

# STUDIES IN MARK

BY GLENN PEASE

## CONTENTS

1.	THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL	MARK 1:1-8
2.	OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE	MARK 1:1-8
3.	CONFLICT OF THE KINGS	MARK 1:9-12
4.	DESCENT OF THE DOVE	MARK 1:9-13
5.	CHANGING YOUR MIND	MARK 1:14-20
6.	KNOW THE FOE	MARK 1:21-28
7.	DEMONS DEFEATED	MARK 1:21-28
8.	INTIMATE COMMUNICATION	MARK 1:35-39
9.	TOOLS FOR HEALING	MARK 1:40-45
10.	THE MEDICINE OF FORGIVENESS	MARK 2:1-12
11.	THE OLD OR THE NEW	MARK 2:18-22
12.	LOVER'S ARE WINNERS	MARK 3:1-6
13.	ACCEPTABLE ANGER	MARK 3:1-7
14.	POSITIVE ESCAPISM	MARK 3:7-12
15.	PRIVACY	MARK 3:7-21
16.	PUZZLING APPOINTMENTS	MARK 3:13-19
17.	CHRIST AND CRITICISM	MARK 3:20-30
18.	RUIN WITHOUT REMEDY	MARK 3:22-30
19.	STILLING THE STORM	MARK 4:35-41
20.	MADNESS MEETS ITS MASTER	MARK 5:1-20
21.	MEDICAL MISSIONS	MARK 5:1-20
22.	FEAR OR FAITH	MARK 5:21-24, 35-43
23.	THE POWER OF TOUCH	MARK 5:25-34
24.	MIRACLES AND THE MIND	MARK 7:31-37
25.	A FOCUS ON FOOD	MARK 8:1-10
26.	LOVED BUT LOST	MARK 10:17-22
27.	SURRENDER TO WIN	MARK 10:17-23
28.	A ROYAL REDEEMER	MARK 11:1-11
29.	CHRISTIAN EDUCATION	MARK 12:18-24
30.	THE LOVE TRIANGLE	MARK 12:28-34
31.	OPTIMISTIC PESSIMISM	MARK 13:1-2
32.	A WARNING ABOUT WARNINGS	MARK 13:3f
33.	ADVANCE THROUGH ARREST	MARK 13:9-13
34.	A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLEHILL	MARK 14:22-25
35.	A RISEN REDEEMER	MARK 16:1-14
36.	THE REALITY OF RESURRECTION	MARK 16:1-14
37.	THE ULTIMATE HEALING	MARK 16:9-20

## 1 THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL

MARK 1:1-8

The painter Ludwig Richter, tells in his memoirs of how he and three friends set out to paint the same landscape. They each were committed to produce as accurately as possible what they saw. Nevertheless, the result was four different pictures, as different as the four personalities of the artists.

The same thing happened when four well-known artists painted the portrait of the United Nations hostess Maria Lani. Each of them knew her personally and saw her from a different perspective, and the result was four remarkably different pictures.

This helps us understand why there are four Gospels in the New Testament. One Gospel would give us the life of Jesus as seen from only one perspective, and that would mean a very inadequate portrait. Jesus is too complex to be seen from only one perspective. God inspired four men to write the life of Jesus, for each of them gives us unique insight into Jesus that you do not get in the others.

Mark gives us the perspective that is most popular in our modern world. Wycliff Bible Translators have made Mark the most translated book in the world. There is no other book in the world in so many different languages. It is the shortest of the Gospels, and, therefore, the fastest to translate and to read. But that is not the only reason for its selection. It is also the Gospel most appealing to the Gentile world.

Matthew is written for Jews, and it is full of Old Testament quotes, and references to Jewish customs, all of which are of little concern to the Gentiles to whom Mark writes. He writes for the Romans, and they did not care about genealogies and a persons pedigree. They only cared about his deeds, not his decent. The result is, Mark is a Gospel of deeds. Jesus is a man of action-a man on the move. It is a go go go Gospel, and Jesus is involved in one event and miracle after another, with hardly a breath in between. If Jesus ever relaxed, it is not noted by Mark.

