 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. You would think their faith would never fail again after that, but Jesus sends them off to face contrary winds and put their faith to the test.

Peter is being tested here especially, and we see him come through with both an A and a F, but with an overall stamp of approval that made him the key leader. He got a A for daring and a F for doubting, but as we shall see, even his failure was an asset that Jesus appreciated. If we could learn to fail like Peter, we will please our Lord and be used to build his kingdom. Let's look at his success and failure, or his daring and doubting.

I. HIS DARING.

Peter dared to do what the others never dreamed of doing. Safety first was their motto. But Peter was an impulsive risk taker, and his impulse in this very unusual setting was to step out onto the water. "Lord if its you tell me to come to you on the water." Peter is saying, "dare me to come Lord", and Jesus responds, "I dare you to come." Jesus knew Peter was the kind of man who could not refuse a dare. If you challenged him to do the unusual and impossible, you better be prepared to deal with the consequences, for he will be going for it.

Such a personality trait can quickly turn you into a fool, but it can also make you a hero. It has to be kept under control, and Peter had his problems doing that. Peter dared to do foolish things also, and

was like a teenager being dared to play chicken in a car, or being dared to go over 100 miles per hour. People who can't say no to a dare are often at the mercy of the most foolish and dangerous whims. It is one of those virtue-vice type traits. If you can be daring, however, and respond to a dare to do what is good, noble, and heroic, then you have a very positive virtue.

Studies show that people can be dared into doing what is best for them. George Warren Kroll was a weakling who was dared to become the healthiest boy in his class, and the blood flowed through his body responding to the challenge, and he began to build his body until it was the strongest in his class. Harry Wonda was about to quit his job as a salesman when his sales manager challenged him. "I dare you to go out and sell more today than you ever have." It was like a call to battle, and he went out with a determination to do just that, and he did. He needed the dare to bring out the daring spirit that was in him.

Jesus knew Peter had a daring spirit, and that is why he challenged him to do the daring act of walking on water. Jesus was doing to Peter what Ulysses did to Achilles. He provided an opportunity to reveal his true nature. When the Greeks were besieging Troy the oracle came saying they would never take the city until Achilles came to the front. But the mother of Achilles fearing his death had him hidden away disguised as a girl in the court of Diomedes. Crafty old Ulysses disguised himself as a peddler and entered the home of Diomedes where he spread out a glittering array of trinkets before the eager eyes of the girls. As if by chance there was also a sword laid among them. Suddenly, a trumpet blast sounded at the gate, which Ulysses had prearranged to give the impression of an attack. One of the girls with flushing cheeks and kindly eyes sprang forward and gripped the sword and flashed it in the air, and stood forth every inch a warrior. Ulysses presented a challenge and a dare, and he found his

man. Achilles went with him and Troy fell.

Jesus needed a brave leader to defeat the kingdom of darkness, and by this dare to come to him on the water Jesus also found his man in Peter the daring disciple. But we have to face the reality that Peter did not stay on top of the water very long, and so we have to look at-

II. HIS DOUBTING.

We love Peter better because he sank. Paul probably would have walked all the way to Jesus and made us all feel hopelessly inadequate. But Peter, the Rock, sank because his daring faith turned to doubting fear, and we see ourselves in Peter, for he is more like us. Paul was more of an intellectual, and he probably would not have tried it after he gave it some thought. He was smart enough to know it wouldn't work, but Peter was not that smart.

We get our courage up at times and feel determined to take a new path. We say with Peter, "Lord bid me come to you on the water." We pray for Jesus to guide us to new heights and bold adventures for him. "Lord help me take the leap of faith; to get out of the boat of complacency and non-productive habits. Help me be bold for you." Then, like Peter, we soon recognize we are not very good at walking on water. We are out of our element, and are like a fish trying to walk on the beach. We see the reality of our inadequacy, and the waves begin to pound our sand castle of faith, and it dissolves before our eyes. All we see is the impossibility of maintaining our commitment, and we cry out as Peter did, "Lord save me!" Our determination leads us into deep water, and we are worse off now than if we would have just stayed in the boat.

We are just like Peter. Even his best intentions often ended in a failure because fear and doubt overwhelmed his faith and daring.

Why then did Jesus choose Peter to be the leader of the 12, when he had the same weaknesses that they had, and that we all have? The reason is obvious, for Jesus is teaching us all through Peter that it is better to try and fail then never to try at all. It is better to fail in a cause that will one day succeed than to succeed in a cause that will one day fail. That statement comes from another Peter who was Peter Marshall.

Jesus chose Peter because Peter was willing to take a chance and do something rather than nothing. You can set in the boat and succeed at being a setter, or you can leap out of the boat and fail to be a walker on water, but Jesus says that he chooses the one who fails in trying, rather than the one who succeeds in not trying. Jesus is saying to go ahead and fail in trying to do what he calls you to do. Take a chance, for I prefer a rock that tries to walk on water and sinks, over a bump in a boat that will take no risks.

Jesus never asked Peter to do this again, or anyone else. He never again walked on water. It is not anyone's goal in life to walk on water. It is not in God's plan at all, and so it is obvious this one time event was to teach us this lesson. Failure in trying is superior to success in not trying. Don't let your doubts and fears stop you from trying to do something exciting for Christ. Even the world's greatest daredevils have to fight with fear and doubt. Steve Brodie at age 23 leaped off the Brooklyn Bridge in 1886. He plunged a 120 feet into the East River. He was on the front page of the New York Times the next morning. He was arrested, but the judge didn't know what to do with him, for nobody had ever done this and lived to tell about it. It was against the law to kill yourself this way, but there was no law dealing with someone who jumped and lived. He was released and became quite famous as a daredevil.

He decided to go over Niagara Falls in a rubber suit. This also

was against the law, so he got up at 5:30 in the morning and paddled out to the middle of the river above Horseshoe Falls on the Canadian side. He went over, and again he lived to tell about it. But like Peter, the power of the water all about him raised his doubt level to near panic. He reported afterward that he would have given anything to back out, but once he was in the current there was no return. He tried hard to get to shore, but when he saw it was impossible he felt he was going to die, and so cried out in prayer just as Peter did to be spared. By the time he came to the brink of the falls the fear was so great he went unconscious. That was his answer to prayer, for he was spared the experience of the fall, and the next thing he knew he was on the water's edge.

The point is, the most brave and bold and courageous can be filled with fear, and his faith can fail. Fear of failure is no excuse, for all men fear failure at some point. Fear of not trying should be the fear that motivates us. We are not called to walk on water or go over Niagara, or a thousand other stunts that have no value for the kingdom of God. But we are called to get out of the boat which represents the church, and join Jesus on the stormy sea which represents the lost world. That is the kind of person Jesus is looking for, and that is why he used Peter to be the first man to lead a Gentile into the church. Peter led Cornelius to Christ before Paul the Apostle and the Gentiles were involved in ministry. The whole first part of the book of Acts revolves around Peter. Why? Because he was a man willing to change.

Stepping out of the boat onto a stormy sea is what we all do if we take seriously the call to evangelism. It can lead to so much failure. We risk offending people all the time. We risk losing friendships. We risk getting a reputation as a fanatic. It is a high risk area to step into, but it is better to fail in trying than to succeed in staying safe. Studies show that only about 10 per cent of Christians ever respond

to the challenge of evangelism, the question is, are you one of that 10 per cent? We can't all be like Peter, but we can all move in the direction of being a more daring disciple. The unknown poet gives the challenge to us all.

**"In this vast universe
There is but one supreme truth-
That God is our friend!
By that truth meaning is given
To the remote stars, the numberless centuries,
The long and heroic struggle of mankind....
O my Soul, dare to trust this truth!
Dare to rest in God's kindly arms,
Dare to look confidently into His face,
Then launch thyself into life unafraid!
Knowing thou art within thy Father's house,
That thou art surrounded by His love,
Thou wilt become master of fear,
Lord of life, conqueror even of death!"**

2. JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA Based on Matt. 27:55-66

The danger of making a hero out of a man who does a great thing after a long time of doing nothing is that you give the impression that there was nothing lost by doing it that way. A man lives a life of sin, or of indifference to God's will, and suddenly he sees the light and is wondrously converted. If he has been a well known sinner, or a famous unbeliever, there is a tendency to make a great deal of it, and make such a person an example. But there is often a failure to point out what a great loss was suffered by his delayed decision. Some have

pointed out that it is of no credit to Paul that God had to beat him down and blind him before he submitted to Christ.

Joseph of Arimathea became a hero by his last minute change from cowardice to courage. But we want to point out something of the loss he suffered by not making his decision earlier. We want to look at 2 aspects of his experience and see the loss which he suffered, and the love which he showed.

I. THE LOSS WHICH HE SUFFERED.

What is said here will not be taken as statements out of the text, but as inferences from other passages of the Bible. First he suffered loss because his discontent came to late for the greatest good. When he stood before the cross he became thoroughly discontent with his superficial secret discipleship. But this discontent should have characterized his life from the start as a believer. Discontent is an essential factor for effective Christian growth.

But didn't Paul say I have learned to be content in whatever state I am. Yes, but Paul was speaking of being content with much or little, with hard bed, in danger, or soft one in the home of a friend. He was talking about being content with whatever life brought in his service for Christ, whether it be good or bad. But when it came to the spiritual, Paul was not content. Paul was as near perfect as we can imagine, yet called himself chief of sinners, and cried out, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death." Paul was constantly pushing onward and upward trying to apprehend that for which God had apprehended him. He was never content to stop and be satisfied with where he was in his spiritual growth.

If there is no discontent, there will be no drive to move ahead.

Contentment with one's spiritual life is a curse. It has been one of the greatest curses in the history of the church, and was such also in Judaism. Dead orthodoxy is the fruit of contentment. The Pharisees were content with their system of salvation by works. That is why they despise Jesus and wanted to kill Him. That is why the established church has killed so many who were excited about doing the will of God. Men like to get everything all wrapped up in a creed and call that Christianity. This was the case with the state churches of Europe. They were perfectly content to let the people live for the devil just as long as they memorize the creed. But God raised up men who would not be content with that kind of Christianity.

We need to be careful in our use of words like liberal. Remember that the men who were the fathers of what we now call orthodoxy were once the liberals. They were the discontented liberals who could not stand dead orthodoxy, and so they rebelled. There needs to be constant reformation, for the orthodox has a tendency to settle back into contentment. It is only as we are constantly discontent that we can keep orthodoxy alive. Whenever a Christian is content he is in danger of backsliding, but a discontented Christian grows. We need to distinguish, however, between discontent and discouragement. Discouragement drags down, but discontent pushes us on.

I have said all this as background to explain what Joseph missed by experiencing his discontent so late. If he had felt this all along, there is no telling what he may have accomplished among the leaders of Israel, and especially among those other secret disciples. If only they had a leader who was discontent enough to speak out and organize them. This is what Joseph lost-the honor of organizing a band of disciples among the elite, and thereby winning many more to Christ.

St. Augustine was one who lived long in sin before he came to

Christ. Once he said, "All too late have I loved thee." This was Joseph's experience as well. What he did was great, but it was too late for the greatest glory. Mary of Bethany demonstrates for us that when we love it ought to be shown. While Jesus sat at the table she came an anointed Him with expensive perfumes. Judas rebuked her, but Jesus praised her and said that what she had done would be spoken as a memorial for her wherever the Gospel is preached. She gave her gift and showed her love while Jesus was alive. Joseph waited until He was dead, and when it was too late for Jesus to appreciate it.

The contrast is between those who send flowers to the living, and those who only send them to the dead. Edgar Dewitt Jones told of a man who had to leave his invalid mother to work in the city. Every week he sent flowers home. Some felt this was a waste, for she had flowers all over the house. But the mother eagerly awaited them each week. They were concrete expressions of his love, and they made her happy all her days until she died. The Judas mind says it is such a waste, and the Joseph mind says why not wait until she dies. But the Mary mind says express your love now and never put it off, and she was the only one whom Jesus praised, for her philosophy is the only one that acts when the greatest glory can be gained. An unknown poet maybe too hard on Joseph, but here are some lines he has written:

**Strange quite man, what impulse in your breast
Involved your kindness to the Master whom
You had not dared to join? He wanted rest
Within your heart, but found it in your tomb.
Did you not dare to love Him, He who sought
To give you life, nor asked for recompense?
What pity that in finding Him you brought
Your laggard love in death's cold cerements!**

II. THE LOVE WHICH HE SUFFERED.

Hate has had its hour, and now love steps in to close the day. Maybe Joseph was late with his love, but it was of great significance when it came. It is of interest to note the similarities of the burial of Christ with His birth.

- 1. When He was born the rich came to worship. When He was buried it was in the tomb of a rich man.**
- 2. When He was born the main characters were Mary and Joseph. When He was buried the main characters were Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea.**
- 3. Joseph would be the first to touch the baby at birth, and Joseph was the last to touch the body in burial.**
- 4. In birth He had a borrowed cradle, and in dead a borrowed grave.**

Jesus did own things, for He was a carpenter and had to have tools. But He was greatly dependant upon others in His ministry. He preached from a borrowed boat; He rode on a borrowed colt; He ate the Last Supper in a borrowed room, and was buried in a borrowed tomb. He had nothing lasting on earth, for He laid up all His treasure in heaven. The only thing He had of permanent value was His life and He gave that for us.

In comparing His birth and burial Wordworth said, "One Joseph was appointed by God to be the guardian of His body in the virgin womb, and another Joseph was the guardian of His body in the virgin tomb, and each man is called a just man in Holy Scripture." A poet has put it,

**How life and death in Thee agree;
Thou hadst a virgin womb and tomb,
And Joseph did betroth them both.**

Some critics go too far in their criticism of Joseph and say that he only took Jesus down from the cross because he was concerned about obedience to the Jewish law, which said in Deut. 21:22-23, "When a man who has committed a crime deserving of death, is executed and you hang him on a tree, his body must not be permitted to remain on the tree over night; you must bury him on the same day." (Berkley). This is going too far, for if that was his only concern, why did not take care of the two thieves as well? Not only that, if he was worried about the law he would not be there defiling himself by touching a dead body on the night of the Passover Feast. He was a rich man and could have hired someone to do it. The fact that he and Nicodemus were there, and cut themselves off from the feast by defilement, is proof enough of their real love.

John tells us that while Joseph was getting permission to take the body of Christ Nicodemus went to buy a 100 pound weight of spices. It is of interest again the myrr should be used, which was one of the gifts the wise men brought at His birth. When they came to take down the body of Jesus and prepare it for burial the women who had been there watching followed them, and Mary Magdalene was among them. They, no doubt, wondered what was happening, for they did not know these two men were disciples of Jesus. They had been secret disciples. It must have been a pleasant surprise for them to see these two take the body to a beautiful garden tomb and prepare it for decent burial. They would have done it themselves, but they could never have gotten permission to take the body. Here was the amazing providence of God in having a man of wealth and position ready just when he was needed.

In taking Jesus to His new tomb Joseph was fulfilling the prophecy of Isa. 53:9, which said, "Men made His grave with the criminals, and He was with the rich in His death." The tomb of Joseph must have been in a beautiful garden with many plants and flowers. Man began

in the Garden of Eden with perfect life, but soon he turned it into death. Jesus now lays in the garden of Joseph dead, but will soon turn it into life. The beauty of the location was symbolic of the joy and glory of the Easter message.

It is more than guess work that makes us visualize the beauty of Joseph's garden. If you recall, Mary Magdalene on the first Easter morning saw a figure nearby when she was weeping because her Lord was gone. It says that she supposed him to be the gardener. It is highly unlikely she would think any such thing unless this garden was a beautiful estate calling for a great deal of care. Joseph was a rich man, and no doubt did have a gardener to keep this place neat and beautiful, and so it was perfectly natural for Mary to think that is who she saw.

Thanks to the love of Joseph, Jesus received the burial of a king and fulfilled several prophecies. One of them was that the body of Jesus was not to see corruption. Thanks to the new tomb where none had been laid, and to the spices that Nicodemus bought, his body did not see corruption. The Christian is to regard the body with respect and care, but not to worship it. Some say just throw it away as worthless, and others say honor it as an idol. These extremes are both wrong. The body is to be loved and respected, but whatever happens to the body does not make a difference in terms of the resurrection. Jesus had a decent burial, but the thief on the cross was likely thrown into a ditch somewhere, but his spirit went to paradise with Jesus just the same. Whatever be the grave of a saint it is a resurrection field.

Joseph was late in his expression of love, and because of that he suffered loss, but he illustrates the truth of the saying that it is better late than never. Joseph will always be remembered for the love which he finally showed that did play an important role in the respect given to the body of Christ.

3. JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA THE COURAGEOUS COWARD Based on Mark 15:37-47

A fireman who was half dead from exhaustion and smoke inhalation, with face dirty and uniform covered with grime, staggers past the crowd and is almost deafened by their shouts and cheers for him. He has just come from a burning building where, at the risk of his life, he climbed to the third story and rescued a trapped child. The crowd watched breathlessly as he walked along the ledge of the building with his precious burden, and finally managed to get back to the ladder and down to safety. The crowd cheered this man more now than they ever thought of doing on the day of the firemen's parade. He marched by then in his freshly cleaned uniform with all the buttons shined. It is obvious why. Even though he was more presentable marching in a parade, that was only a superficial duty of a fireman, but now they had just witnessed his sacrificial duty. He had risked his life, and the awful appearance which he now exhibited was the result of his willingness to perform the hardest, highest, and most sacrificial duty of a fireman. This called for cheers and praise.

We would think people mad if they thought more of him all spic and span marching in the parade than they thought of him now. Yet, it is just this very thing that happened in the last week of the life of Christ. On Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem the crowds cheered him and honored Him like a king. A few days later when He hung on the cross they mocked Him. This was as foolish as mocking the fireman for saving the child. Couldn't they see that the triumphal entry was only the parade, but the cross was the real victory? Here was the king on His throne doing the real and sacrificial duty He came into the world to do. It was on the cross that He was at His best. He came to give His life a ransom for many, and now as he

fulfills this greatest and most sacrificial duty of all time, the cheering crowds have become the cruel crowds. They were blind, and they missed the meaning of it all.

What was obvious in the case of the fireman is just the opposite here, but we want to consider the happy fact that not everyone missed it. The Bible tells us of several who were deeply moved by the death of Christ. We have the Roman Centurion, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. We want to focus on Joseph, for he was the first Christian man we know of who was so moved by the cross that he made an all out commitment of his life. We want to consider his experience in two stages.

I. HIS COWARDICE BEFORE THE CROSS. v. 43

Simon of Cyrene, the penitent thief, and the Roman Centurion, all found Christ at the cross, and they could sing as a trio, "At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light." This was not the case with Joseph of Arimathea. Matthew and John both tell us that he was already a disciple of Christ, but John adds, "But secretly for fear of the Jews." It was not at the cross where Joseph first saw the light, but it was there that the light penetrated deep into his heart, and compelled him to come out into the light of open commitment.