Mark does not tell us about birth stories and childhood. He leaves that to Dr. Luke. He is more anxious to get on with the story of the adult action of the Lord. But this does not mean Mark is not interested in details. He gives us graphic details the other Gospels do not share. If you want to know exact names, times, locations, or the numbers and colors, you go to Mark for these details. He is the detail man. His portrait is of Messiah on the run, but he is no blur, but rather, a very concrete personality involved in very specific settings and lives. Mark tells us more about the looks and gestures of Jesus than anyone.

Mark is the only one who tells us that our Savior was a carpenter. Mark tells us more about our Lord's emotions than the other Gospels. He brings Jesus closer to us as a man of like feelings. The other Gospels just tell us of Jesus calling little children to Him, but Mark tells us twice that when they came He took them up into His arms. Mark alone brings out a tenderness in Jesus that nobody else records.

We could go on giving examples, but the point we want to make is, each Gospel writer sees Jesus from a perspective that the others do not see. You cannot know all there is to know about Jesus by reading just one Gospel. There are four of them for a reason, and each is vital to the total picture. Mark is the Gospel that is the first Gospel recommended for reading around the world, and this morning we are going to start a study of Mark in our goal to know our Lord and Savior better.

Mark begins his Gospel with the word, beginning. The Greek has no article, and so it is not in the original, the beginning, but just beginning. Beginning of the Gospel about Jesus. Mark does not waste any time in getting the show on the road. This is the greatest show on earth, and the greatest story ever told, and he does not give us page after page of background and introduction. He lifts the curtain on this drama for act one just as the gun is fired for the race to begin.

Matthew is more like the educational channel with a long introduction of genealogies, exciting to those in the know, but boring to the majority of people who just want to see some action. Mark is the Gospel for them, for he is like one of those action-packed films that starts off with a chase scene, or a few explosions, before they even list the characters. Mark does not even say, "On your marks, get set": He just says, "Go!"

Now we could argue with Mark, and say the Gospel began long before John the Baptist came announcing the coming of Christ. It actually began in the mind and heart of God before the world began. This is, of course, the perspective of John's Gospel. He starts, "In the beginning was the word." He goes back to the eternal pre-incarnate state of the Son with the Father.

Or we could argue that the Gospel began with the birth of Jesus, and this would be Dr. Luke's perspective. You could argue that it started with the promise to Abraham, or go back to the promise to Adam and Eve. This is Matthew's perspective. There are a lot of places you can begin the Gospel, but Mark says, here is where the rubber meets the road: When Jesus actually began His public ministry, and began to demonstrate His deity in power and compassion for people. That is where the good news really became a reality. Before it was potential, but here it becomes actual. All that went before was promise, but here begins the fulfillment. Nobody else has to be wrong for Mark to be right. Where the Gospel begins all depends on your perspective.

Mark's perspective is that it is the action of Jesus that really counts, and, therefore, here is where we begin: Where Jesus steps out of the shadow of His obscure and commonplace life, and begins to play the public role he came into the world to play as the Messiah of Israel, and the Savior of the world.

Every time you give an account of some event in your life, you have to choose where to begin. You can start with what you had for breakfast, or where you went shopping, if these are relevant to the event. Or you can start with the event itself. Where you begin depends on your purpose, and on which details of the day are relevant to your purpose. There was a time when Jesus was not a public figure doing miracles and drawing crowds by His teaching. But then He began His public ministry as a man of action, and Mark shows this as the beginning of the Gospel. This is where the light began to shine and produce new hope and dreams.

I have labored this issue because I believe it is a very important issue that Christians need to get into their thinking. God has given us four perspectives on the life of His Son, and thus teaches us the validity of, and the value of different perspectives. You can argue all you want about the importance of the birth stories of Matthew and Luke, or about the pre-existent Christ of John, but you cannot escape the fact that God inspired a Gospel to begin with the adult life of Jesus and John the Baptist his forerunner. All of them are valid and of great value.