Where was Joseph before the cross? Why don't we hear of him until now? It was because Joseph was one of those men who wanted to eat his cake and have it too. He and Nicodemus were both members of the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body among the Jews. Most of the followers of Jesus were from the common people. His chosen disciples were mostly uneducated fishermen. You certainly would not expect a man of his standing to come out in an open declaration of his belief in Christ. Just about everyone in his circle of high society was opposed to this Galilean upstart who taught with

more authority than they did.

It was too risky to operate in the open, and so Joseph decided he would be a secret disciple. He, no doubt, had all kinds of good reasons why this would be best, such as, I'll be more influence in this position of power; I'll be able to be a silent witness among the elite, the up and outers. John tells us the real reason: He was just plain scared. Nothing is so hard as going against the group.

Joseph was not alone. There were others who were afraid to risk their position and reputation by making an open stand. In John 12:42-43 we read, "Nevertheless, many even of the leaders believed in Him but, due to the Pharisees, failed to confess it so they might not be put out of the synagogue, for they preferred men's esteem to divine approval." Jesus had good cause for saying, "He who denies Me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

The fear of what others think is a powerful force in controlling our conduct. A group of boys from good American families broke over 300 windows in a new school building. A famous psychologist was called in to interview each boy separately, and he found that not one approved of the conduct of the group. Each thought that they were the only one who didn't want to do it, but no one was willing to voice his opinion. They were all afraid of what the others would think. All it would have taken is for one with enough sense to call the whole plan a stupid idea. He would have been a welcome leader, and could have prevented the whole thing, but they were all secret disciples of what they knew to be right. A secret disciple is about as useless as a rubber crutch.

Nicodemus and Joseph both made weak attempts to do something for Jesus. Nicodemus on one occasion said to the Sanhedrin, "Does

our law condemn a man without a trial?" Luke tells us Joseph did not consent to the decision to condemn Jesus. He didn't consent, but he didn't fight it either. He was neutral, but to be neutral and silent in the presence of sin is to condone the sin. Someone said, "All it takes for evil to succeed is for good men to do nothing." If he would have risen to the defense of Jesus along with Nicodemus, and other leaders who believed, they could have prevented all the injustice and cruelty Jesus had to suffer, but he remained a secret disciple and a cowardly Christian.

Secret discipleship is a sad development in the life of many a believer. The idea of being a silent witness with your life, without speaking up for Christ, is being shattered these days. It is a fine idea, but it just doesn't work as a major method. Luke tells us that Joseph was a good and righteous man, but that did not do a thing for Christ as long as he was a silent and secret disciple. To be a silent witness is the hard way, and it leads to all sorts of complications. The man who comes right out and lets others know where he stands finds it much easier to live an effective Christian life. Once you make your stand the world expects you to be Christian in your conduct, but until they know they assume you are like them.

The secret disciple has to constantly make excuses for why he does not live like the world. When asked to go to a night club, he has to say he is tired, or has other plans. When asked to play golf on Sunday morning, he has to explain that his wife wants him to go to church, or that he would rather play on Saturday. He has to laugh at their dirty jokes or they will get suspicious. When are we going to learn that the best defense is our offense? The world shrinks in weakness before the man or woman who takes a solid stand for Christ, and for what is right. Even the conscience of the unbeliever is on our side. No one ever took a fort by hiding in the woods. You have to attack to take it. Like a mighty army moves the church of God; the gates of hell cannot

stop it. Secret disciples like Joseph are of no help in the battle. Maybe they are not helping the enemy hold up the gate, but neither are they doing anything to beat it down. That is why it is a delight to see what happened to Joseph at the cross.

II. HIS COMMITMENT BENEATH THE CROSS. v. 43

What a sudden change came over Joseph. When Jesus was popular and the crowds cheered him, he was cowardly, but now when it appears that there is nothing but defeat and utter ruin of all the Lord's plans, he becomes courageous. When Jesus was performing miracles, healing the blind, and raising the dead, he was afraid to come out into the open. But now when all his disciples have fled, and he is a picture of complete helplessness and weakness, he boldly goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Christ, and thereby proclaims to the world that he is a follower of this man.

This took more courage than we realize. The Roman practice was to dishonor the bodies of criminals who were crucified. They would let the dogs and birds consume them, or burn them, or throw them in a ditch. For Joseph to go and request the body of Jesus for decent burial was as much as saying, "I think you crucified an innocent man. You did wrong to kill him." It was fortunate for him that Pilate felt guilty, and was glad to grant his wish as another act to ease his conscience. Eusebius, the ancient church historian, tells us that when the Presbyter Pamphylus of Cesarea was sentenced to martyrdom in 309 A. D., his young slave Porphyrius requested that he might be allowed to bury the body. The judge was infuriated and condemned him to be tortured at the stake.

Joseph not only risked his life because of Pilate, but because of the Sanhedrin. What would they do when they heard what he had done to the one they had so despised? At best he would be cursed and

ostracized from office. What was it that caused Joseph to do now what he could never do before? I cannot doubt that it was what he saw and heard beneath the cross. If the cross does not bring a man out of his cowardly concealment, nothing will. We see in Joseph the first evidence of the power of the cross. There was a power there that did what even his perfect life could not do. The cross is not only the power that brings sinners to conversion, it is the power that brings saints to commitment.

As Joseph stood beneath the cross of Jesus, and saw the love that He exhibited there, in spite of the hate and mockery against Him, his conscience must have burned within him. His shame must have been almost unbearable when Jesus said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." He must have examined Himself and said, "That is right! I don't know what I am doing. I have been playing it safe, and look what He suffers. I've been worried about my position, power, and possessions. My pride has been my master." He saw what folly he was practicing in the light of the cross. Even the Roman Centurion, who did not have the knowledge he did, could see the love of God at the cross.

Joseph could not longer hide his love for this one whose love never failed or faltered, even on the cross.

**"For me, I yield, I yield-I can hold out no more.
I come by dying love compelled, and own Him conqueror."**

Joseph could have sung from actual experience,

**"When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory
died,
My richest gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my pride."**

Our text tells us that Joseph was looking for the kingdom of God. Could it be that even the penitent thief played a part in Joseph's sudden commitment? This thief said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom," and Jesus said, "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." This was certainly a challenge to Joseph. Here was a thief who saw in Jesus a king. He believed that Jesus had a kingdom, and that he could be a part of it, and Jesus assured him he would be. Joseph must have wondered at his own folly. He was looking for the kingdom, and here was the king before his very eyes. He had been counting the cost of coming out in the open for Christ, and he thought it was too high a price to pay, but now he begins to consider the cost of remaining silent, and he came to the conclusion that he would count all else as loss that he might win Christ. He threw all fear to the wind, and made an open stand. Jesus said, "It is finished," and Joseph said in his heart, "Amen, and so is my secret discipleship finished."

The death of Jesus did something in Joseph just the opposite of what it did to the disciples of Jesus. They took it as the final blow, and they slunk away in defeat to weep in despair. Joseph, in contrast, came out of hiding, threw off his mask, and boldly said, "I love this man enough to give him my tomb for burial." He took a stand as shocking to all who knew him as it would be to us if a member of the Supreme Court gave his burial plot to one that the court had just condemned to death. If you think that would make headlines, what about the story of Joseph? It would spread like wildfire through the land of Israel. He would be branded for life. Tradition says he was removed from the Sanhedrin for his action. How would we feel if the Supreme Court judge who gave his plot, gave it to one who was condemned as a traitor of our country? That is how the leaders of Israel looked at Jesus, and at Joseph who gave him a place of burial."

It took the crisis of the cross to change his cowardice into courage.

Sometimes it takes a crisis to bring out a man's true faith. Foxe, in his book of martyrs, tells of Christians who trembled in fear as they sat in prison thinking of being burned at the stake, but when the time came they faced it bravely. Some Christians are like Peter who was courageous when all was calm, but who turned weak in the hour of crisis. Others are like Joseph who was cowardly, but who became courageous in the hour of crisis.

Joseph was the first in a long line of men of God who were compelled to risk all in complete commitment due to a crisis situation. Savonarola was preaching the Word of God with such boldness to the Italians that the corrupt church tried to stop him by advancing him to the position of Cardinal. When the messenger of Rome arrived with the offer of the Cardinal's purple, Savonarola asked him to come to his next sermon and receive his reply. In that lenten sermon of 1496 he said, "I desire neither hats nor mitres, be they great or small. I desire naught save that which thou hast given to thy saints; it is death; a crimson hat, a hat of blood I desire." That is what he got, for he chose the cross rather than compromise, and to be a coward.

Before the great anti-Christian outbreak in China, an official who was a secret believer was ordered to send a message to an inland governor telling him to kill all Christian missionaries. This was his hour of crisis, and, as it was with Joseph, it led him to open commitment. He sent instructions to the governor to protect the Christians, and in so doing he risked all that his life offered him, and that is what it cost, for he was soon put to death. It is costly to be committed to Christ. But Jesus did not call us to raise roses, pick posies, cultivate carnations, but to carry the cross. The Christian life is not a cinch, but a challenge that calls for courage. As the hymn says,

**Ye that are men now serve Him,
Against unnumbered foes:
Your courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose.**

Leaders of any cause know that there must be a challenge in their cause if it is going to succeed. Napoleon once built a battery in such an exposed position that his artillery officers said he would never find men to man it. Napoleon was wise. He set a placard by it which read, "The Battery Of Men Without Fear." He never lacked men to man that battery.

If we read between the lines on the placard over the cross, we see written there, "Jesus Christ the King of the Jews-those who would follow Him must be willing to risk everything. Joseph of Arimethea accepted that challenge, and made the most important decision of his life-the decisions to end his secret discipleship of cowardice, and become an open witness whatever the cost.

As we consider the cross before our communion service, we too must face its challenge. We cannot remain neutral before the cross of Christ, and we ought not to want to, for every man's heart cries out with George Eliot who said, "I don't want to be a bit of driftwood on the current of things." We want our lives to count, and if they count for Christ, they count for eternity. A decision for him gives direction to life; gives determination to make life useful, and gives a destination for our life worth striving for. Everyone of us stand at the cross of crisis, and it is the hour of decision: Will we be cowards, or will be courageous?

4. JOHN THE GREATEST Based on MARK 1:1-8

It takes all kinds to make a world is an old cliché, and like many old clichés there is a lot of truth to it. God so made our physical world that it just won't work without differences. Issac Asimov points out that energy can only be turned into work when you find it in greater concentration in one place, and in lesser concentration in another. If the world was flat and the sun shone on all of it at the same time, all parts of the earth would be at the same temperature, and you could get no work out of it. But if it is round, and so one side is dark when the other is light, and it is the reality of these opposites that makes the sun so powerful a source of energy for work.

God follows the same laws in the building of His kingdom on earth. He does not want everybody to be the same. In fact, He wants people who are opposites: Not just in sex, but in personality, life-style, and in there gifts and goals. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the contrast we see between Jesus and His forerunner John The Baptist. They were as unlike each other as a wedding and a funeral, or joy and solemnity. Do not reject or look down on Christians who are different. The world is full of Christians who are strange to us, but they are just what God wants. We are all strange to someone else, but God loves the variety.

The paradox is Jesus and John were so much alike in their preaching of the kingdom that they were mistaken for each other. People thought John may be the Messiah, and he had to deny it. Jesus was taken to be John the Baptist because He was so powerful. People thought he was John come back to life. In Matt. 14:1-2 we read, "At that time Herod the Tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus; and he said to his servants, this is John the Baptist, he has been raised from the dead, that is why these powers are at work in him." Later on Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that the Son Of Man is?" And in Matt. 16:14 we read this response, "And they said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or

one of the prophets."

This gives us an insight into the powerful impact John the Baptist had on Israel in the few short years of his ministry. All the other prophets people thought of were Old Testament prophets. John was the only contemporary that was put in that class of people whom Jesus might have been, for He was the only man of God like him who had been seen in Israel for centuries. They could easily imagine that he was the Messiah. So John was taken for Jesus, and Jesus for John, because they were both such powerful personalities for God. But they were still very much opposites in their personal lives.

John was a hermit who spent a good share of his life in the desert living the life of an ascetic. This is the point of Mark 1:6 where his dress and his diet are described. There is not much point in details like this being preserved unless they have some significance. What do we care what John wore and ate? Unless there is something valuable to learn by the contrast with the life-style of the Master, whose way he was preparing, there would be no point in it. His camel hair clothing was the clothing of a wilderness nomad, and his diet of locust and wild honey were the products of the wilderness. If we saw John today, we would no doubt point him to a mission, for he would give us the impression that he was not exactly living high off the hog. He was an uncut diamond, rough and unpolished.

Jesus said, "Why did you go out into the wilderness, to see a man clothed in soft raiment?" Jesus went on to say you would go to king's houses if all you were interested in was soft and expensive clothing. No, he said, you went out to see a prophet, and more than prophet. He is the one who was to prepare the way for Messiah. And then Jesus makes this amazing statement: The greatest compliment he ever paid to anyone in Matt. 11:11, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the

Baptist."

Who was the greatest man in history? It all depends on who you ask. But if you had asked Jesus that question in His day on earth, He would say it was this strange forerunner of his, John the Baptist. Any survey among Christians with this question would bring in votes for Abraham, Moses, David, and other great personalities of the Old Testament. Few would choose this wild looking man, darkened from years in the desert sun, and unshaven, for he was a Nazarene. He was too radically different to appeal to us. It is true he had low overhead for his ministry, the locust and wild honey were free. Bees were everywhere making honey in the crevices of the rocks. Some might even consider it a delicacy to eat honey coated locust. He was getting his protein and carbohydrates with no preservatives added.

But, all kidding aside, John the Baptist was performing a ministry to thousands of people, and he started one of the biggest revivals in all the history of Israel, and he never took an offering of which we have any record. John was not called to be a fund raiser, or to build a church, or a school for prophets. He was called to prepare the way for the Messiah, and he did it without money. He had the lowest overhead of any ministry on record. Can you imagine what it would cost to get John's results today? The point is, there was no credibility gap when he preached to others to live the simple life style, and to give to the poor. Many who preach this live like kings and drive the most expensive cars, but John lived what he preached.

John is one of the few people in history, in or out of the Bible, who demonstrated you can live a life sold out to God, and give up all that the world treasures, and still be successful. When John's birth was announced to his father the angel said in Luke 1:15, "He will be great before the Lord." He was destined to be great. His birth is the only

one described in detail in the New Testament, except that of Jesus. Most of the world, in most cultures, at most times, would not consider John as being very successful, let alone great. He had nothing of the status symbols of materialism. Yet he was powerful in his poverty, and we learn from John that the only resource one really needs to be great, as far as God is concerned, is the Holy Spirit. John is the only person in the Bible who was surrounded by the Holy Spirit from his conception. We know this was true of Jesus also, but it is only recorded of John. In Luke 1:15 we read of John, "...he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mothers womb." This is never said of any other person. In Luke 1:41 we read of his mother, "And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." Here is the most unique family in all of history. No wonder John was in the eyes of Jesus the greatest man in history.

It is of interest to note that John was the first person to recognize that Jesus came into the world to give His life as a sacrifice. He saw Jesus coming toward him and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Some of his disciples followed Jesus because of this, but it was a long time before they saw in Jesus what John did. John was so special and unique, but there are few sermons about him, and this may be legitimate because he said, "I must decrease and He must increase." His job was to point the way to Jesus, and not focus on himself, but we can't escape the facts. There are more words in the New Testament about John the Baptist than there are in 33 of the 66 books of the Bible. He is the first preacher of the New Testament. He did not preach the law, but the New Testament kingdom coming with the Messiah.

He was the first man in history called the Baptist. For decades it was thought that John picked up the idea of baptism from the Jewish practice of baptizing Gentiles. It was supposed that the Jews baptized them when they came into the Jewish faith. Modern studies,

however, reveal that this came after John and not before. There is no reference to this practice in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, Philo, or Josephus, or any record that would indicate that it came before John. Even the liberal scholar Rudolf Bultmann writes, "No certain testimony to the practice of proselyte baptism is found before the end of the first century." What this means is that all the evidence points to John as the first Baptist in history, and the founder of the very idea of Baptism. He also baptized more people than anyone we know of in history. Note verse 5 of our text: "And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan."

The use of "all" is hyperbole. It is deliberate exaggeration to convey the point that it was a major movement touching everybody from both the city and the country. People of all walks of life were caught up in the revival, and were being baptized. A quarter of a century later Paul, in Acts 19, found a group of John's disciples way off in Ephesus. Jesus even tells us the Jewish leaders were positively excited about the John's ministry for awhile. He says in John 5:35, "He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for awhile in his light." Even some of the Scribes and Pharisees were baptized by John. There was no revival like this before in history. It was the preparation for the Messiah, and John was doing the job well.

John had the privilege of baptizing not only the most people in history, but he got to baptize the Messiah Himself. He resisted because he felt unworthy, but Jesus did not resist, but gladly let his body be immersed by John, who in his eyes was the greatest. John was a man that Jesus looked up to and admired. The other two persons of the trinity concurred, for it was at that point where John baptized Jesus that the trinity, for the first time in history, was manifested in all three persons at the same time: Jesus in the flesh,

the Holy Spirit coming down as a dove, and the Father speaking, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." John was the only man in history permitted to witness such a marvel and mystery revealed. Many of the Old Testament saints had visions, but none were ever let in on the full reality of the trinity.

John was very special in God's plan for sending His Son into the world. We think of him as sort of a minor character. So what if he opened the door for Christ. Anyone could have done that, we think. But we are wrong to so think. It took a very special and unusual man to fill this role. If we go back to the last two verses of the Old Testament, we read these words, which were the last official words God spoke to Israel: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse." The Old Testament ends with this promise of the coming of the prophet Elijah. Elijah was caught up into heaven without dying. His history was not completed on earth, for God intended to send him back into history. Can you come back into history after you have gone to heaven? It is highly improbable, but not impossible if God chooses to use you in this way. Elijah was one God so chose to use.

Now, how serious did the Jews take their hope of seeing the prophet Elijah? Very serious, for the Rabbis taught that Elijah would appear if Israel would repent for one day. This expectation of the coming of Elijah was an important part of the Jewish hope. We already read of how some people thought Jesus was the prophet Elijah. Now we come to the beginning of the New Testament, and what do we discover? A prophet called John the Baptist who is so much like Elijah. In fact, the angel that announced the birth of John said to his father in Luke 1:17, "He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the

children....." This sounds like John was the fulfillment of the Old Testament hope of the coming of Elijah.