God is aware of the need to adapt the message to the needs of the hearers. Thus, He had Matthew

write with a Jewish perspective; Mark with a Roman perspective, and Luke with a Greek perspective. What this means for us is that we need to be aware that we need to present Christ to those who do not know Him in a way that fits their point of view. If you are dealing with an intellectual you will stress that Jesus is the Truth, and that in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. If you are dwelling with a person with all sorts of physical needs, you will present Christ as the Great Physician. There are no limits to the ways you can present the Lord, for He has hundreds of names, and plays hundreds of roles depending upon the need.

One of the most important things we need to learn about our Lord is that He is adaptable. Do not limit and stifle your growth in Jesus by locking Him into your culture, and into the framework of your own background and awareness. Be open to the Jesus and multiple perspectives. But this is not to be interpreted to mean that all perspectives about Jesus are correct. There are all kinds of wrong perspectives on Jesus too. History is full of them. The New Testament has plenty of them. People saw Jesus as a winebibber and a glutton. People saw Jesus as a lawbreaker and a blasphemer. Some even saw Him as one of the prophets returned. This was a positive perspective, but it was still false.

From the earliest centuries there have been fictional accounts of Jesus designed to make Him conform to the current values of the culture. He was portrayed in many apocryphal Gospel as a sensationalist doing the very thing Satan tempted Him to do. He used His divine power to make play birds fly away, and to make boards shorter without cutting them, and other crowd-pleasing miracles. False perspectives on Jesus have been common. The only way to discover what is false is to put it up against the four basic views of Jesus God has revealed in the four Gospels. If any Christ is presented that is not consistent with these four portraits, then you know you are dealing with a false Christ. There is no higher goal for the Christian to aim for than that of knowing Christ as He is revealed in the Gospels.

We are beginning our journey to this end with Mark who begins with the word beginning, and then the word Gospel. Mark is the only one of the four who calls his life of Christ a Gospel. But it caught on, and now we call all four of the lives of Christ, Gospels. It is because of Mark's use of the word here that we do.

Mark's use of this word to cover the beginning of the life of Jesus, is itself an important truth. The good news, or glad tidings about Jesus means more than his death and resurrection. Without these the rest would not matter of course, and so they are the heart of the Gospel. But a heart needs a body, and Mark is telling us the whole body of the life of Jesus is good news. All that Jesus did and said is part of a total package of good news that we call the Gospel. If the cross and resurrection was all that was necessary, there would not be much point in God inspiring four men to record the life of Christ. His life, as well as His death, is a part of the Gospel.

Knowing about Jesus is a vital part of the Christians education, for the Gospels were given to us for this purpose. We can only fully grasp the Gospel by knowing what Jesus did, and what He said. You cannot know that the Jesus you know is the Jesus of the Bible, unless you know this revelation about Him. Here is the good news that gives us objective basis by which we judge the validity of all subjective experience.

The word Gospel was not invented by Mark. It was a word used by the Greeks to convey the joy

of victory. If Alexander the Great defeated the Persians, a runner would race from town to town announcing the gospel-that is the good news. "Hey everyone, listen up! We beat the Persians. Alexander has won again!" And then he would be off to spread the good news to the next town.

Mark is saying right off, "Listen up people! Jesus the Son the God has won the victory, and here is how it all began!" Mark is not writing a biography of Jesus. This is a Gospel about Jesus. That is, it is not an orderly account of the full life of Jesus, it is a proclamation of why His life is good news. It is a Gospel. Mark uses the word Gospel eight times. That is twice the total of the other three Gospel writers. Matthew uses it four times, and Luke and John not at all. Mark is the unique Gospel writer. In contrast to so much of the news that we hear, Mark is a communicator of good news.

Mark's good news is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus was His personal name. Christ is His official name. It is the title of the Messiah. The Christ is the anointed One of God. Just as the official title of the Emperor was Caesar, so the official title of the Messiah was Christ. It is the Gospel of the Son of God. This is no mere man he writes about, though he stresses the humanity of Christ strongly. The deity of Christ is established from the start.

In verse two Mark writes it is written. Mark links the Gospel of Jesus to the Old Testament immediately. Dozens of times the New Testament refers to the Old Testament by saying, it is written. Jesus refuted the Devil in his temptation by saying each time, "it is written, man shall not live by bread alone;" "it is written thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," "it is written thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." Mark does the least quoting of the Old Testament of anyone, but he starts with this quote to establish right from the beginning that the Gospel about Jesus does not appear out of thin air, but is the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises. There would be no New Testament without an Old Testament foundation.