They wore the same hairy wilderness clothing. They both spoke out against wickedness in high places. They both drew great crowds and spoke the word of God. One begins to wonder if John was the fulfillment of the last promise of the Old Testament. Well, we do not need to depend upon circumstantial evidence for we have a clear word from Jesus. In the very context where Jesus calls him the greatest man born of woman Jesus says in Matt. 11:13-14, "And all the prophets and the law prophesied until John and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come." The one who is to come to prepare the way for Messiah has come, and he is none other than John the Baptist.

No wonder there was a great revival. He was the great hope of Israel, and next to the Messiah the most important man in Jewish hopes. He was second only to Jesus himself, and that is what Jesus said, and this makes John all the more amazing. He was a man of great power and influence, and he could have resented being pushed into the background when Jesus came onto the scene. But John did not have any personal ambitions. He lived only to do the will of God, and said he must increase and I must decrease. It takes a great man to do this and nobody did it better than John.

It is of no small interest for singles to take note that the Messiah and his great forerunner were both single. This eliminates forever the idea that the single life can never be as great as the married life. Here was a single at the top, greater than all the famous married men of the Old Testament. John never married, never had children, never lived what most of us would call a normal life. Without having all the facts about this man we have a tendency to feel sorry for him. He died young leaving no heirs, and he missed out on most of the

pleasures we take for granted as part of the good life. Yet Jesus says he was the greatest. If we are going to evaluate life as Jesus did we will have to resist all of our cultural conditioning as to what success is, and see that it does not consist in the abundance of possessions, but in the commitment we have to be obedient to God's call.

Most of us would have no interest in living the life of John the Baptist. It has little that is appealing, and much that is appalling. Fortunately, God does not call many to live such a life. Even his own Son the Lord Jesus was not called to live like John. Jesus was not anti-social like John. He was seen at weddings and banquets, and He enjoyed the life and laughter of social life. He wore better clothes, and ate better food, and grew up in a society where He interacted with people. He was not a loner like John.

God does not call all of us to be alike. Some have a radical different role to play in God's plan. But the beauty is we do not hear John even once trying to get a single follower to join him in his wilderness nomad life-style. He never condemned another for not giving up lamb and bread, and joining him in his locust and honey lunch. John was different, and he knew it, and he accepted it without trying to impose it on others as if God called all people to be like him.

John took up the moral issue of Herod's immoral marriage to Herodius, and paid the price of his life for this courageous stand. You will observe, however, that neither Jesus nor any of His followers took up the same cause. When John was beheaded the issue was dropped, and Jesus never spoke a word about it. Why? Because this was not his calling. Nor was it the calling of other Christian leaders. Not once do we hear John from his prison cell, where he spent possibly up to a year, crying out and cursing the people of God for not joining and standing with him against Herod's evil. This was his

calling to take such a stand, and not even Jesus felt that same call.

This same thing is true today. I get mail constantly urging to take stands on all sorts of issues. Nobody can get involved in fighting all the evils of the world. You have to select what is relevant to you, and let others response to what is relevant to them. This is not only how it has to be, it is how it is meant to be, and we see it in John and Jesus. On some issues they were as one, but on others they had a different perspective. Not only about Herod, but about fasting and other issues of the law as well as life-style issues.

Jesus said John is the greatest, but He did not conform to who John was and what he did. He did His own thing and what He was called to do. John was John and Jesus was Jesus, and their differences were not bad for the kingdom of God, but were a part of the plan for the kingdom of God. We are not necessarily called to be like this greatest man ever born of woman. We are not necessarily called to do what he did nor live like him. We are called to be obedient like him. Jesus did not think of John as the greatest because of his life-style or his approach to people, but because he was a man sold out to do God's will regardless of any loss or gain to himself. There not many of us like that, and nobody was like that in the Old Testament to the same degree as John.

We all have mixed motives and self-centeredness, and few if any can match the commitment of John. He will always be next to Jesus as the greatest of men. Paul and Peter were used to do great things too, but John was never a persecutor or blasphemer like Paul, and never denied his Lord like Peter. There is no escaping the facts: John with all of his differences was the closest to being the perfect man because of his ideal spirit. John was filled with the spirit from his birth.

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was this man and his ministry. It is of interest to go to the book of Acts where they are selecting a disciple to take the place of Judas. Listen to the requirements this man had to fulfill. Acts 1:21-22 says, "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us." Notice that the beginning point for a Christian disciple was not the public ministry of Jesus, but the baptism of John. This is where the New Testament begins. Everything else before this was Old Testament. The Old Testament ends with the promise of the prophet Elijah, and the New Testament begins with John's fulfillment of that promise. The disciples of Jesus were first of all disciples of John.

Calvin in his Institutes writes, "It is very certain that the ministry of John was precisely the same as that which afterwards was committed to the apostles.....the sameness of their doctrine shows their baptism to have been the same....If any difference be sought for in the Word of God, the only difference that will be found is, that John baptized in the name of Him who was to come, the apostles in the name of Him who had already manifested Himself."

John did not just baptize Jesus, and that was the end of their relationship. On the contrary Jesus began His ministry and became quite popular, and the source, not only of His select 12, but of many others of His disciples was from John the Baptist. In John 10:40-42 we read of how Jesus had to flee from the wrath of Jews in Jerusalem, and it says, "He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John at first baptized, and there He remained. And many came to Him and they said, John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true. And many believed in Him there." When the leaders and the masses were turning on Jesus he was still gaining crowds of followers from the ministry of John the

Baptist.

They were partners in the work of the kingdom, and not in two different camps, as some give the impression. Jesus made it clear that though He and John had different approaches, they were on the same team. He said to the rebellious Jews who would not repent in Matt. 11:18-19, "For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, he has a demon; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say behold a wine bibber and a glutton." Jesus is saying they could have been a part of the kingdom of God had they responded to either approach, for both preached repentance for the kingdom of God is at hand. They rejected both because they did not want to repent, and when that is the case, people find fault with the messenger regardless of his method. John and Jesus were baptizing people at the same time, and they were not two different kinds of baptism. Jesus did not baptize, but His disciples did, and they were doing just what John was doing: Bringing Jews back to God in repentance. They were not in competition with their old master, but were following him who prepared the way.

Dr. Merrill C. Tenny wrote that John's preaching, "Laid the foundation of all practical Christian theology." Augustus Strong, one of the greatest theologians of this century wrote, "John's baptism was essentially Christian baptism, although the full significance of it was not understood until after Jesus' death and resurrection."

George E. Hicks writes, "It is to the Baptist we are indebted for practically all the major articles of the Christian faith. Not only so, but the actual terms used by him have constituted the seed bed of all subsequent thought."

John was the first to teach the deity of Christ; the first to teach of the baptism of the Spirit; the first to teach baptism by immersion.

John taught a host of doctrines that are vital to the Christian faith such as, the sovereignty of God, the kingdom of heaven, the need for repentance and confession, the inevitability of judgment and individual responsibility. He taught by example, loyalty unto death, and a humility that is unsurpassed. We can't begin to look at all that he taught, but Jesus taught us to look at him as a hero, and a great example to follow. We can learn a lot from a focus on this man that Jesus called the greatest.

5. MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR Based on Mark 2:13-16

Someone said, you never could take your money with you, but some can remember when the government would let you keep some while you were still here. It is hard for many to believe that our country was founded partly to avoid taxation. As bad as taxes are, however, only two classes of people ever complain-men and women. Taxes are nothing new, however. The Romans had just about every tax we do today, and they were heavy. Rome needed taxes because she built the best road system the world had ever seen. Some of the roads built in New Testament times are still in use today. Trade was booming because of the road system. Soldiers patrolled the roads to protect travellers from bandits. To maintain this system and highway patrol protection, plus build government buildings, town halls, baths and stadiums, there was a need for many taxes.

They taxed one tenth of crops of grain, one fifth of produce of wine, oil, and fruit, plus they had an income tax of one percent. On top of this, they had a poll tax for men 14 to 65 and women 12

to 65. This was one denarius a year, which was the wages of an average man for one day. Then, of course, there were the import-export taxes, the road taxes, the harbor taxes, and the tax for the use of the market place. Custom officers were stationed everywhere to collect these taxes, and they had the power to be very unjust. It is known that some levied taxes so high the trader could not pay, and so the tax collector would loan him the money for his tax at a high interest rate. It was literal highway robbery.

This tax burden and the abused power of the tax collector has survived into the modern day. Charles Brown, the dean of Yale Divinity School, went to Palestine years ago when it was under Turkish control. He talked to a farmer in Jericho who told him he was required to place his harvested crop of wheat in ten stacks. He made them as even as possible because the tax collector had the right to come and select one of the ten for the state. To get the tax collector to come and make his selection he had to give the collector another of the ten stacks for his personal fee. Then to get a paper signed permitting him to thresh his crop he had to give another stack in final payment.

This same kind of oppression was going on in New Testament days, and the Jews despised it, and everyone connected with it. The Jews were not opposed to taxes, but, as a theocracy, they felt only a God appointed man had the right to collect taxes. They did not mind supporting their government, but they objected to the support of a foreign government. Those who cooperated with the Romans were considered traitors to Israel. They were so hated that their money was not accepted in the temple. Their word was of no value in court, and they were listed by the Jews along with harlots and murderers. Even the Romans themselves did not respect the tax collector. Cicero said that it was a trade unbecoming to a gentleman, and it was vulgar. Lucian listed them

with a adulterous, informers, and money-lenders. All in all it was a class of people highly unlikely to contribute anyone to a religious movement, and yet Jesus chose one of these tax collectors to be one of His 12 select men.

Matthew the publican was chosen long before the only Pharisee Jesus ever chose as an Apostle, which was Paul. Matthew, or Levi as he is called, also had potential which no one else would have ever tried to discover, but Jesus not only discovered it, He developed an used it. When Matthew left his tax booth he took his pen with him, and was used of God to record words of Jesus which we would otherwise not have, and be much the poorer. The Sermon on the Mount being just one of the major examples.

In 1844 a New Testament scholar visited the monestery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai. While there he saw some papers in a basket. His eye detected Greek characters which turned out to be the famous manuscript of the Bible called Codex Sinaiticus. It was a copy that dated back to the 4th century. To the monks there it was just an old Bible of no value, but to the scholar it was a priceless discovery. So it was with Matthew the publican. To his own people he was a worthless Jew; a disgrace to his nation, and of no value at all, but to Jesus he was so precious that he chose him to be one of the foundation stones of the New Israel-the Church.

Jesus did not select His 12 according to any standard of social acceptance of His day. He chose men of any class or position who had depth of character and commitment. In His selection of Matthew we noticed that He chose a man who was successful and wealthy. We know this because he had a house and was able to throw a big party in it for Jesus and His disciples, plus a large number of old friends who were publicans and sinners. The Scripture stresses how big this affair was. It was probably the

largest social event Jesus ever attended, and the news of it spread so that the Scribes and Pharisees complained of his eating with tax collectors and sinners. In Luke 5:29 we read, "Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table with them."

Matthew was obviously a leader among his class of despised people, and he was well liked if they would all come to his party. The point we want to notice again is that Jesus did not call a dozen loafers to be His key men. He called men who had already demonstrated their ability in the secular world. Matthew had achieved success in his profession, as did Peter, Andrew, James and John in the fishing business. As far as we know everyone of the 12 were in middle and upper middle class of the society of that day. Often we like to emphasize that Jesus took a bunch of poor nobodies and turned them into dynamic leaders. He can and has done it, but when He chose men for the foundation of His church He chose the best He could find. We are not being honest with the facts of Scripture if we do not recognize that the men Jesus chose were sharp men in their field.

Another factor that is common in the selections Jesus made is the way He chose sets of brothers. Peter and Andrew were brothers; James and John were brothers, and now we come to Matthew who also had a brother who was one of 12. In Mark 2:14 we read, "As he passed on he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, follow me, and he rose and followed Him." Mark gives us the same quick picture of a call to discipleship without any detail as to the background just as he did in the call of the fisherman. We know, however, from John's Gospel that a great deal of background took place beforehand. We can be confident that this was true with Matthew as well. We don't know the story of that background, but Jesus must have had

frequent contact with Matthew and his family, for Matthew is called the son of Alphaeus, and the other Apostle named James is in Matthew , Mark, Luke, and Acts, always listed as James the son of Alphaeus.

This is no doubt to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee and brother of John. It also links Matthew and this James together as another set of brothers. It is not impossible it is only a coincidence that they both had fathers of the same name, but the pattern of Jesus makes it probable that Jesus got into that family and won both boys to Himself, just as He did with other families. Jesus seemed to specialize in brothers. The result was that He had a close knit group from the start. He had a natural loyalty to build on from the beginning. What a joy this must have been to Alphaeus the father of Matthew. Remember, Matthew was a despised outcast by the establishment, and the majority of respected citizens. Matthew had sold his patriotism down the drain because he wanted to make money at any cost.

Matthew represents the millions who long to make a fortune, and are willing to forsake all other values to do it. Matthew was money hungry, and the path he took cut him off from his people, and alienated him from the institutions of Israel's faith. Matthew said the religion of Israel irrelevant, but making money and friends in the world, and getting somewhere is all that counts. Yet, though he made his decision, and was doing quite well, he was not satisfied. You can just imagine Matthew at that big feast giving his testimony. There can be no doubt that he did so, for he was leaving his old life to follow Jesus, and he wanted to tell his old gang why. He had gained all he could ask for in terms of wealth, success, and fame among his class of people. Yet, he was empty. The story of Matthew is repeated in lives everyday.

Boswell said to Johnson as they went through the mansion of Lord Scarsdale, "One would think the proprietor of all this must be happy." "No sir," replied Johnson, "All this excludes but one evil-poverty." That is the only evil Matthew escaped, and it cost him more than it was worth, and he knew it, and Jesus knew that he knew it. Jesus knew that sometimes your best potential is in people outside the institution of the church. Sometimes a rebel is so valuable just because he has broken away, and found the world so empty, and is hungry to find his way back into the real experience of commitment. Matthew was not in the pig pen like the Prodigal, but he was just as empty and hungry.

Matthew was a rebel who had fulfilled his dream in the world, and who realized it was not satisfying. He calls himself the publican, however, in his Gospel, because he rejoices that he is a trophy of grace. He had quite a testimony in his giving up success in the world to follow Jesus. Matthew's Gospel reveals clearly the authors personal experience. Matthew is the only one who records the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price. These so fit him that he could never forget them. The story of a man hunting for something, and then finally finding it in Christ, describes Matthew perfectly.

It is also in Matthew that we find such text as, "You cannot serve God and mammon." That was the decision he had to make. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you," is only in Matthew. How it fits him. Or, "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul." That is the very thing Matthew almost did. How it must have poured out of him as he wrote for others to read the words of Christ which had been so relevant to his own life. There are many more that reveal the author was very conscious of the dangers of the love of money.

Matthew became a zealous Bible reader, for his Gospel has 65 quotes from the Old Testament. It is the first Gospel, and it bridges the gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Tradition says that for 15 years Matthew preached to the Jews. He is the most Jewish of the Gospel writers, and aims at Jewish conversions. Matthew forsook Israel to get rich, but Jesus called him to forsake his riches to be a missionary to Israel. He had already learned to be hated by the Jews for being a money hungry collaborator with Rome, so he had no problem in adjusting to be hated for being an Apostle of Christ. All the hate and ridicule he faced in his old life prepared him to be a bold witness for Jesus.

It is interesting how little things can reveal a factor in a man's character. Matthew was a humble man, and one who, no doubt, felt inferior to the other Apostles who had never deserted Israel as he had. In Mark and Luke the Apostles are listed with Matthew and Thomas, in that order. But in Matthew's Gospel it is Thomas and then Matthew. This is an incidental witness to the author's humility. You need to know the author of the part of the Bible you are studying, for this gives you the perspective from which you are seeing his revelation.

Traditions vary as to where and how Matthew died. Some say in a Arabia, and others in Ethiopia. Some say he died by the sword, but the Greek church uses fire as a symbol of Matthew, because they believe he died a martyr by burning. All we know for sure is that this ex-tax-collector became a profitable servant of Christ; teaching us to never underestimate the potential of any worldly person for the kingdom of God. When ever you see an ambitious, materialistic, money hungry man, remember Matthew, and do not despise him, but pray and labor for his conversion. Like Matthew, he can become as zealous for the Master as he

formerly was for money.

6. SIMON OF CYRENE Based on Mark 15:15-26

This text focuses on a man who was forced to become famous. Millions of people through the ages have labored and fought to get their names in the record of history, but Simon of Cyrene was pushed into the pages of history. Except for one incident in his life he would never have been known, but because of that one experience, he is known the world over wherever the Gospel of Jesus is known. There is very little said about Simon in the Bible. In fact, just about everything we know about him is found in Mark 15:21, and in one verse in each of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke which are parallels of this one.

One might suspect that there is hardly enough information to preach on for ten minutes, but this is not the case, for the Bible has a unique way of saying a great deal in just a few words. A high school student was assigned to write a five hundred word theme, and he chose to write on the universe, its origin, nature, and destiny. Even the Bible does not attempt to condense to that degree, but it does not waste words. The story of creation is told in two chapters. The great 23rd Psalm is just a little over a hundred words. The famous Sermon on the Mount is in three chapters, and the last words of Christ on the cross, though few in quantity, have been of such quality as to give birth to literally tons of literature. The Bible is the key example of the truth that one does not need to be wordy to be wise, nor voluminous to be valuable. I trust we see this as we consider what we can know about Simon from this one verse. First of all-

I. WE KNOW WHERE HE WAS FROM AND WHAT HE WAS DOING.

He was from Cyrene, one of the two largest towns of Libya in North Africa, of over 100,000 people. It was a city in which a great many Jews lived, and many of them would travel all the way to Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost. In the list of places in Acts 2 of which the people were from, you will find Cyrene listed. Simon was either a Jew or a proselyte, that is a pagan who was converted to Judaism, and who was a very pious believer, for he was willing to travel over a thousand miles to Jerusalem to worship in the temple.

But what he was doing when he was suddenly, in a moment, made to change the whole direction of his life, was simply passing by. He knew nothing of all that had gone on in the city that night. Jesus had been going through the agonies of Gethsemane, and the trial, and had endured the cruel mockings and beatings of the mob and soldiers. Simon had no doubt been sleeping. He had a long day planned, and was up early in the morning, as were all Orthodox Jews, saying their prayers. He was dressed, cleaned, and almost into the city before 9 in the morning. If he had been three minutes earlier or later, or had gone a different way, we never would have heard of him, but in the providence of God Simon was to have an experience that morning that changed his whole life. This brings us to the second thing we know about Simon.

II. WE KNOW HE WAS COMPELLED TO BEAR THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

As Simon came near the city gate he saw a crowd coming out of the city. They were shouting and mocking at three men who were

bearing crosses. One of them was having a difficult time, and it was obvious he was holding up the procession. The soldiers who were anxious to get this business over ordered Simon to bear his cross. The Roman soldiers had a right to compel a civilian to help them. When Jesus said, "If anyone compel you to go a mile, go with him two miles," He was referring to this practice.

Why the soldiers picked Simon is not known. We know that Jesus had been up all night, and had taken a beating that was known to have killed other men. Therefore, it is quite likely that the traditional viewpoint is true-that Jesus stumbled and fell beneath the load. Many feel that Simon must have shown sympathy for this one who had been so cruelly treated, and possibly even stepped forward to help Him up. The soldier in charge, seeing a chance to speed things up, says, "Alright helpful, you carry the cross," and forced him to do so. Simon was likely the only one in the crowd not mocking Jesus, and so he was a likely one to choose.

I find it easy to believe another idea held by many, that Jesus looked on Simon with a look of love that drew out his compassion. Jesus had a power in His eyes to move men. Just hours before He moved another Simon, called Peter, to tears of repentance by a mere glance. It is likely then that Simon was moved by a force within before he was compelled from without. The poet put it-

Thou must have looked on Simon,
Turn Lord, and look on me,
Till I shall see and follow,
And bear Thy cross for Thee.

Because of an act of sympathy and compassion he found himself going in the opposite direction and bearing a cursed cross.

What a way to start the Passover season. He was on his way to church, and he winds up in a procession to a crucifixion. Just to touch the cross would defile him, so his day was ruined. What a miserable way to meet the Master. He was on his way to worship God, and was interrupted by having to help Christ get to the cross to redeem the world. Not a bad day's work! He, of course, did not realize what was taking place. He came a thousand miles to do something significant, and all he did was help save the world.

Simon did not rebel at this sudden turn of events. It had to be a disappointment, but it was one of the greatest acts of love in history. Like Cornelius, Lydia, and others who were honestly seeking to know the will of God, he had, no doubt, prayed that very morning, "Lord teach me thy will and draw me closer to you this day." He had come a long way seeking a deeper knowledge of God, but he believed compassion and not cruelty was the will of God, so he submitted to the shame of bearing the cross.

He was compelled to bear it, but he chose to submit. The fact that nothing more is said indicates that Simon gave no trouble, but bore the cross without a struggle. If only we could, like Simon, choose to bear what we are compelled to bear. If only we could see the blessings and burdens that we bear for Jesus. Circumstances compel us to bear burdens, but we can choose to submit or rebel. This principle holds true for all of life. For example: Young people are compelled to go to school. This is a burden that many would not choose if it was left to them. But since we are compelled to go, we have two choices. We can rebel and fight the system, and quit as soon as possible, or we can take it as a challenge, and choose to submit to the burden, and in so doing the burden will become a blessing. We cannot determine what life brings to us, but we can determine what we bring to life, and if we choose to do what we are compelled to do, we can change burdens

into blessings. The third thing we know about Simon is-

III. WE KNOW THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS BEARING THE CROSS.

It is also certain, that though the cross kept Simon from church that morning, it brought him to Christ. We believe he found it to be true that the way of the cross leads home, and that his frustration led to faith; his embarrassment led to enlistment; his compassion led to commitment, and his sympathy led to salvation. There are several reasons for believing this to be the case. In the first place, it fits into a pattern which is amazing if true. If Simon was a convert just before the cross, and the Roman Centurion was a convert just after the death of Christ on the cross, then together with the thief on the cross, we have three converts at the cross representing the descendants of each of the three sons of Noah, Sham, Ham, and Japeth. This would be a concrete illustration of the universality of the cross, and that Jesus did indeed die for all men.

There is more to go on, however, for our verse says that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Why would Mark, who wrote his Gospel for the Romans, say that he was the father of these two men unless it was because the Romans knew these two men? There would be no point in giving these names unless they were well known among the Roman Christians. Nor would these names be known if Simon just disappeared in the crowd after reaching Golgotha. The others Gospels do not mention the names of these two sons. This means that the sons of Simon were well known Christians in Rome, and this is confirmed by Paul in his letter to the Romans where he says in 16:13, "Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine." Where did this outstanding Christian family come from? Paul had not been to

Rome when he wrote his letter, so he must have met them before they moved to Rome.

If we put all these facts together and see that, not the Ethiopian Eunuch, but Simon of Cyrene was the first convert from Africa, and he went back to his home and won his family to Christ. From there they likely moved to Antioch, for in Acts 13:1 we read of prophets and teachers there, two of which were Simon and Lucius of Cyrene. It was here in Antioch where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians. Who knows how much he who bore the cross of Christ had to do with that. He was the first convert at the cross, and became a leader where believers were first called Christians. It would be here that Paul would get to know the family, and later be able to speak of them when they moved to Rome.

There is much we do not know, but these things that we do know teach us to see that though Simon was compelled to bear the cross for a while by the soldiers, he chose to bear it the rest of his life for the Savior. That brings us to the final thing we can know about Simon.

IV. WE KNOW HIS EXPERIENCE WAS RECORDED FOR A PURPOSE.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. The story of Simon, though minor in length, teaches us a lesson of major importance. It teaches us what cross-bearing really is. Men have been more concerned about making up legends about the cross than they have been in learning what it means to bear it. Legend takes us way back to the garden of Eden. Adam was dying, and so his eldest son Seth ran to the gate of the garden, and begged the angel for fruit from the tree of life. The angel told him

that Adam would be dead when he returned, but that he should bury him with seeds from the fruit of the tree of life in his mouth. A great tree grew from these seeds, which Noah cut down for the king post in his ark, which saved him and his family. Centuries later Hiram, king of Tyre, brought it down from the mountains to build the temple of Solomon. It was not used, however, but laid in a trench by the wall. Nehemiah used it when he rebuilt the temple, but when Herod rebuilt it again this tree was again laying beside the wall.

In the haste of the day of the trial of Jesus no one made a cross, and so this post by the temple wall was used. The early Christians cared nothing about the actual cross on which Christ died, but only the meaning of it, and so for several centuries there is a break in the legend. But when the church became corrupted because of paganism, it again revived the legend. The cross was found it was claimed, and was being sold in small pieces as charms. This is where we get the idea of knocking on wood. It has been estimated that enough pieces of the cross have been sold to build a fleet of ships. Today the cross has become, to many people, nothing more than a piece of jewelry. We bear golden crosses around our neck or on our lapel as decorations. There is nothing wrong with the cross as a symbol like this, but there is something wrong with our thinking about it. The experience of Simon teaches us to think of the cross as an identification with Christ, and not merely a decoration.

When Simon bore the cross of Christ he became identified with Christ, and bore the same reproach that he did. Jesus said, "Take up your cross daily and follow me." That means to be identified openly with Jesus, and if people would mock Christ they will mock you. That is why it is not as easy to talk about Jesus as it is about the weather or politics. It is embarrassing and difficult to be

identified with Christ in some circles. I am sure Simon was ashamed as he picked up the cross and heard the laughter and mocking of the crowd.

Bearing the cross is not the same kind of suffering one goes through because of some injury or weakness in the body. That is a thorn and not a cross. The cross is only taken up when we are so identified with Christ that people will feel and act toward us as they do toward Him. If a person loves Jesus, he will also love you. If a person despises Jesus he will also despise you. This means that Christ expects us everyday to be so identified with Him that it costs us to be a Christian. It is easy to be a Christian if we do not bear the cross.

Ray Jordon tells of being in a group in Jerusalem that wanted to follow the path that Jesus took on His way to the cross. It was hot that day and he noticed that the leader had an umbrella over his head to protect him from the discomfort of the blazing sun. It struck him as to the amazing contrast between this and the real incident. They wanted to follow the path of Christ, but did not want any discomfort in doing so. It is understandable, for there would be no profit in being miserable as they followed the path. But when this philosophy passes over into the spiritual realm, it is tragic. We want to follow Jesus, but we do not want it to cost anything. It should be that we experience some discomfort because of our identification with Christ.

Leslie Weatherhead had an Indian Christian tell of what it cost to follow Christ, and it put him to shame when he considered how little he had identified himself with the cross of Christ in such a way that it cost. This Indian friend heard the call of Christ in a Methodist church in Madras. He came from a Brahmin family and his father was the head of the community. When his father

heard of his decision for Christ he blazed with anger. He tied him to a pillar in the courtyard of his home. He stripped the turban from his head, a mark of indignity in the East, lashed his back with whips till blood ran, and let him stand in the hot sun for hours.

They even poured the contents of the sewage bin over his head. They put two large scars on his face with red hot irons. His own mother died of shock before him, and finally his sister cut him loose, and he escaped to the hills. He eventually became a chaplain in the army. Many have suffered the same thing for crimes, but when it is suffered because one is identified with Christ, that is cross-bearing. The story of Simon is recorded for the purpose of challenging each of us to take up the cross and be identified with Jesus whatever the cost.

7. SIMON THE ZEALOT Based on Luke 6:12-16

We want to look at an Apostle of whom we would know nothing if the New Testament did not tell us of his political affiliation before he became a believer. If a man was called Simon the Democrat or Simon the Republican, you would not be able to draw many conclusions about him because these terms are too general. But if he was called Simon the Communist you would be able to say much more about him, for they have a more specific philosophy. So it is with the name Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were a political party in Israel with a very clear cut philosophy, and a program to carry it out.

Since the New Testament tells us nothing of Simon but the fact that he was a member of this party, everything we can learn about

him must come as inferences from what we know of the party. Simon the Zealot is as obscure as Simon Peter is famous. We know nothing about the Apostle Peter's political background, but that is all we know of Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were radical and fanatical nationalists who mixed their religion and politics into one of the most potent mixtures history has ever seen.

The land of Palestine was a country under Roman rule. None of the Jews liked it, but some hated it, and they wanted to fight this master that had them in its grip. Herod the Great was able to keep the volcano of their wrath from erupting by skilled diplomacy and sheer power of personality. But when he died in 4 B. C. and the territory was divided between his three sons, things began to get hot. In 7 A. D. a leader rose up in Galilee where the blaze was hottest. Judas the Galilean led an insurrection. They stormed the palace and broke into the arsenal, and embarked on a revolution as armed rebels.

Judas and his men were no match for the power of Rome, however, and he was crushed. In Acts 5:37 Gamaliel tells us of his fate. "Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered." Judas did not get far, but he started something which gave rise to the party called the Zealots. These fanatical nationalists loved their country more than life itself, and they hated Rome with all the hatred the human heart can possess. Such passion of love and hate when mixed lead to zeal bordering on madness. Nothing was permitted to stand in their way. Murder was not only permitted, it was promoted. They became known as the assassins. The name Sicarii came from the Sica, the little curved sword which they carried below their robes, and which they plunged into their enemies at every possible opportunity.

They were ruthless, and they were hunted down by the Romans and killed, but their zeal was so great that they did not fear what the Romans could do to them. Josephus wrote, "The Zealots have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is the only Ruler and Lord. They do not mind dying any kind of death, nor do they heed the torture of their kindred and their friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man lord." This zeal and loyalty and love for country were all qualities to be admired, but their hate for Rome spoiled these values. Hatred, however good the basis for it, destroys the hater. The Zealots did not destroy Rome, but they destroyed their own nation. Fanaticism is self-destructive. They so hated Rome that they became suspicious of all who did not hate Rome with their zeal. They began to look upon Jews who paid taxes to Rome as compromisers and enemies of Israel.

Their battle cry was, "No Lord but Jehovah, no tax but the temple tax, no friend but the Zealot." Everyone who was not with them was against them, and so they began to turn upon their own countrymen. Any Jew who entered into an agreement with the Romans was marked for assassination. The country homes of rich Saducees were burned and the people were terrorized. Four sons of Judas the Galilean continued gorilla warfare until they were killed. A grandson was still at it with no lag in zeal.

When he and his 900 men were trapped by the Romans he ordered them to destroy themselves with fire so the Romans would have nothing but ashes for their victory. This fanaticism finally led to complete self-destruction of the Zealots and of the Jewish state. In 70 A. D. the Romans surrounded Jerusalem for a final showdown with the Jews. The people were starving, and were in a hopeless situation. The Zealots were so crazed with hate for Rome, however, that they began to murder everyone who was

for coming to terms with the Romans. Surrender was betrayal of God and country they said, and so they started a civil war within the city. When the Romans took the city the Zealots were the last to perish. They were in Masada, the last stronghold. When escape was seen to be impossible, Elezer told his men to slaughter their wives and children and then commit suicide. They did it and 960 perished. Only 2 women and 5 children escaped by hiding. So the Zealots perished by their own hands illustrating the self-destructive nature of fanaticism.

It would be hard to find anywhere in history a political party more zealous for its cause. It was from this radical group that Jesus chose one of His Apostles. The fact that Jesus could have both Matthew, who was a tax collector, and Simon the Zealot on his team reveals how He can combine all types of people into a unified group by their common loyalty to Him.

Under different circumstances Simon would run a blade a through Matthew, and Matthew would live in fear of Simon, but Jesus makes them partners in the Gospel. A left-winger and a right-winger united in Christ. How are curiosity would love to pry into the unknown and listen to the debates of these two men. Simon certainly gave up the philosophy of force when he followed Christ. He saw that the power of love is more effective. He had to forsake the sword, for Jesus said, "Those who lived by the sword shall perish by the sword." He had to give up his hatred for the Romans, for Jesus said to love your enemies. He had to change his mind on taxes, for Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." Simon had to make many changes in his philosophy, but we cannot doubt that he still maintained many of the qualities of the Zealot.

He was, no doubt, in his glory when Jesus cleansed the temple

and used force. He was, no doubt, one of the spokesman who asked Jesus in Acts 1:6, "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Simon was still eager to see his country free and powerful. He had a more universal outlook than he did as a Zealot, but still he would be a nationalist.

It would be interesting to hear Matthew trying to justify to him how he as a Jew could have collected taxes for Rome, and how he still had a lot of good friends in that business. The Apostles had to have some hot political debates, but they are not recorded for they have no value. The value is in seeing how Jesus kept a balance in His selection of the 12. They were not all of one mind on everything, but often in sharp contrast.

The fact that a man like Simon would follow Jesus indicates that following Him was no dull and boring thing. It had to be a call to adventure and high purpose to appeal to a man who was committed to a cause that called for loyalty unto death. Jesus apparently didn't have any political advisers in making His choices of men to be Apostles. When He chose Matthew He was in danger of angering the Jewish establishment, and when He chose Simon He was in danger of angering the Roman authorities. Jesus, however, did not look upon men as means to an end. He did not use people and toy with them according to political advantage. He took every man for what he was as an end in himself, and if it happened that their background and viewpoint was of a controversial nature, it made no difference to him. If they would heed His call and take up the cross and follow Him, they were His disciples.

This still holds true today and that is why the body of Christ is the most mixed group of people on earth. There are disciples of Christ from every kind of race, class, culture, and political

persuasion that can be imagined. Like the 12, they find their unity in a common Lord. Simon came from an underground organization to follow Christ openly. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were rich Jewish politicians whom the Zealots would have desired to destroy. But they remained underground within the establishment as hidden disciples of Christ. The New Testament reveals Christians playing a variety of roles in their relationship to Christ and the world. It is important to keep this in mind so that we do not think our particular relationship is the only valid one.

Rev. Richard Wurmbrand wrote of a bishop Frederic Mueller of the Lutheran church in Romania. He had collaborated with the Communists for 23 five years. He was decorated by them and was a member of the Communist Parliament. Yet all the while he advised the underground Christian fighters. It was obviously his conviction that he could do this for the glory of God. Other Christians would call him a betrayer of Christ, and rejoice in his death. Who is right? Is it better to be a Matthew or a Simon? One collaborates with the enemy, the other hates the enemy. All we know for sure is that Jesus called them both to be men who would be the foundation of His church that would alter all of human history. If Jesus is broadminded in His selection of men it was because He intended to build a church with a message that would appeal to all men. Something would have been missing with a Simon the Zealot in that foundation.

Christ met the test He had to meet if he was to be the great reconciler. He had to demonstrate His ability to reconcile men of extreme positions before He could be proclaimed as the reconciler of God and man. As He and His 12 Apostles walked about ministering to people He was giving an object lesson in the power of love to reconcile. People knew both Matthew and Simon, and

you can imagine the impact of seeing them laboring together as they carried baskets among the 5000 feeding the hungry masses. Simon was a radical, but even more radical was the ability of Jesus to unite men with such radical differences. Praise God that a man like Simon was chosen to be one of the 12.

8. JOHN-SON OF THUNDER Based on Luke 9:46-56

A farmer in Georgia was sitting on the porch of his tumble-down shack. He was ragged and barefoot when a stranger stopped for a drink of water. Wishing to be agreeable, the stranger said, "How was your cotton coming on?" "Ain't got none," replied the farmer. "Didn't you plant any?" asked the stranger. "Nope, fraid of boll weevils." "Well," said the stranger, "How is your corn?" "Didn't plant none. Fraid there wa'nt going to be no rain," came the reply. The stranger confused but persevering asked, "Well, how are your potatos?" "Ain't got none, scart o' potato bugs." "Really, what did you plant," asked the astonished visitor. "Nothin," said the farmer. "I just played it safe."

Most people do not play it that safe, but most people are afraid to take a chance, especially on people. We fear to risk putting our trust in others because we know how weak and fallible people are. Jesus knew this better than anyone, but He took great chances, and put His trust in men who are very risky candidates for Apostles. Jesus wanted to play it safe, He never would have chosen John the younger son of Zebedee. John was not just potential trouble, he was actual trouble. There are more negative characteristics of John in the New Testament than any of the 12, and yet he became the great Apostle of love.

John could be called the Apostle who experienced the greatest change, for he went from the most proud, arrogant, intolerant, and narrow-minded of the 12, to the most loving man whose writings have done more to spread love than any other man in history. John is a good example of the fact that Jesus did not choose men for what they were, but for what they could become. Before we see what John became by the grace of God, let's look at the negatives we have on him in the synoptic Gospels. There are no negative facts about John in his own Gospel, for John, though he was a partner with Peter all his life almost, was a different character from Peter. John did not bring out his errors like Peter did. Peter told of his blunders, but John would rather forget them.

When John wrote his Gospel the other three were already written and well known. They are so negative on John that he probably thought there was little he could add, so he ignores himself all together in his own Gospel. He never even mentions his own name. In only 6 places is he even referred to. In three of the six he is called, "This man," "That disciple," and "The disciple who testified these things." In the other three he is "The disciple whom Jesus loved." He has that very positive distinction, but let's look at him in the other Gospels.