This phrase, it is written, is used so often in the New Testament that it establishes beyond a shadow of a doubt that true spirituality has to conform to objective revelation or be rejected. It would be a monumental task just to study all that the New Testament has to say about the importance of the written word. You have Greek words like grapho, graphomai, epigrapho, graptos, eggrapho, prographo, and gramma. All these words refer to writings, and make it clear that God is a God of objective truth.

No matter how anyone feels about Jesus, if their feelings cannot be supported by the objective written revelation of God, they have no authority. The bottom line for all Christian convictions is, "it is written." This may sound like legalism, but it is the only protection we have against the subtlety of Satan, and all of the cults who bombard the minds of men with clever deception. Satan even used the power of the written word to tempt Jesus. He said in Matthew 4:6, "It is written: He will command His angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus responded "It is also written, do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Even the Devil and his angels quote the Bible, so just being written in the Bible is not enough. We need to know how to apply the objective word to life. This is where the guidance of the Holy Spirit comes in. Here is the subjective side of the Christian experience. The objective written word can be so misused, and it can lead to legalism, and many others abuses. So the Christian needs the

constant guidance of the Holy Spirit to know how to apply the written word in life's situations. To claim a promise, for example, that is not meant for you, or not meant for the situation you are in, is to court disaster, and to be presumptuous. Jesus was wise enough to see this, but not all Christians are, and they are led by Scripture even to make foolish choices, because Satan seduces them to take it out of context. It is not enough it is written. It must be the right application of what is written, or Satan can even lead you astray with the Bible, as he tried with Jesus.

In spite of the danger of abuse the written word is still the supreme authority for all our faith and practice, and this is where Mark begins his Gospel, "It is written." Mark quotes the Old Testament promise that the Messiah would be preceded by a messenger who would prepare the way for Him. Only the greatest of dignitaries are so honored.

When the King was to take a journey to a town where the roads were not in the best condition, he would be preceded by one who would go and make sure the path was straight, and the ruts filled in, assuring a pleasant journey. Such preparation was an honor to royalty. We see it in our world yet today. When the King of Sweden came to Minnesota, not only were the roads prepared, but some whole towns were painted and spruced up to look like new for the sake of the King, that he might have a pleasant atmosphere. Many famous people have what they call advance men who go ahead to prepare the way for them. The Pope has them, the President has them, and Billy Graham has them. They make all kinds of arrangements so people are ready to receive the dignitary. This is what John the Baptist was for Jesus. He was the advance man who set the stage for Jesus to appear, and have people ready to receive His message.

John the Baptist is the only person in the New Testament who is the subject of Old Testament prophecy. John was as vital to the fulfillment of the Old Testament hope as Jesus, for Jesus could not come, and His public ministry could not begin until His advance man had prepared the way. Thus, the Gospel about Jesus begins with John the Baptist. It has been 400 years since a prophet has spoken. With John there is a new beginning, for God is about to speak His best Word in Jesus. God does not just leap into history, He prepares the way. God is a God of preparation. He is never in such a hurry that He acts without a plan. God has thought everything out ahead of time. He is not impulsive. He has a long range plan, and so the public ministry of His Son begins with the Preparer. In old English the man who paved the road was called the pavior. John was the one who paved the way for Jesus, and so was the pavior of the Savior.

Jesus was, and is the way. John was the preparer of the way. They had much in common, and yet they were in radical contrast. John was like a surgeon, and with his knife cut out the cancer of corruption. Then Jesus came as the compassionate nurse to cure and heal the wound. They were partners, but each had a different role to play in God's plan. They were both preachers. They both drew large crowds. They both died young by violent means of execution. They were born close together and they died close together. They were cousins. But they were two totally different personalities. John was an ascetic who lived in the wilderness, and was basically anti-social. Jesus on the other hand was frequently at weddings and banquets eating with publicans and sinners. Their life-styles were as far apart and as contrasted as a funeral and a wedding.

God is not locked into any one kind of personality that He uses for His purposes. Every kind can be useful, for God loves variety. Do not fret that you are not somebody else, for who you are can be just what God needs to prepare someone to receive Christ. Like John, we cannot bring in the

kingdom, but we can prepare the way. We may be different from our Lord in a great many ways, but we can be instruments in preparing others to be open to Christ.

Mark's Gospel begins with the preparation of the way, and the Gospel in most lives begins here, for someone is used of God to sow the seed and set the stage for Christ to come into their lives. Very few people receive Jesus as their Savior without first of all being prepared by the influence of someone else who already has.

We are all in the people preparation business, and we need to be aware of this. We cannot save, and we cannot solve all of people's problems, but we can help prepare the way for them to turn to Christ, who can. The poet wrote,

In youth, because I could not be a singer,  
I did not even try to write a song;  
I set no little trees along the roadside,  
Because I knew their growth would take so long.

But now from wisdom that the years have brought me,  
I know that it may be a blessed thing  
To plant a tree for someone else to water,  
Or make a song for someone else to sing.

Author unknown

Jesus does not expect us to be the way. He is the only way. But we can be preparers of the way, and that is where the Gospel about Jesus most often begins. Let us pray that God will use us in such a way that someday someone will say, as they point to our lives and influence, "there is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

## 2. OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE

## MARK 1:1-8

How wrong can the experts be? Let's look at history and see. Daryl F. Zanuck, who was head of 20th Century Fox, back in 1946 said, "TV won't be able to hold on to any market after the first 6 months-people will soon tire at staring at a plywood box every night." Marshall Foch of France said in 1911, "Airplanes are interesting toys but of no military value." James Hoffa, president of the teamsters said in 1975, "I don't need bodyguards." Hitler at the peak of his power said the third Reich will last one thousand years. He was only off by 988 years. General George Custer said there are only about 300 Indians down there by the Little Big Horn. He was off by two thousand eight hundred. Captain Edward Smith of the Titanic said, "This ship will never sink." He was close, for he only missed it by one, for it only sank once.

We get a kick out of just how wrong experts can be in their judgments, for it makes us feel superior. If we knew just how often they are wrong we would probably rid the world of the feelings of inferiority. The poet writes,

The world is full of experts, but with every breaking story

The experts seem a whole lot like Professor Irwin Corey.  
Because they are authorities, they stand out from the throng,  
The only problem being that they are so often wrong.

It is almost impossible not to be wrong, for not only can nobody know that needs to be known, but it is possible to be wrong even when you are right. It is possible to be subjectively right, and yet objectively wrong.

This is the paradox we find in the words and spirit of John the Baptist. He is famous for his sentence about his relationship to the Messiah where he expresses profound humility. He says in Mark 1:7, "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." John is saying, I am not worthy to be this mans slave, and do for him the task of the lowliest servant.

Since John was the forerunner of the Messiah, he was the only man alive on earth who knew the Messiah was about to make His move. He was the worlds authority on the Messiah. Yet he made this statement which was truly how he felt, and thus, a right statement, but one which was nevertheless wrong according to the objective facts of the Biblical records. Jesus came to John and said not only are you worthy to untie my sandals, I want you to be the one who baptizes me. John did not want to do it, for he sincerely felt unworthy, but Jesus insisted, for Jesus considered him the most worthy man, not just of his day, but of all of history. Jesus said John was the greatest man ever born of woman.

So what we have here is the greatest man ever born, and the leading authority of his day on the Messiah, saying something that he sincerely felt, and thus, it was a virtue, but it was objectively false. He was worthy to untie his Masters sandals, and a whole lot more than that. He was the man Jesus chose to baptize Him. Now this distinction between the subjective and the objective is no minor matter. It is important for our understanding of what otherwise would be a direct and plain contradiction in the New Testament. Last week we saw how the last two verses of the Old Testament prophesied that Elijah would come, and that was the hope of Israel. We also saw how John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy, and thus, the New Testament begins where the Old Testament left off.