In Luke 9, for example, we get quite a glimpse into John. In verse 46 he and the others are arguing as to who is the greatest. We know John thought he was the best of all, or at least second best, for as we shall see later, he had the audacity to ask Jesus for a place at his right or left in the kingdom. In verse 49 we see John demonstrating his intolerance. He said to Jesus that he saw a man casting out demons in his name, and he forbid him to do so because he did not follow with them. John cannot take all the blame, for the others, no doubt, felt the same. The point is, we see

John as ideal material for becoming a zealous bigot. He would have made Christianity so exclusive and narrow that it would have been horrible to disagree with him. He would be excommunicating or executing all over the place.

The proof of this in the next paragraph. The Samaritans did not like the Jews, and when they knew Jesus was heading for Jerusalem they refused to give He and His disciples any hospitality. This burned John and his brother James, and his tornado like temper wanted to blow. John is a victim of prejudice, and he wanted to burn the place down. He said to Jesus, "Do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" This was John's solution to the problem of prejudice and social injustice at this stage of his life. Later in the book of Acts we see him with Peter going to the Samaritans and laying hands on them, and seeing them filled with the Holy Spirit. John praying down the fire from heaven to bless the very people he first longed to see consumed by the fire of wrath.

Some ancient authorities add, "As Elijah did," in verse 54. John thought he had a Biblical basis for his bad temper. Just because Elijah called down the wrath of God, John thought he should do the same. You the pride and arrogance here that most all of us have to some degree. We try to find a text or example in the Old Testament as a precedent for our sub-Christian attitudes. We feel justified in being sub-Christian if we can find someone who is just in having the same feelings. In verse 55, however, Jesus rebukes them, for their spirit is not in accord with His at all. He came to save and not destroy men. John was not thinking of that at all. He was only concerned about his rights and pride. He wanted to have the power of God's wrath to back up his pride. Imagine the danger of a man like John without Jesus around to rebuke and control him. Jesus had to rebuke him for arguing

about greatness, for forbidding a man to heal in His name, and for his bad temper. John had some learning to do to become the Apostle of love.

Jesus knew his character fully, but He took the risk of trying to train him to be all God wanted him to be. He and his brother are given a special nickname in Mark 3:17. They are called sons of thunder. Most all of what we say about John applies to his brother James as well. They were, no doubt, spoiled rotten. They probably got everything they ever wanted, and that is why they were such temperamental hot-heads. They had much wealth, and were among the rich of their day. Their father had hired servants, and John had a large home, for he took in Mary the mother of Jesus after the crucifixion.

We have a clue also in John 18:15 that John was of a well-to-do family very influential in society. When Jesus was arrested we read, "Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door." John got Peter in, but he would have been better off shut out, for inside he made his three fold denial. Peter had no connections like John. John knew people in high places. John was the only one of the 12 at the cross, because he did not fear officials like the others, for he was used to dealing with people on that level.

H. V. Morton in The Steps Of The Master writes, "There is in the back streets of Jerusalem a dark little hovel, now, I believe, an Arab coffee-house, which contains stones and arches that were once part of an early Christian church. The Franciscan tradition is that this church was erected on the sight of a house which had belonged to Zebedee, the father of St. John. This family, said the

Franciscans, were fish merchants of Galilee, with a branch office in Jerusalem, from which they used to supply, among others, the family of the High Priest." This would explain how John knew the High Priest, and could get himself and Peter inside. Solome, their mother, was one of the women who followed Jesus and ministered of him of her substance. She asked Jesus to give her boys the best positions, and this indicates she was a woman of wealth and position herself.

All of this shows that John and James did have some reason for their pride. They were in a higher social class, and they had prospects for being very successful in the secular world. They figured they should have the top spots in the kingdom Jesus came to establish. We often hear that Jesus chose poor fishermen to be His disciples, but this tradition is not supported by the evidence of Scripture. In Mark 10:35-45 we read of how James and John came to Jesus and request Him to do what they asked. He says, "What do you want me to do for you?" They say, "Grant us to sit one at your right and one at your left in your glory." They were use to getting places by knowing somebody, and so why not with Jesus?

Jesus uses the occasion to do some teaching. He tells them that their request is not His to grant, and verse 41 says the other Apostles were indignant at James and John. The struggle for power among the Apostles was just like the struggle among any group of men. Greatness and position is all they could think about and squabble about. Jesus teaches them they are acting like the Gentiles who loved to lord it over one another. He says the whole thing is to be reversed in His kingdom. The greatest are the servants, and He closes His lesson with His own powerful example. "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

In Matt. 20:20-29, Matthew tells us their mother put them up to it, and so we see behind their own ambition was the family status and ambition. Not only did the family of John have wealth and status, but they were related to Jesus according to the best evidence. In John 19:25 we read that standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister. This sister is likely the Solome that Mark and Luke mentioned, and whom Matthew in 27:56 calls the mother of the sons of Zebedee. Not only John, but His mother was at the cross. We see a strong tie of families making John the full cousin of Jesus. All of this led to him feeling he should have special privileges. It also makes it clear why John took Mary home with him after the cross.

Leonardo da Vinci apparently thought James and John got their way with Jesus, for in the Last Supper John is at the right and James at the left of Jesus. John lived the longest and received the greatest revelation ever. He became the greatest prophet of all time through the book of Revelation. The greatest achievement of John, however, was his becoming the Apostle of love. He penned the greatest verse of Scripture on God's love in John 3:16. He alone wrote, "God is love." He writes of love in his epistle more than all the others put together. Love of brethren is a key note with him who was once the most quarrelsome of all. He became as strong on love as he once was on revenge. He said those who do not love are in darkness and do not love God. He wrote, "If anyone says I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar."

John never lost his temper, but he brought it under the control of love. He could be sharp, but did so in love. Many are the stories of tradition of how he loved people, and once risked his life to win back a youth who became a thief. The stories are likely true, for no name ever became so popular as John, which means

God is gracious. There is a long list of Christian leaders named after John. John Chrysostom, John Huss, John Wycliffe, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, John Milton, and John Bunyan just to mention some of the best known.

He saw more real tragedy in his own life as well as future tragedy in his visions than the rest of the Apostles put together. His first master, John the Baptist was beheaded. His Lord was crucified, and his brother James was the first of the Apostles to be martyred. He lived to see all the rest martyred also, plus masses of other Christians. In John 21:20-23 we read of the rumor that got started that John was not going to die. He did finally die, but only after outliving 12 Roman Emperors. But John, who saw more hell on earth than any of the 12, also saw and gave to Christians the only vision we have of heaven. He was 90 or older and was ready for a literal journey to heaven when God revealed it to him in spirit. You wonder how an old man could take all that excitement with horseman, battles, trumpets, violence, and noises of agony. There is certainly reason to believe that even as an Apostle of love John was in a positive way right to the end a Son of Thunder.

9. DEFECTIVE DISCIPLES Based on Luke 9:46-50

It is not without good reason that many people say they never argue about politics or religion. The ignorance and intolerance of men in relation to these subjects is such that they almost always lead to contention and anger rather than helpfulness and understanding. The average person, who does not delight in verbal wrangling, and who does not enjoy seeing what he feels to be precious dragged through the mud of controversy, feels that

the best thing to do is just be quiet. The ignorance with which men attack brothers in Christ is almost unbelievable, and if we did not have examples of the same foolishness in the Bible we could easily be led to doubt their salvation. Some have not only admitted their ignorance, but have bragged about it. One such man said to John Wesley, "I thank God for my ignorance." Wesley simply responded that he certainly had much to be thankful for.

Contention has characterized Christianity from its conception. This may sound like an awful thing to say about those who claim to follow the Prince of Peace, but it needs to be said and understood, for the Bible both portrays it and predicts it. Practically every one of the Apostles, including Paul, is pictured as being wrong in an argument at some point. The 3 best known are specifically mentioned as being out of God's will in their attitudes toward others. Peter, Paul and John were all wrong at some point. Peter was wrong in his attitude toward Gentiles, and God had to rebuke him and teach him that Gentiles were not unclean, but equal with Jews in His plan of salvation. Paul had to rebuke Peter for his narrowness.

Paul in turn was in a controversy with Barnabas over John Mark, who was the author of the Gospel of Mark. Paul did not think he was a fit person to travel with them on a missionary journey, but Barnabas was willing to give him another chance even though he failed on the first try. Paul did not agree and would not give in, and so they split up and Barnabas took Mark with him. Mark proved himself to be a loyal servant of Christ, and later Paul received him as his fellow servant in the Lord. Paul was wrong, and if he had gotten his way we may never have had the Gospel of Mark. John was wrong on several occasions. He was one of the quick tempered sons of thunder who was ready to call down fire from heaven to destroy those who did not respond

as he thought they should. He is the one in our text who hindered a man from doing good because he was not following with them.

The disciples had defects, and the Bible does not attempt to hide them, but openly reveals them that we might recognize the dangers of pride, ignorance and selfish ambition. They are real for all of us, even as children and saints of God. Their defects are recorded that we might learn how to more quickly arrive at the goal of Christ-likeness by avoiding their mistakes. To learn the hard way by going through the same experiences, causing the same problems, and needing the same rebukes, rather than heeding the Word of God is one of the Christians greatest sins. We are going to examine the defects of the disciples, and not that we might gloat at their weaknesses, but that we might avoid them and be less defective in our discipleship. Our text indicates two reasons why they were defective disciples.

I. DEFECTIVE BECAUSE OF IGNORANCE. v. 46

Here was a group of men who were going to be used of God to change the course of history. Three of them had just seen the deity of Christ displayed in his transfiguration, and yet they are arguing like a group of immature boys over who has the strongest father. They were debating as to who of them was going to be the greatest. There was certainly no lack of pride among them, for each apparently felt he had some good claim to be the greatest among them. It is difficult for the Holy Spirit to lead men to higher ground when they are already convinced that they are the king of the mountain. The whole thing could have been avoided if they had not been so ignorant about what true greatness is in the sight of God. Their ignorance on this, and on the plan of Christ led them into this foolish dispute.

Jesus was heading for the cross, and here they are debating about who will wear the crown. They expected Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom and make them the rulers of the world. Not everyone, of course, could be equal, and so there was a power struggle among them as each tried to maneuver his way into the seat of the highest office. On one occasion the mother of James and John came to Jesus and requested that her two sons be seated on His right and left hand. All of this business of gaining power was based on a false concept of the kingdom of Christ. His kingdom was not going to be of this world, and so all of their arguing was vain from the start. They were debating over a matter that was non-existent, and it had no part in the realm of reality. It was all a matter of their imagination and misunderstanding, and yet they spent their time debating it. Christians often spend their time debating issues that have no relevance to the kingdom of Christ.

Nothing strikes me as being more foolish than when believers will waste their time and energy in controversy over matters of which they have little to no knowledge. Often they have strong convictions about things that are mere opinions and speculation. One exhorter announced his outline to the congregation and said, "My beloved hearers, I shall in the first place speak to you of things you know; second of what I know and you do not know; third, of things that neither of us know." He at least had a balance, but there are some who specialize in that which no one knows, and they pretend to fill us in where God has chosen to be silent.

If the disciples had listened to Christ and weighed his words carefully instead of blindly following their own preconceived opinions about the kingdom, they never would have gotten into such a foolish dispute. Likewise for us today, if we give heed to

Christ and not the speculations of men we will avoid foolish controversy. There are too many things God has made crystal clear for us to be wasting time in controversy over petty and obscure issues. The best defense against all error and fruitless speculation is to know the truth. Learn what is clearly taught and let others who have time to waste fight about fantasies. John Wesley urged this upon believers: "If you desire to be extensively useful, do not spend your time and strength in contending for or against such things, as are of a disputable nature, but in testifying against open and notorious vice, and in prompting real spiritual holiness. Let us keep to this, leaving a thousand disputable points to those who have no better business than to too the ball of controversy to and fro..."

Thousands of believers are split over issues dealing with the return of Christ, even though they all believe in literal, visible and bodily return. They do so because men of God, like the disciples, strive for superiority. There are those who believe that holding their particular system of teaching about the second coming makes them superior to others who have not been so enlightened. They even forbid other views to be discussed. They have already reached the top and are on the highest ground, and so every one else has to be beneath them.

To strive for superiority rather than for truth is to be guilty of willful ignorance, and this is a serious defect in any believer. Jesus was very kind in the way He handled His defective disciples, and we must learn also that you do not help people overcome defects by crushing them with condemning words, but by enlightening them as to their error. Jesus rebukes them by showing them a true concept of greatness. He does so by taking a child and setting him by himself. Tradition says this child was the son of Peter who grew up to become the famous Ignatius, Bishop

of Antioch.

Jesus makes this surprising statement in verse 48: "Whoever shall receive this child in my name receives me." What does this have to do the disciples dispute over who was the greatest? They were thinking in terms of power, ability, skill, ambition and places of authority for themselves, but Jesus directs their attention along a totally different channel of thought. He is proclaiming to them God's attitude about what is great, and it has very little similarity to what they have been disputing about. They were not thinking about service to others, but about being served by others. Here is the difference between the secular and spiritual view of greatness. Jesus came to minister and give His life a ransom for others, and not to be ministered to. He came to give, serve, to accept and to save. He became the servant of all, and in so humbling himself He reached the top, for God exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name.

The disciples were on the wrong track, and going the wrong direction by hoping to be great in their concept of greatness. The only way to true greatness is by way of humility and service. Just the receiving of a child in Christ's name is an act that cannot be surpassed in terms of doing what is truly great, for in so doing one receives both Christ the Son and God the Father.

Jesus is showing them that they are following a line of thinking that is contrary to His. The ambitious man of the world who seeks to be great does not bother with the poor and the unknown lower classes of society. He tries to associate only with the rich and influential. He tries to build up his own image. The world's concept of greatness leads to a division of men into those who count and those who do not. By the use of a child Jesus makes it clear that from God's view there is no such division. Even a child

who cannot add in any way to your prestige is of eternal value, and is on a level of equality with any prominent personality. Being great in the eyes of God is open to all men, and not just to the few, for it consists in concern for and service to anyone and everyone, and especially to the acceptance of children. Ministry to children is a road to greatness that anyone can travel. We need to avoid the ignorance of the disciples and not think and act on the basis of the world's concept of greatness.

We ought to have the ambition to be great, and we need to desire to be somebody important. Everybody has a hunger to be recognized, and to feel wanted and significant. Every person wants to be great in some way, and this is a good thing, but like all desires it can be perverted and lead to much evil. In a biography of Mussolini he is seen pacing in his palace bedroom saying, "I am obsessed by one wild desire. It consumes my whole being. I want to a mark on my era with my will. A mark like this..." and with his fingernails he scratched the back of the chair, "like the claw of a lion." He made his mark all right, and the whole world had to bear the scar. This self-centered desire for greatness is just the danger the disciples were falling into before Jesus made it clear that greatness is not in rising above others, but in lifting others.

A child lifted by your love will make you greater than any man who has had to step on others to rise to a place of power. It will make you greater than an greatness attained by popularity, position or possessions. A child is equal in importance before God to any great theologian, scholar or preacher. Those who are wise enough to see it gladly invests their lives in serving youth. Many, however, never learned the lesson Jesus taught here, and they go on in ignorance as to what true greatness really is. They continue to strive and fight for places of prominence and superiority.

People cannot believe the paradox of Jesus that the way to the top is down. The way to exaltation is humility, and the way to greatness is to be the least, and to be, like Him, the servant of all. The disciples were defective at this point because of ignorance, and this is what led them to their foolish striving. It is possible that many disciples of Christ are still defective because of their ignorance about true greatness. That can never be our excuse, for we have now heard the word of Christ on this matter. We can go on trying to be great by the world's standard, which will lead to futility, but it should be our prayer that we will follow Jesus in finding our greatness in service and not be a defective disciple.

10. APOSTOLIC INTOLERANCE Based on Luke 9:49-50

It is not intolerant to expose an oppose error. If a newspaper prints an article naming you as a spokesman for the Ku Kulx Klan it would not be intolerant for you to write them and tell them of their error. Likewise, if a man preaches that God's Word teaches a man can be saved by works, it is not intolerant to tell him of his error, and that it is by the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ alone that we are saved. It would be the worst of all possible worlds if toleration meant that truth is to give way to error without resistance.

This would lead to sheer indifference in which there would be no distinction between truth and error, and all would be completely relative. Some people are very tolerant just because the truth means nothing to them, and so they have nothing to defend. This can never be true of a believer in Christ, for in Him there is very

definite truth and right in contrast to error and wrong. The problem that a believer faces in relation to error is two fold. First of all he is in danger of sinning in his opposition to evil if he uses evil means to do so. The Christian must be intolerant of evil in himself as well as others. He must refuse to employ bad manners and false logic in his fight against evil. Paul said, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” If we use evil means to overcome evil, we are in the camp of error whatever be our end.

The second danger of a believer in opposition to error is that he tends to think that he has the whole truth, and, therefore, anyone who does not see truth just as he does is in error. This is where the vast majority of sinful intolerance enters into the Christian life. Tolerance does not mean we accept error, but it does mean we accept that there are more aspects of truth than that which we know. Not to admit this is to claim omniscience. William Gladstone defined tolerance in a way that a Christian must understand it. He said, “Tolerance means reverence for all the possibilities of truth; it means the acknowledgment that she dwells in diverse mansions, and wears vestures of many colors, and speaks in strange tongues..”

It is interesting that we find the Apostles falling into both of these dangers and becoming intolerant in a non-Christian way. As to the first danger of using evil means to oppose evil, you recall how the sons of thunder wanted evil men to be destroyed immediately, and also how Peter wanted to fight with a sword those who came to capture Jesus. They were all rebuked by Jesus for their willingness to use such force against others. Paul understood that our weapons are not to be carnal but spiritual. If the truth is attacked with bitterness, hate and violent language, we are not to respond with the same evil weapons. The disciples had not yet learned this.

Newman Smith was the author of a widely used book, “Come To

Jesus.” Later in a controversy with Robert Hall, the famous Baptist author, he wrote a bitter pamphlet. He did not know what to title it, and so he asked a friend for suggestions. His friend read the fierce pamphlet and said he would call it, “Go To Hell By The Author Of Come To Jesus.” The inconsistency made him see how obvious it was that he was not displaying a Christian attitude. Our text is an example of how the Apostles were also being intolerant by limiting truth to their own group, and it is this kind of intolerance we want to examine. We saw how the disciples were defective because of ignorance, and now we want to see how they were-

DEFECTIVE BECAUSE OF INTOLERANCE.

John’s conscience was apparently bothered by what Jesus had just taught. He had just said that the least is greatest, and it made Him think of a man who was casting out demons that He had stopped because he thought he was not worthy, for he did not follow them. In other words, he was, in their minds, unqualified and unimportant. He was the least. The disciples were under the impression that they had a monopoly on God’s power, and so they forbid this man to carry on in his service to others in the name of Christ.

Many commentators agree that John feels a sense of guilt about this incident after what Jesus has said about the greatness of one who receives even a child in His name. The man they had stopped was aiding people in distress in the name of Christ, and now John wonders if they did act too hasty in forbidding him. He brings it out into the open to get an answer. It might never have been answered if Jesus had not made his conscience sensitive by revealing his pride. Pride is what started them arguing in the first place about greatness, and pride was the cause for their hindering a man who was doing good in the name of Christ. Imagine this, of all people to oppose the

work of Christ we have the very Apostles themselves.

This has an important lesson for us. Let us never assume that because a man is a Christian that all he stands for or against is the will of God. If pride and a sense of exclusiveness and spiritual privilege could lead the Apostles to go wrong, it is not only likely, but inevitable that the same will be true of all of us. None of us are beyond being intolerant and even bigoted because of pride. There are so many who do not dot their I's and cross their t's as we do, and it is so easy to feel that this is more important than serving Christ. It had to be pride that blinded the disciples, for what other cause could their be for stopping any good work being done in the name of Christ?

There was likely some jealousy mixed with pride also, for the disciples had just failed in being able to cast out a demon in a young boy. Their weakness in contrast to this man's power would cause them to be jealous, and the best defense of the ego is to stop the success of others so that your own failure does not stand out. What would it look like, and what kind of reputation would we get if some stranger, who does not even follow us, has more power than we do as the disciples of Jesus? They wanted God to only work through them so they alone would get the credit. There are parallels of this today. Christians want to forbid people to be involved with ministries that are not connected with their denomination. They are often like Job's friends who felt that we are the people, and wisdom will die with us. It could well be that we are guilty of sinful intolerance. No one has a copyright on the name of Christ, and so just because people do not follow us does not mean they do not follow Christ.

Jesus said to John that he should not forbid that man, for he that is not against us is for us. If the man had been opposing the truth then it would not be intolerant to forbid him, for then it would

be a valid defense of the truth to do so. Since he was doing what was consistent with what you are doing in casting out demons, you did wrong to forbid him. Van Doren said, "True love approves good, whensoever, and by whomsoever, done." The disciples were defective at this point, for they hindered good just because the man was not a part of their group.

Jesus did not say that that man was saved. He just said that He was not against them. He may have been saved, but the point is, even if he was not, he was not to be stopped from doing good. Jesus taught in Matt. 7:22 that there would be those in the day of judgment who would be rejected even though they had done many mighty works and cast out demons. Jesus will judge them, but meanwhile, even they are not to be opposed if they do good. Jesus is trying to impress on us that we never advance the cause of Christ by hindering the good work of any man. If a group of atheists were doing a good service to people, we would be out of God's will if we tried to stop it. Let all who do not oppose the Gospel do all the good they can, and encourage them to do so, for they can do much for the cause of Christ indirectly, even if they are ultimately lost. Many unsaved people do much good, and we are not to oppose it.

One of the best illustrations of how we ought to be in this area is found in Acts 18. We read there of how Apollos began to preach the Gospel. He had not yet completely understood all that he should about the New Testament. Priscilla and Aquilla did not condemn him for his shortcomings, but they took him aside and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly. This is the only attitude worthy of a Christian. If you see a man serving Christ in any capacity, even though he is doing it with inadequate theology, or an inadequate attitude, do not hinder, but help. Complete his understanding and encourage him.

If more believers in the history of the church had been like Priscilla and Aquilla, there would be far more to be proud of, and far less to be ashamed of in Christian history. Men have repeated the same mistake as the disciples over and over again. They have wasted their powers in fighting with those going in the same direction rather than using their combined forces to oppose evil. The history of the Baptists and Methodists on the early American frontier is filled with rivalry.

A young Methodist pastor was called on to conduct the funeral of a Baptist person. He was not sure what to do, and so he wrote to his Bishop for instruction. The Bishop wrote back, "Bury all the Baptists you can." This sounds like a joke, but the fact is there was serious opposition between these two groups, and they fought in earnest. James H. Addison said in all seriousness that in one area Methodists were gaining strength and now-"The combined powers of the Baptist and the devil will be unavailing towards shaking the fabric thus reared."

In spite of the defects of the disciples being openly rebuked for the benefit for all succeeding generations, and in spite of Paul's admission that even he only saw in part, men have had the audacity and the pride to demand that all who do not follow them are wrong and should be stopped. J. C. Ryle wrote, "Thousands, in every period of church history have spent their lives in copying John's mistake. They have labored to stop every man who will not work for Christ in their way, from working for Christ at all. They have imagined, in their petty self-conceit, that no man can be a soldier of Christ, unless he wears their uniform, and fights in their regiment."

In the light of both the Bible and church history we are forced to admit that all of us are in danger of displaying the same defect of intolerance as did the disciples. May God grant us the wisdom to see this danger and refuse to let it guide our lives and attitudes. Let us

listen to our Lord and follow His spirit and avoid all the foolishness we see in Apostolic Intolerance.

11. ANDREW THE ORDINARY Based on John 1:35-42

Colonel Bottomly was rising to the level of general in the United States Air Force. He was a proud self-sufficient man who needed nobody. He felt that if you could succeed without God you didn't need Him. As he rose in power he began to feel he could do as he pleased, and he did. He bombed across the border in the war in Viet Nam. It was a violation of the rules of war, but he thought he was above the rules, and he could do what other morals could not do. He didn't get by with it, however, and was facing a court martial. His whole world began to tumble in, and he was filled with stress. He called his son who was a Christian. When his son explained how he could become a child of God by receiving Jesus as his Savior, he prayed right over the phone and became a Christian.

Here was a famous man who became a Christian because of the witness of an ordinary an unknown man. This has been the case with many of the famous Christians of history. They are brought to Jesus by ordinary people. D. L. Moody was brought to Christ by an obscure Sunday School teacher. Charles Spurgeon was brought to Christ by an unlettered man. Peter is one of the most famous names in Christian history. It is hard to imagine anyone who has not heard of Peter, but he was brought to Jesus by his ordinary brother Andrew.

Andrew never did anything wild and spectacular like his live wire brother Peter. He never leaped over the side of the boat to

walk on water. He never drew his sword to take on the Roman army single handed. He never preached to the masses like Peter did at Pentecost. Andrew was a quiet behind the scenes type of person. He had no great gifts that make him stand out. He was just an ordinary guy who loved to introduce people to Jesus. That is about all Andrew ever did in the record we have of his life. He represents the majority of Christians who feel ungifted and ordinary.

Some believers like Barnabas are extra-ordinary people. They are unique, and they have gifts that most do not have. It is not that ordinary people can't be like Barnabas. They can be like them and imitate some of their best qualities, but they can never be equal to them. Andrew did nothing that the rest of us could not do if we choose to do it. Andrew is connected with evangelism, but we let this word scare us. We think we have to be very gifted people to do evangelism. This is a failure to see that we are confusing the gifted evangelists with the ministry of evangelism. All Andrew did was invite people to come to Jesus. He was an inviter. He was not a leader, but a follower but he could invite others to come to Jesus to see for themselves what He could do in their lives.

We have this mistaken idea that if a person is filled with the Spirit he will become a dynamic soul winner leaving streaks of lightening in his path as he blazes across the stage of history. The New Testament reveals no such thing. Andrew was a quiet sort of guy who just confronted people one on one and said, "Let me introduce you to Jesus." Andrew knew Jesus was the Way and so he pointed others to the Way. He brought Peter to Jesus, and then Peter left Andrew in the shadow, for Peter was far more gifted. But Andrew did not fret and complain and feel bad about himself. He just kept bringing people to Jesus. He is the one who brought the lad with his lunch to Jesus, and Jesus used it to feed the multitudes. He is the one who brought the first Greeks to Jesus as well.

He was not the kind of guy who could preach like Peter, but he could point a man like Peter to Jesus. He could not feed the crowds, but he could point a lad to Jesus, and Jesus could feed the crowd. He could not change Greeks, but he could bring them to Jesus who could change them. Andrew was sort of a middle man. He linked people up with Jesus and made great things happen. He did not do the great things, but they happened because he did his ordinary things to prepare the way.

Do you think anything wonderful and marvelous ever happens without many ordinary things preparing the way? Do you think a space craft soars into the sky with its spectacular blastoff without a thousand and one ordinary people doing ordinary things first? Do you think any great performer could hold you spell bound with their gifts without the labor of many ordinary people behind the scenes? Do you think Billy Graham could put on his great crusades without the help of masses of ordinary people doing all sorts of ordinary things?

Ordinary people doing ordinary things is the foundation for human progress. In 1848 it was suggested that a bridge be built across Niagara. It would save miles of travel and solve many problems. But the cliffs were too steep, and the water was too wild to figure out how to begin. Then someone got the bright idea of offering ten dollars to the kid who could fly a kite from one side to another. The string could then be connected to a larger string, and then to a rope, and that to a cable, and they would have a start. The sophisticated engineers had a field day laughing at such an idea. But one young boy named Herman Walsh flew his kite across the chasm and collected his ten bucks, and thus a great bridge was begun with an ordinary boy flying an ordinary kite, and his ordinary string got this extra-ordinary project under way. It has been a blessing to many millions.

Jesus did not choose all Peters, but he choose some Andrews to be a part of his 12. Our culture says it is no good to be ordinary. If that is all you are, then you are not special. Never mind the fact that of the billions of people on this planet most are ordinary. The only way to be somebody is to be the best is the message we often get. This leads parents to put pressure on their children. David Wilkerson wrote, "It begins early. The first time little Tommy hits a home run in Little League, someone starts grooming him for the big leagues. When Susan gets a solo part in choir, she's told she is another Sandi Patti. The children's teachers keep telling them that every year in school is worth so many more dollars of income. The libraries overflow with books of how to take 10 easy steps to the top, how to get power over others with the right mental gimmicks, and how to make millions without trying."

The great sin of our culture is to be ordinary. But in the Bible we see the ordinary glorified, and in Andrew we see a specialist in the ordinary. John mentions Andrew 3 times in his Gospel, and in 2 of the 3 he is called Simon Peters brother. Don't get him confused with the many other Andrews. This is the Andrew who is the brother of Peter. Just say Peter and all know who you are speaking of, for Peter was extra-ordinary. He stands out as unique, and everybody know Peter. Andrew alone does not stand out, for Andrews are a dime a dozen.

Nobody ever said I want you to meet Peter the brother of Andrew. Peter's reputation stood on its own, but Andrew had to be more clearly identified because he was just ordinary. But remember, he too was one of the 12. Jesus chose, not only Peter to be a foundation of his church, but he also chose his ordinary brother Andrew. Jesus has a place in His kingdom for the ordinary, for they are always the majority. There are far more Andrews as fishers of men than there are Peters. There are far more ordinary pines than

there are giant redwoods. The redwoods are marvelous and a wonder, but the ordinary trees are the key to building the houses for people to dwell in. And so also it is the ordinary Andrews who are the key to building the church of Christ.

Andrew did not try to imitate his older and more dynamic brother. He knew Jesus chose him for who he was. If He would have wanted another Peter, He would not have chosen him. He knew Jesus could use the ordinary as well as the extra-ordinary. Andrew knew he was loved and used by Jesus just by being himself. He didn't have to be like somebody else. He didn't have to be somebody different, or somebody better. He was okay in being who he was-ordinary Andrew.

If anyone had the right to burn with envy and long to be somebody else, it was Andrew. He had the hardest role to play among the 12 Apostles, for he was a fourth wheel that came with a tricycle. His brother Peter and the 2 brothers James and John became the inner circle. These 3 Jesus chose to be closer to Him than the rest. Here was Andrew who believed in Jesus first before Peter, and he too was a brother of one in the inner circle, and he too was a partner of these 3 in their fishing business, but he was left out of the inner circle.

I cannot pretend that this would not hurt me if I was Andrew. He was so close to the three in that inner circle, but he didn't make it. Yet we do not read of a single word of anger, envy, or resentment. Andrew could accept the fact that he was ordinary and not go all to pieces over it. He could do so because he knew that as an ordinary Christian he could do what really mattered, for he could bring people to Jesus. It may not be by preaching to large crowds like his brother, but one by one he could speak to people and point them to Jesus. And so Andrew became the patron saint of

personal workers. The world is not being won by great preachers. Most of the people they reach are people that have been prepared by Andrews. It is the ordinary Christian who speaks to others about Jesus who touches most of the people who come to Him.

If Jesus was hard on the one talented man who buried that one talent it is because his kingdom depends on the faithfulness of the those one talented people. He cannot reach this world with unique people. He needs the masses of ordinary Andrews if the great commission is to ever be fulfilled. Some unknown poet wrote:

**Common as the wayside grasses,
Ordinary as the soil,
By the score he daily passes
Going to and from his toil.
Stranger he to wealth or fame;
He is only what's-his-name.
Not for him the glittering glory,
Not for him the places high,
Week by week the same old story;
Try and fail and fail and try.
All his days seem dull and tame.
Poor old plotting what's-his-name.**

Most of the books are written about the extra ordinary people like Peters and Pauls of history. But the fact is, it is the labor of the masses of ordinary Christians that keeps the kingdom of God going. Take away the Andrews and all your superstars would fall, for they all need Andrews to succeed. Billy Graham knows this and that is why the backbone of his crusades is the Operation Andrew Program. If the masses of ordinary Christians do not bring people there is very little that Graham can do to reach the masses.

An Andrew has to be a person who can play second fiddle and love it because he knows that it is essential that somebody does it, and that it is a valuable part of the whole, even though it does not get the recognition. Peter was so great and spectacular that we sometimes forget that Jesus chose His brother too. John Sebastian Bach was so great that other members of his talented family were lost in his shadow, but they also blessed people with their gift. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow so eclipsed his brother Samuel that he is largely forgotten, but he also was a great poet.

Ezekiel Webster is not even remember because of his famous brother Daniel Webster. It happens in every field of life that the ordinary are pushed off the pages of history by the extra-ordinary. There are hundreds of sermons on Peter for everyone on Andrew. Do you think Andrew is somewhere in heaven brooding over his place in history? Do you think he regrets being ordinary? He never showed it on earth, so we can count on it that he does not see being ordinary as a defect. He sees it as a link to the vast majority of people for whom Christ died.

Henry Ward Beecher was asked what he thought was the greatest thing a person could do and he replied, "The greatest thing a man can do is not to be a theologian or a scientist, but to bring someone to Jesus Christ." an ordinary man can't be and do a lot of things like being a great theologian or scientist, but he can bring others to Christ, and that is truly being great in the eyes of God. We can't all be chiefs, but we can all be chief winners. That is what Andrew was. He never became one of the key leaders among the Apostles, but he was a key influence in the lives of those who did become the chief leaders.

Andrew had an eye for the individual. Peter fished with the net and drew in the crowds, but in the midst of the crowds Andrew saw

the individual. He fished for men with a pole. Nobody else saw the little boy with the lunch in that crowd with 5000 men plus women and children. Andrew was the one who noticed this little guy. He was just an ordinary kid and Andrew could spot the ordinary. Others were looking for the big shot, and people with power, and money and dignity. They looked for people who could help them solve the problem, but Andrew says, "I found this lad with 5 loaves and 2 fish."

The others were no doubt thinking that Andrew can be such a jerk at times. Here we are having a major problem and he comes up with a sack lunch. But Jesus honored Andrew's faith in the ordinary. He took that ordinary lunch and he made it do the job of an extra ordinary catering service. He did the most massive miracle of his career with this ordinary boy and ordinary lunch.

Andrew was vindicated, for Jesus said by this miracle that he could use the ordinary. Anybody can feed 5000 with a herd of cattle and a field of sweet corn and potatoes, or a ship full of fish and a field of wheat. But when you do it with a lad's lunch you know that God has entered history. God gets more glory when He works by means of the ordinary. When super gifted people serve the Lord much of the glory gets directed to them. But when ordinary people serve the Lord, the Lord gets most of the credit.

Andrew not only chose to focus on the ordinary lad with his lunch, but he made it career to focus on the ordinary. He went to the Sythians, who were the most barbaric people of the ancient world. Nobody else would bother with them, but again Andrew loved the ordinary, and the result is that he became the patron saint of both Russia and Scotland, for both of these peoples descended from the Sythians. Out of the Christian history of these people have come many of the great and famous Christians of history. But this

would not have happened had there not been someone who said that ordinary people are worth reaching. Andrew was that man. By his focus on the ordinary he changed the course of history in very extra-ordinary ways.

Nobody but Jesus can know just how a great an impact this ordinary man has had in history, and in the kingdom of God. All we know for sure is that he is one of history's most famous ordinary men. The flag that George Washington flew in 1776 had the crosses of St. Andrew and St. George in the place of the stars. There are St. Andrew Cathedrals and the St. Andrew University. There are Christians ministries all over the world named after this ordinary Apostle whose focus on the ordinary proved that Jesus loves and uses ordinary people for His purpose.

12. PHILIP Based on John 1:43-46

If Simon the Zealot was a right-winger and Matthew the Publican a left- winger, Philip was a cautious middle of the roader. He had both liberal and conservative leanings. His background was one of mixed influence. His name, for example, tell us something of his home life. Philip is a Greek name, and when Jewish parents give their baby boy a Greek name it tells you something about their outlook on life. This is especially evident with the name of Philip, for this is the name of the ruler over that area when Philip was born. Prince Philip, or Philip the Tetrarch, as Scripture calls him, of the Herodian House was reigning when Philip was born. He ruled from 4 B. C. to A. D. 34. This was the Philip whose wife Herod was living with, which caused John the Baptist to speak words of condemnation.

It was Philip's former wife, Herodius who had John the Baptist killed. John the Baptist was the one who pointed Andrew to Jesus, and Andrew pointed Jesus to Philip. This means that Philip was named after the man whose wife killed the man whose action lead to him becoming an Apostle. Prince Philip, of course, cannot be held responsible for the evil conduct of his unfaithful wife. He was well liked as a ruler, and obvious was appreciated by the parents of the Apostle. It could be that they benefited by his acts in relation to Bethsaida. Verse 44 tells us that Philip was from this city. Josephus tells us of the Tetrarch's interests in Bethsaida. "He raised the village of Bethsaida, situated at the lake of Gennesarath, to city rank, provided it with a greater number of inhabitants and other powers...."

This likely helped the parents of the Apostle in some way-probably economically, and in gratitude they names their son after Prince Philip. He was one who sought to balance things between the Jewish and Greek views, and so the parents of Philip must have been in favor of this balance and the harmony of the old and the new, and so were politically middle of the road type people. The evidence that Philip grew up with this kind of attitude is the fact that when the Greeks wanted to get an interview with Jesus they came to Philip. He had a Greek name and was obviously sympathetic to the Greeks. He was cautious, however, and he went to talk it over with Andrew before he went to Jesus. He was the type of man who wanted a second opinion before he acted, which also shows him to be a middle of the road type person.

Andrew was a good friend of Philip, and the evidence reveals that many of the Apostles had a relationship before they were called by Jesus. Peter and Andrew, and James and John were two sets of brothers who were in business together. Verse 44 tells us that Philip was from Bethsaida, which was the city of Andrew and Peter. John

is clearly indicating a connection of these men, and that they were friends before they became Apostles. Andrew found his brother Peter in v. 41, and then Jesus went to Galilee and found Philip in v. 43, and in v. 45 Philip found Nathaniel and said we have found the Messiah. We have a series of finds here where it is clear that they knew each other. Jesus found Philip after he talked to Andrew and Peter, and the implication is that they told Jesus about him. They told him of their friend in their hometown, who was also one who was looking for the Messiah. They recommended him to Jesus and the next day Jesus looked him up.

The fact that John is the only one who tells us these details shows that he was also a part of this group of friends. The other Gospel writers tell us nothing of Philip but his name, but this author tells us of his call, of his testing at the feeding of the 5000, of his bringing the Greeks to Jesus, and of his question to Jesus at the Last Supper. The other writers did not know Philip, but to John he was part of the old gang that became a part of this new gang of Apostles of Jesus. It is of interest to note that Jesus selected a group of men who were already friends and who had spiritual commitments before he met them. Philip got a place in recorded Scripture largely because of his friends, and he in turn brought his friend Nathaniel to Christ.

Verse 35 reveals that Philip was a Bible student. He said, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote." Philip knew the prophecy of the coming Messiah. It was on the basis of fulfilled prophecy that Jesus was able to convince His Apostles that He was the Messiah. The fact that He would run to Nathaniel and say this tells us that this is where Jesus began. He went to Scripture and showed how he fulfilled it. All we read in the text is that he said, "Follow me." But much more was said. There is nothing in the words follow me to prove he was fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus had to give evidence and it

was convincing, for Philip was not going to waste time trying to answer the philosophical question of Nathaniel, which was, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" He simply said, "Come and see." The evidence need only be seen to be believed.

This little phrase of come and see describes Philip's character for us. He was a very practical and down to earth man. He did not go for Nathaniel's mysticism and abstract philosophy. He went for solid visible evidence and facts. Seeing is believing was his motto. He was basically a materialist and had to see. At the feeding of the 5000 we read in John 6:5-7, "...Jesus said to Philip, 'how are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?' This He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, 'two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.'"

The way Philip quickly calculated things has led to speculation that he may have been a cook or a manager of an eating establishment owned by his parents. Whatever the case, he was a calculator. He faced the facts realistically, and he concluded that all the money in their treasury could not begin to feed this crowd. "Come and see," Philip is saying again. "Look at the cold facts and you will see it cannot be done." He had a vivid sense of the impossible because he did not figure the power of Christ into his calculation. It is possible to be so practical and realistic that you never see beyond the physical facts into the realm of spiritual facts. This leads to frustration and to failure to attempt anything beyond the strength of visible powers. Leave the unseen out of your calculations and most everything seems impossible. Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing." And so everything in God's will is impossible if you depend only upon the visible facts.

It 200 denarii worth of bread would not scratch the surface in

fulfilling the need, what is the sense of Andrew introducing the lad with 5 loaves and 2 fishes? Philip must have laughed at the absurdity of it. Philip had to learn that a little with Christ can be sufficient, for he is not limited by the physical facts. Philip was probably embarrassed by the miracle of Christ, and he probably felt silly about his calculations. Evidence of this is in the fact that when the Greeks came to him he went to Andrew. Andrew had an insight into Christ's spiritual nature that was deeper than that of Philip. Philip knew that he made a fool of himself at the feeding of the 5000, but that Andrew came through with shining colors. Therefore, he played it cautiously and went to Andrew. Philip had learned to seek the advice of friends with a different perspective.

Philip still had his seeing is believing attitude right to the end. In John 14:8 Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." That is all Philip needed to be fully satisfied. All he wanted was to see God. He represents the vast majority of people who long for a concrete materialistic proof of God. He had it, however, and didn't even realize it. Jesus said, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father." Philip needed to listen carefully to the teachings of Jesus that night. He needed to develop the spiritual perspective, for Jesus is leaving them and returning to the Father, and the Holy Spirit will be their guide. Philip would no longer be able to depend on the physical. After the ascension he could no longer say, as he did to Nathaniel, "Come and see," for Jesus would no longer be visible. He had to rise above his dependence upon the visible.

Evidence that he struggled with his materialistic character all of his life is in the tradition concerning his martyrdom. He was stripped and hung head down, and he was pierced at the ankles and thighs. He refused to tolerate this abuse and leave vengeance to the

Lord. He had to see his enemies punished to be satisfied, and so he ordered the ground to open and swallow the people. Jesus appeared and rebuked Philip, and he restored all the people to life. This is fiction, of course, but it reveals that even tradition preserves for us the characteristics that were true of him in real life.

Philip, like all the other Apostles, was unique. He had his own strengths and weaknesses. He is another proof that Jesus can and does use people of all different natures. If our presentation of Christ appeals to only a certain kind of people, we can be sure that we are not preaching a whole Christ, but one limited to certain tastes and character. A whole Christ will attract everyone, for no one, however unique, is any different from the 12 that Jesus chose.

13. THE SON OF LIGHTNING Based on John 13:1-10

Some years back a young girl was caught out in a thunder storm as she rode her bicycle. She made it to the top of the hill and then headed down as fast as she could go. When she got home she told a strange tale. Every time there was a flash of lightning blue flames ran across her handle bars. Had it not been for the rubber tires on her bike she felt she would have been electrocuted. This experience is rare for landlubbers. But for men of the sea strange happenings with lightening are common. The fiery glow of electricity is often seen on the masts of ships, and other pointed objects. Pilots see it on the wings of their planes also. This electrical discharge has come to be called St. Elmo's fire, and it has a fascinating history. It all ties in with our subject this morning because many Italian sailors call it the fires of St. Peter.

In the account of the second voyage of Columbus, written by his son, is this passage: "During the night of Saturday Oct. 1493 the thunder and rain being very violent, St. Elmo appeared on the topgallant mast with 7 lighted tapers, that is to say, we saw those fires which the sailors believe to proceed from the body of the saint." Seaman even developed poetry concerning this strange electric phenomenon.

**Last night I saw Saint Elmo's stars,
With their glittering lanterns all at play,
On the tops of the masts and the tips of the spars,
And I knew we should have foul weather today.**

It is of interest that Peter is connected with these phenomena of natural lightning; not only because of his being a fisherman and a man of the sea, but because it fits his very nature. If James and John, two out of the three in the inner circle of Christ's Apostles, were called sons of thunder, then nothing could be more appropriate than calling Peter, the third member of this trio, the son of lightning. The Jews have a proverb that says, thunder and lightning are inseparable, and this certainly holds true with the men Christ chose as the foundation for his church. Lightning comes before the thunder, and Peter was given first place as leader of the 12, even over the beloved John-the son of thunder.

Peter is like lightning in so many ways. He is as unpredictable. You never know when he is going to strike, and when he does he follows the path of least resistance just like lightning. Alexander Whyte says of Peter, "He was hasty, headlong, speaking impertinently, and unadvisedly...Ever wading into waters too deep for him...Caring little for conventional propriety, or for difficulties locking his way, Peter acted on the rule, when in doubt, speak." Peter's reckless tongue was like forked lightning, and nowhere do we

see it more clearly than in our text. Peter is the only one of the 12 who was so quick on the trigger that he fired back at the Lord Himself with heated resistance.

Even in this setting where Jesus was filling the air with the most beautiful message he ever spoke, Peter is living up to this name as a son of lightning by creating all kinds of static. Jesus persisted with Peter, however, for he knew long before Benjamin Franklin, the lightning can be tamed. Lightning can be made into a powerful force for good if it is harnessed and brought under control. We want to look at the three stages Peter went through before the divine lightning tamer brought him under control. First look at-

I. PETER'S REFUSAL. v. 8

Who but this flaming, impetuous son of lightning would dare to give this heated response to his master-"you shall never wash my feet!" If ever a man was deserving of being struck down by the lightning of God's judgment, you would think Peter was well qualified. All ancient people's looked upon lightning as the tool of God's wrath. Zeus among the Greeks, or Jupiter among the Romans, or Allah among the Moslems are frequently portrayed as destroying their enemies with flaming thunder bolts from the sky. In the Old Testament there are references to the Lord's use of lightning. Psa. 144:6 says, "Flash forth the lightning and scatter them." Psa. 97:4 says, "His lightnings lighten the world; the earth sees and trembles."

Our text says all things were given into the hands of Christ. This means that the lightning of God's wrath was also available to him, and he could have met Peter's hotheaded refusal with a bolt of judgment. Jesus does not handle things that way, however, for he understands Peter's problem. Jesus does not deal with us according

to what we are, but according to what we can be when we are committed to him. Peter is blind and ignorant, and so he takes this stubborn stand with a good motive. His thinking is that no Lord of mine is going to wash my feet, for I respect his dignity too much to see it degraded. His refusal was based on a high respect for Christ, and we could admire Peter for this if it were not for verse 7 where Jesus said, "What I am doing you do not understand now but later you will."

Jesus recognized that what he was doing was unique. It was contrary to all custom. The master never washes the feet of the servants. This is unheard of in any land, and so he prepares them by telling them that they will come to understand by progressive enlightenment. They would have to submit and obey him first, and later come to an understanding of what it was all about. The Christian life is like this because the Lord wants obedience above all else. If we can learn to obey his commands even when we do not fully understand, we reveal that we have truly made him Lord. The key to good discipleship is not understanding, but obedience.

So many people worry about whether a young person fully understands what they are doing when they get baptized at 9 or 10 years old. Of course, they don't fully understand. I didn't either when I was baptized at 9, but I understand now. We are baptized primarily because Jesus commanded it. It is an act of obedience above all else. To many we might appropriately say, what we do now you do not know, but you will understand later. When a person is old enough to obey what they understand is their Lord's command, they are old enough to be baptized. If you don't buy that, you are in good company, for Peter didn't either. Peter made a lightning like response and thought, I don't understand it now, and, therefore, I will not obey-you will never wash my feet.

This is just the problem with lightning. It is all speed and no thought. It is quick on the trigger, but doesn't take aim. Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet says,

**It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden,
Too like lightning, which does cease to be
Ere one can say it lightens.**

That is Peter all over. He doesn't bother to weigh any evidence, or hear any arguments. His mind is made up before any facts are presented, and he flashes forth with his dogmatic refusal. It is not a polite, "Can't we discuss this issue," or a courteous evasion, "let's do it another time," but a rude, rebellious refusal, "never-you shall never wash my feet."

Peter is a real rebel, but he is all the more lovable because of it. We like non-conformists because they usually have the nerve to stand up and be different when everyone else is afraid to do so. Even when they are on the wrong path, like Peter is here, we enjoy them for their blunders make us feel more secure because we would never be so foolish. Peter's blunders are favorite sermon texts.

**Preach about the other man, preacher,
The man we all can see,
The man who drinks and beats his wife,
The man who lends his hands to strife,
Preach about the other man,
Not about me.**

The fact is, Peter is the representative man. When we preach on Peter, we preach on all men, for we are all more like Peter than we care to admit. We are all defiled with the same pride that lead to Peter's refusal. It is not easy for an man to submit to being served

by a superior, especially when you respect that superior. Suppose you were invited to the home of some dignitary that you greatly admired, and the hostess noticed that your shoes were scuffed and offered to polish them. Not a man in a million would yield to such service. We would resist such an offer with all the dogmatism of the son of lightning. "Never, never, never! We would not hear of such a thing." Wild horses could not pull us into a position where we would let a person we greatly respect perform a lowly, undignified service for us.

Put yourself in Peter's sandals and you will better understand his refusal. You will understand that it is not only more blessed to give than to receive, but it is a whole lot easier. It is very hard to accept charity, but if we pay attention to our own theology, that is what we do constantly. All we have and are is by the grace of God. We receive the gift of life, salvation, guidance, and all gifts as charity. But when Jesus dramatizes this truth as he does with the feet washing we are shocked, and our pride resists. We have often heard that we can accept Jesus as Savior and not as Lord, but Jesus goes one step more and says, we can accept him as Savior and Lord, and still not accept him as servant, and thus, miss the best of all.

Jesus said to Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me." If we do not submit to his sovereign service, and learn to overcome all the pride and false dignity that keeps us from bending to serve others, we can have no part in his plan. He came into the world to minister, and his church is formed to minister. No one is truly a part of the body of Christ who has not learned this. When Peter heard the shocking rebuke he quickly changed his mind, and so we look secondly at-

II. PETER'S REVERSAL. v. 9

Peter reveals his kinship to lightning again by the way he changes his mind. His never lasted about 5 seconds. His dogmatic refusal to ever submit to being washed was reversed instantly to a plea for washing all over. Peter went from one extreme to the other in a few seconds. From never to now with the speed of lightning. You have to give Peter a lot of credit for this sudden reversal of his dogmatic stand. Very few men have the courage to abandon a bad decision as fast as Peter. He gets into trouble fast, but he also knows how to quickly retreat from a bad position. He is mighty in his mistakes, but equally courageous in his corrections.

History is full of men who cannot, like Peter, fail successfully because they don't have the courage to admit they have made a mistake. F. W. Boreham tells of the celebrated doctor Sangrado of Spain who developed a simple remedy for all sicknesses. He and his assistant Gil Blas went from bed to bed applying this panacea to all the patients. The one thing that troubled the assistant was that without exception all the patients died. When he modestly suggested that they should modify their method of treatment Dr. Sangrado replied, "I would willingly do so provided it would have no bad consequences. But I have published a book in which I have exalted this wonderful system, and would you have me decry my own work?" "You are right," the assistant said, "It would ruin your reputation. You must not give your enemies such a triumph over you. Let us continue as we are."

Peter made mistakes, but he was not stupid. He never stuck with a mistake when he saw it for what it was. He was a great man just because he could retreat as fast as he advanced when he saw he was going the wrong direction. Jesus wanted that kind of man at the head of his disciples. No man is truly great who cannot change his mind when he makes a foolish decision. When Peter saw that his never would cut him off from Christ he switched to now

immediately. Like lightning he joined the company of great men who learned to say, "I was wrong.."

In Boswell's famous biography of Dr. Johnson he tells of his visit to America. And admirer of his who felt he was infallible could not understand one of his definitions in his famous dictionary. He defined postern as the knee of a horse. She approached him with her problem and expected to get an explanation from some deeply learned source with which she was not acquainted. To her astonishment the great doctor made no elaborate defense, but said, "Ignorance madam, pure ignorance!" He was a great man because he could admit his mistake and retreat from it. It is no virtue to be faithful to one's folly. It is a virtue to flee from it.

Peter did just that with the speed of lightning, and so we learn that even lightning is not all bad. Natural lightning has its good side also. It causes a chemical reaction between oxygen and nitrogen in the air. It forms a substance known as nitric acid. This is brought down by rain and provides the earth with millions of tons of the finest fertilizer every year. Natural lightning can make a great reversal from being a fearfully destructive force to become a fruitfully constructive force. That is what Peter the lightning like Apostle did. His fruit became universal because of his great reversal. The third thing we want to consider is-

III. PETER'S RENEWAL. v. 10

Peter's reversal actually took him to an extreme beyond what the Lord required. Jesus said to Peter, "You don't have to be washed all over, only your feet and you will be renewed to your state of cleanness. This feet washing is symbolic of the fact that all Christians need renewal. This battle to get Peter's feet washed should make that clear. The head Apostle's struggle is recorded so

all Christians can see clearly that if he needed it, then all need it. Studdert Kennedy wrote,

**There's nothing in man that's perfect,
There's nothing that's all complete,
He's no but a big beginning,
From his head to the soles of his feet.**

Peter was not a finished product, as no Christian is. We are in process of becoming what God wants us to be. All construction sights tend to get messy and dirty, and that is true for the Christian as he walks through this dusty world. He gets defiled and needs to be renewed constantly, or he will stop growing. Construction will cease, and he will begin to look like a unfinished project deserted and left to decay. If a Christian submits to constant reviewing of his life, and consistent renewing of it by confession and changing his course, he will, like Peter, go on to abundant and fruitful living.

When Apollo 12 took off, everything was perfect for 36 seconds. Then lightning struck the space craft and the master alarm sounded, and lights blazed all over the control panel. Dick Gordon said, "In all our training we had never seen so many alarm lights." Once in orbit their lives and the success of the mission depended on getting the guidance system realigned. Dick Gordon crawled down into the equipment bay and tried to sight some stars in order to get the space craft back on course. He looked through the telescope and couldn't see a single star. He actually wondered if the stars had gone out. But as his eyes adapted to the dark he saw the constellation Orion. He sighted on Rigel and Sirius, and Apollo 12 was back in business.

This true life event concerning man's progress in space is like a parable of the progress of the church of Christ. Lightning was

threatening to throw the church out of control. It was necessary for Jesus to get Peter to focus his eyes on the bright and morning star in order to get the church again under the proper guidance system so it could achieve the purpose for which Jesus established it. Like Peter, all of us need to be constantly renewed by getting our eyes on Jesus so that we have the proper guidance to achieve his goal for us.

14. PILATE'S PERPLEXING PROBLEM Based on John 18:28-40

Pilate was appointed procurator of Judea in A.D. 26, which was only about 3 years before the crucifixion of Christ, but already he had so much trouble with the Jews that he despised them. When he first came to Jerusalem he discovered that it was about the only city in the whole Roman Empire that did not have an image of the Emperor. He did not realize how the Jews hated idols, and how they would rather die than bow down to one. In his ignorance he sent a guard to set up images on a tower overlooking the temple. He had enough sense to do it at night, but when it was discovered in the morning, the angry Jews began to stream out of Jerusalem toward the palace of Pilate. By the time they got there they had gathered seven thousand people and completely surrounded the palace.

The people sent Pilate their request to remove the images, but he refused, and so they camped there for 6 days. Every time Pilate looked out he saw seven thousand Jews praying that God would change His mind. Finally, he told them to go to the marketplace and he would speak to them. Then he ordered his soldiers to surround the marketplace. He then gave them a warning that they either go

home quietly or the whole lot of them would be killed. They said it was better to die than have images in Jerusalem. This called Pilate's bluff, and he knew if he began his career there by killing thousand of unarmed Jews he would soon be back in Rome. He had to give in and order the idols removed. He despised the Jews for winning this battle and forcing him to be humiliated.

On another occasion he tried to rob the temple treasury and started a riot. Many Jews were killed by his soldiers. On a third occasion he tried to bring in shields with pagan gods on them, but again the Jews won out by writing to Caesar. He rebuked Pilate, and so with this as a background we can better understand the attitude and action of Pilate when Jesus is brought before him. First we see-

I. PILATE'S CONCERN. v. 28-32

Pilate was suspicious from the start. In the first place he could not stand there smug self-righteousness. They would not come into his judgment hall less they be defiled, but they could plan a cruel murder and think nothing of it. The letter of the law was everything to them, but the spirit of it was nothing. Pilate knew they were up to no good, but he went out to them and asked what they charged Jesus with. The Jews had no love for him either, and so they said, "If He wasn't guilty we would not have brought Him to you." They were saying this is none of your business. We only come to you to get your order to crucify Him.

In verse 31 Pilate shows he is not to be outwitted. He says, "That is just fine. If you don't need to tell me anything, then you take care of it yourself and judge Him by your own law." That was a victory for Pilate, for he knew he had them there. They had to admit it and confess that they could not put a man to death without

his permission. Pilate would have been glad to see them try, for then he would have Rome behind him while he satisfied his thirst for revenge against them. They knew this, of course, and so they obeyed the law of Rome that forbid them to practice capital punishment without permission.

Pilate was concerned also because he knew they were charging Jesus with treason. Luke tells us that they said he claims to be a king, and if you do not try Him, you are no friend of Caesar. Pilate had to consider this charge, for if news ever got back to Rome, he would be in serious trouble. He knew, however, that this was not the real reason they wanted Jesus crucified. He knew they were envious. They hated Rome and would be glad to see someone overthrow it. When Jesus was only a boy Judas the Galilean started a rebellion, and all of Galilee was in a uproar. Many of the Pharisees joined him. It was soon crushed by the Romans, but it showed that the Pharisees hated the Romans, and so Pilate was very suspicious of their charge. Pilate was cruel, but he did have a typical Roman concern for justice, and so he determined to examine the prisoner.

II. PILATE'S CONVICTION. v. 33-38

When Jesus was brought into Pilate the first question he asked Him was, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" Jesus had to be very cautious here, and so He answers by asking another question. Pilate responds with a third question, and so we can easily see why a conversation would be confusing if it contains nothing but questions. Finally, Jesus breaks the chain of questions. Jesus knew He asked the question only because the Jews charged Him with being a king, but he also knows that Pilate's eternal destiny is being worked out right there, and so He tried to become personal and get into the inner man. He asked Pilate, "Are you asking because of your own

interest, or just because others have told this to you?" This made Pilate nervous, but Pilate tried to laugh it off as he would say something like, "What a question! What do I care about this whole business? I am no Jew, and it makes no difference to me. Your own people delivered you up to me. I just want to know what you have done to disturb them so that they say you are a king?"

Jesus answered him plainly then and said, "Yes, I have a kingdom, but it is not of this world." The kingdom of Christ does not originate in this world, and it is not built like the kingdoms of the world with swords and armies. Had that been the case Jesus would not have stopped Peter from using his sword, and all of his followers would have been armed. This was confusing to Pilate, but he began to be convicted. Could it be there is another world and a greater kingdom than that of Rome? Tradition says that Pilate's wife was a secret believer, and Pilate may have heard of Christian teachings through her. He certainly had heard of the miracles of Jesus, and of some of His amazing teachings. Now as he talks with Jesus personally it all makes so much sense, and he wonders if it could be true.

Pilate said, "You are a king then?" Jesus said, "Yes, I was born a king and came into this world to be a witness of the truth. My kingdom is a kingdom of truth, and I am the king. All who are of the truth hear my voice." This was another personal appeal to Pilate. Jesus knew He was under conviction and was saying something like this: "You are really the one on trial here Pilate. I am the king of the realm of truth, and you are in a spot right now that you have to decide what is the truth. If you intend to make the right decision, you will listen to me and follow me." That was a personal invitation to accept Him as King. Pilate was faced with a decision even greater than the one he began with, for now he was personally involved.

There's a great deal of difference of opinion as to how Pilate asked this question in verse 38. A few think he was only jesting, and that he thought the whole business was a silly waste of time. I am inclined to agree with those, however, who see that Pilate was more serious at this point. He may have been skeptical and said it with the attitude of, "Well, how can you know what is right in a mess like this? I lose either way. If I don't give in to the Jews, they will write Caesar that I am protecting a rival of his. If I give you to them I will be killing an innocent man. How can a man know what to do?" With that said, he went out to the Jews and tried to persuade them to let Jesus go. Pilate did not want to make a decision, but he wanted to get rid of the whole problem. He felt the price was too great to follow the truth as he knew it. Some even feel he wanted to get rid of the crowd and talk with Jesus alone, but I feel he was trying to escape making it a decision for Christ by getting Him out of the way. He had the conviction that Jesus was innocent, but he did not want to choose Him as his King.

III. PILATE'S COMPROMISE. v. 39-40

It is obvious that Pilate was desperate, for he was naive enough to think he could come out and make a suggestion and they would go for it. He was never further from the truth. He comes out and says there is no fault in this man and so you will want him released as is your custom each year at the Passover when I release to you a prisoner. To his shock they cried out, "Release Barabbas." The crowd wanted Jesus crucified and the real rebel released. Pilate knew Barabbas was a scoundrel and that Jesus was innocent, and so he kept trying to do what he knew was right, but he did not try the one thing necessary, for he did not listen to the truth. He stood for the truth, but not at any cost. He compromised and gave up his personal conviction to do what the crowd wanted.

Pilate believed right but acted wrong. He believed Christ in fact, but he denied Him in act. He was willing to accept Christ as a good man and try to set Him free, but he was not willing to submit to Him as King. To do that would be to take up his cross and follow Jesus, but it was easier just to send Jesus to the cross. He just could not bring himself to the place where he would risk his earthly throne for a heavenly throne. He was no different than millions of other people. He had a good position and he was not sure it was worth losing it to be in the kingdom of Christ. When the showdown came between Caesar and Christ he compromised his stand for justice and chose Caesar and crucified Christ.

He wanted truth and justice, but not at such a price. Judas sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, and Pilate sold Him for his job. He had one of the most important posts in the Roman Empire. He was somebody in this world, and he couldn't afford to gamble with stakes like that, and so, like the rich young ruler who could not pay so big a price, he walked away from Jesus. How hard it is for a man with so much of the world to risk to yield it all to follow Jesus. History is filled with men of position who are almost persuaded, but they never take the step of commitment. John the Baptist almost had Herod, but not quite. Jesus almost had Pilate, and Paul almost had Felix and Agrippa. All through history great preachers have had much influence on kings and leaders, but for the most part they only came close, for most of them never came all the way.

It is with real pleasure that I read the story of Thomas Cranmer who lived in the 1500's. He was an outstanding leader in England who compromised his faith out of fear, and because of pressure he signed documents repudiating his convictions. In his final confession, however, he became one of the most noble leaders in history. Because his life was at stake he denied the Gospel and bowed down to the forces of compromise. When he saw other

Christians going to the stake, however, he was so ashamed of his cowardice that he wrote a denial of his denial. He confessed Christ as his King. When he was taken to the stake to be burned he held up the hand that wrote his denial of the Gospel, and he said, "It shall first be punished." He thrust it into the fire. He came close to being like Pilate, but he repented in time and sacrificed all to follow Jesus.

We can only wish that Pilate might have repented and confessed faith in Christ, but history records that he went on being cruel to the Jews. About 6 years after the crucifixion he killed a number of them unmercifully and was called to Rome. He was exiled where he, like Judas, according to tradition took his own life. A famous legend from which Mt. Pilatus in Switzerland takes its name says that over the waters of the Lake of Sucerne at the foot of the Swiss Mountains there can often be seen on moonlight nights the ghost of Pilate moaning as he washes his hands, but they are never clean from the blood of the innocent Christ he allowed to be crucified. Christ would have cost him his career, which he soon lost anyway, but compromise cost him eternity. We learn from Pilate that nothing is more dangerous than to compromise with the truth, and especially with Jesus who is the King of truth.

15. THOMAS THE DOUBTER Based on John 20:19-31

Sometimes popular ideas about biblical characters are so accepted that one is compelled to go along with them almost as if they were inspired, but they are often arbitrary and superficial. No one ever calls John the Baptist John the doubter, yet his experience of doubt was far more serious than that of Thomas. He had proclaimed of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God." But as he sat in

Herod's prison he had doubts and sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was really the Messiah. Jesus did not rebuke him just as He did not rebuke Thomas. Jesus accepted those who had a quest for evidence, and He gave it in both cases.

Thomas, however, got tagged as the doubter because of his one experience. On this basis he gained a reputation as if he was a skeptic. The fact is we have as much evidence on record as we need to call him Thomas the dedicated defender. He is the only other disciple of the 12 who matches Peter in his commitment and confession. When Jesus determined to go back to Jerusalem, it was Thomas who said, "Let us go and die with Him." It is Thomas who gives the clearest confession of the deity of Christ when he said, "My Lord and my God." The Bible does not call him doubting Thomas because it does not stereotype people on the basis of one week of their life. It remains true, however, that though it was only briefly, Thomas was a doubter, and we want to examine that aspect of his life.

God said let there be light and there was light, and darkness gave way to brightness. This is the way God works both in nature and in man. During World War I a young American sailor gave his testimony of how God brought him out of darkness into light. His ship was torpedoed, and he and 4 other men were on a raft in the ocean for 32 hours. He had a New Testament in his pocket, which he hardly ever read before, but he began to read it now. Three of the men made fun of him, but the 4th said, "Read on buddy, and read loud so I can hear." He read the Bible and prayed for God to save them. Night came and one by one the 3 scoffers slipped from the raft into a dark eternity. The 2 who were left prayed for God to save them, and after what seemed like an eternity a search light appeared from a U. S. Destroyer. Joy filled their souls, for they

knew their sins were forgiven and they dedicated their lives to serve Jesus.

You can imagine the doubts and fears of these men as the clung to a raft in the darkness. They had something, however, which the other 3 did not have to hang onto. They had the promises of God's Word, and God never refuses the true seeker. Not many have that identical experience, but they do go through the agony of dark mental doubts, and we want to look at the experience of Thomas to see if we can gain some insights into the causes and cure of doubt.

I. THE CAUSE OF HIS DOUBT.

The other disciples were not exactly men of great faith at this point. That very morning they did not believe the women who told them that Jesus had risen. They were all doubters of the resurrection. Now we find them meeting behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. They were not strong but they stayed together and did not scatter. So we have here the first Christian meeting as all of the Apostles were filled with fear. Jesus came and demonstrated that He was alive and they are glad. But there were only 10 there for the betrayer was gone and the doubter was absent. We know Judas was dead, but where was Thomas? The very first Christian meeting and someone is missing, and as usual, it is the one who most needed to be there for his faith was the most shattered. If Thomas had been there his wound could have been healed, but he was not. Many are they whom God would comfort and heal, but they are absent from the place where he appears. We see the danger of non-attendance with others for worship and instruction. Forsaking the fellowship is the first step to forsaking the faith.

Thomas was not there, but that was not the cause of his doubt. It was the cause for its continence, however, for the others had joy when he remained in sorrow. He was not doing anything wrong, but he was just not where he should have been. We shall see, however, that Jesus was not hard on Thomas, and so we should not be either. When Thomas was present and Jesus appeared he demanded to see and touch the wounds of Jesus. How did he have such a vivid picture of what happened unless he actually saw the crucifixion? This puts his doubt in a new light, for he was not a skeptic refusing to believe, but it was just too good to be true for him, and he could not believe until he saw. The implication is that Thomas stayed at the cross when the others fled, and he actually saw the spear thrust into His side. He watched the crucifixion with his own eyes, and he needed to see with his own eyes that they crucified Christ was risen.

Here was the Lord he had followed for 3 years who had demonstrated His power in healing, and now He does not lift a finger to destroy these cruel men who take His life. In his heart, the question why does he not do something must have crushed him. When he saw the soldier pierce his side and the end come, Thomas had his faith shattered. If ever a man had good reason to doubt, it was Thomas. If ever an event seem to be prove that God does not care, it was the cross with his dead and wounded Master upon it. Where Thomas went we do not know, but he, no doubt, felt that to meet with others was useless. It was all over and there was no sense kidding ourselves. Thomas thought it best to face his grief alone, and so he was not there at the gathering.

Thomas's doubt was due to the darkness which covered his soul at the cross, and when others came in joy telling him Christ was risen, his attitude was, "Oh, if only it was so. You did not see what I did, or you would not so easily be deceived. I will not believe until I see the very one I saw die, and the very wounds which I saw inflicted

upon my Master.” It was not that Thomas did not want to believe, but he could not, for it was too good to be true. Imagine a man on a ship when a sudden storm brings a wave that sweeps his son off into the ocean. He watches as the boy cries and sinks helpless into the sea. In despair he goes to his cabin and locks himself in. The rest of the family are informed of the loss, and they too in sorrow gather together. Imagine that the boy was miraculously recovered and revived. The family is notified and rushes on deck to see the boy alive just before he is taken in a helicopter to a hospital on land. In their joy they almost forget the father, but when they remember they searched the ship and find him in the cabin. They tell him the good news, but he does not believe them, for he saw the hopeless situation with his own eyes. He says I won’t believe it until I see for myself, and so in doubt and anxiety he must wait for several days to see his boy.

This man, like Thomas, is skeptical because he does not want to build on false hope. It is hard for one who has seen the tragedy to believe without visual evidence. This man’s mistake, like that of Thomas, was in not going with the rest of the family and sharing their burden together. He could have received the same joyous news with them had he been with them. The cause of Thomas’s doubt was a reality of the death of Christ which he saw, and the cause of prolonged doubt was his absence from the fellowship. The obvious truth is that the nearer we are to tragedy the greater will be our doubt that God can bring forth good from it, and the further we are from fellowship the longer we will remain in doubt.

II. THE CURE OF HIS DOUBT.

Verse 26 says he was with them. What a week that must have been for Thomas. The other disciples were happy, and he was in a state of sadness. He was sorry now that he had not joined the others

in the first place. I suspect he probably never missed another meeting after that. The fact that he was with them now shows that Thomas was an honest doubter. He was one who doubted because he could not yet believe, but he was willing to seek evidence. The dishonest doubter does not say, “I can’t” but “I won’t believe.” They not only do not seek evidence, they blind themselves to it, and seek only the negative. I knew a young man who only looked for reasons not to believe, and he never was open to admit there was any reason to believe. This is not true doubt. This is just plain dishonesty. He is a skeptic who refuses to believe, for if it is true he knows he is condemned, and who is going to admit they are condemned?

A man once told me a true story out of his experience, and he gave me permission to use it. He had a neighbor when he was a boy who swore and cursed God at every opportunity. He hated ministers and would curse them off his property. On his death bed, after a long life of cursing God, just before he died he cried out in a loud voice, “God forgive me” This left an impression on the man’s mind that he never forgot. Why did he cry out like that after a life of cursing? It would seem that such a man was living by faith that there was no God, but suddenly they realize they are going to face God and they cry out in repentance. Such a man is a dishonest doubter, for he does not want to believe, and to keep any light from entering his mind he curses God and avoids all openness to truth, for he cannot bear to face it. But in that final moment he saw himself as he really was. Honest doubt does not rest until it has searched for all the evidence. Tennyson said, “There is more faith in honest doubt, believe me, then in half the creeds.” To doubt because it seems too good to be true is far different than doubt because we do not want it to be true.

Thomas was an honest doubter, that is why he was with the disciples at the next meeting. His honest doubt led him to discover the truth of what they believed. Doubt for him, as for all believers, is to be only a state you passed through to further light. It is only a tunnel on the road to faith, and not a dead end. You only walk through the valley of the shadow of death. You do not abide there as your dwelling place. Billy Sunday said, "Do not throw your ticket away just because the train goes into a tunnel. It will come out again on the other side." Thomas did not know what was going to happen, but he was there, and he was ready to believe. What a tragedy if he had been a dishonest doubter. Such a doubter will not move until he has all the answers, but an honest doubter goes as far as he can see, and then waits for more light. It is like walking through thick woods. You do not stand on the edge trying to figure out the way to the other side. You go as far as you can see, and then from there you see where you can go next. The man who stays on the edge thinks he is being reasonable, but in reality he is being a fool. He says he will not believe the Bible until it is proven, and he never tries to read it until it is proven. This is pure dishonesty. Thomas was no such skeptic, and so he found the cure for his doubt by going as far as he could see. S. D. Gordon said, "The honest doubter is a wholesome man to meet. He is not trying to trip somebody up, but to get a sure footing for himself. He never attacks. He inquires. He is always seeking for light."

In verses 26-27 we do not see Jesus rebuking Thomas for his doubt, but instead he offers him clear evidence. The whole incident is recorded, I believe, not so we can call people doubting Thomas, but to teach us that the cure for doubt is an honest seeking after truth in the fellowship of believers. To call a man who is a skeptic a doubting Thomas is to abuse the name of Thomas. It can only honestly apply to a honest seeker who has not yet been convinced, but who is always going as far as he can see. Doubt is not wrong, but

failure to seek evidence is tragic, and fatal for the soul. The others did not rebuke Thomas for his doubt, for they were doubters also until they saw Jesus face to face. They welcomed him back into their fellowship. Doubt is always to be used as a servant that leads you to a deeper dedication. Thomas sought and found the cure of his doubt, and it resulted in-

III. THE CONFESSION OF HIS FAITH.

Doubt is negative and passive, and it allows life to do something to you, but faith is positive and active, and it allows you to do something to life. A man in doubt is narrow and limited, even if a world of opportunity is all around. He is like a gold fish that has been in a small bowl for so long when it is put into a large aquarium continues to swim around in one little corner of it because it is not aware it is no longer limited. Faith is expansion and freedom. It allows one to soar to the heights, and that is what Thomas did when he saw Jesus. From his lips came the greatest confession of the deity of Christ by any of the disciples. He no longer demanded to thrust his hand in the side or touch the holes in the hands of Jesus. He knew that faith was not found in the fingers, but in the awareness of His presence.

He no longer needed any evidence, for he had experience. His testimony is not that he grasped something, but that someone grasped him. He confessed Jesus as Lord and God, and more personal as “my Lord and my God.” When he grasped the reality of the Lordship of Christ is led to immediate personal commitment to Him. He submitted to Christ as sovereign. Jesus knew he was an honest doubter, and that the moment of discovery would be a moment of dedication. Jesus revealed himself because Thomas came in submission with a willingness to believe.

There is a statue in Copenhagen of Christ with hands out and head bowed. Only as one comes on his knees in submission can he look up and see his face. If you are an honest doubter and truly want to know the reality of the risen Christ, then come before Him in submission and ask Him to reveal Himself in your life. Once you experience His love you will not ask for any more evidence. The only reasonable thing to do is to seek Him, for He has promised you will find if you seek Him with all your heart. Pascal said there are only two classes of reasonable men. Those who serve God with all their heart because they know Him, and those who seek God with all their heart because they know Him not. May God help us to always be honest doubters who are ever seeking for more light that we might come to the point where we say of Jesus, "My Lord and my God."