But we now need to see that John the Baptist did not know that he was Elijah. In John 1:21 we read o how the priests came to John and asked him who he was. The verse reads, "They asked him, then who are you? Are you Elijah? He said I am not." If you take John's word as your final authority you would conclude that he was not Elijah. But if you take the words of Jesus as your final authority you would conclude that he was. Listen to the discussion about this issue in Matt. 17:10-13. "The disciples asked Him, 'Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?' Jesus replied, to be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist."

Jesus said it even more clearly in Matt. 11:13-14. "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come." Here you have Jesus saying John was Elijah and John himself saying he was not. Is that not a clear contradiction?



Of course, it is, but no more so than John saying I am not worthy to untie His sandals, and Jesus saying you are worthy even enough to baptize me. Subjectively John felt worthless compared to Jesus, but objectively he was wrong. Subjectively he did not feel he was the great prophet Elijah but objectively he was wrong for Jesus said he was the fulfillment of that great hope.

We learn a valuable lesson from this reality of the conflict between subjective and objective truth. The lesson is this: The objective truth always has priority over the subjective. John really felt unworthy, and he really felt he was not Elijah, but he was wrong. We can all feel all sorts of things deeply and sincerely, but this does not mean we can't be wrong. If the greatest man born of woman can be wrong, no one can boast that their subjective feelings and opinions must always be right.

It is not that there is no truth to a false subjective feeling. There always has to be some truth to it, for it represents a real feeling even if it does not conform to objective facts. The well known poem reveals my point. It is called The Blind Men And The Elephant.

It was six men of Indostan  
To learning much inclined,  
Who went to see the Elephant,  
Though all of them were blind  
That each by observation  
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant,  
And happening to fall  
Against his broad and sturdy side,  
At once began to bawl:  
"God bless me! but the Elephant  
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk,  
Cried, "Ho! what have we hear  
So very round and smooth and sharp?  
To me 'tis mighty clear  
This wonder of an Elephant  
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal,  
And happening to take  
The squirming trunk within his hands,  
Thus boldly up and spake:  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out an eager hand,  
And felt about the knee.  
"What most this wondrous beast is like  
Is mighty plain," quoth he;

"Tis clear enough the Elephant  
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth who chanced to touch the ear,  
Said: "E'en the blindest man  
Can tell what this resembles most;  
Deny the fact who can,  
This marvel of an Elephant  
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun  
About the beast to grope,  
Then, seizing on the swinging tail  
That fell within his scope,  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan  
Disputed loud and long,  
Each in his own opinion  
Exceeding stiff and strong  
Though each was partly in the right,  
And all were in the wrong!

They all had a subjective experience that was real, and thus, authentic to some degree, but none of them had an adequate grasp of all the facts to come to a conclusion we could call the truth. That is why subjectivity is an inadequate foundation on which to build. Truth to be solid has to be based on objective authority. Thus, we take the clear teaching of Christ over the subjective feelings of John. He was far greater than he ever dreamed he was. The facts were greater than his feelings. Subjective feelings are personal and internal, but objective facts are external, and can be varied by others.

The good news is that the facts are often better than our feelings. We can feel so unloved when in fact we are greatly loved. We can feel so forsaken when in reality we are in the very hands of God. Our feelings can be so negative about a lot of things in life when the facts are very positive. The bottom line then, because of this reality, is that we cannot go by our feelings. They can lead us into temptation and depression, and all sorts of negatives. We need to get the facts and build on them for a solid foundation.

Most all of the depressed saints of the Bible and history are depressed because they are living on their subjective feelings. They are saying I am not worthy, I am not loved, I am not of value, when in reality none of this is true. They need to get out of the sand of the subjective and over to the rock of objective. There is a vast amount of objective truth God has given us, and this is the rock on which we are to build.

But before we leave this subject we need to point out that subjectivity is not necessarily in conflict with objectivity. John the Baptist was also thought to be the Messiah, and he said in John

1:20, "I am not the Christ." That is how he felt, and his feelings were right with reality. So we do not want to give the impression that the subjective cannot be true objectively. The problem is, the only way you can know if that is the case is by some objective truth by which to test it. That is why all feelings need to be tested by facts. If you go by John's subjective feelings, he was no big deal. If you go by the objective revelation of New Testament facts, he was the greatest man to ever live next to the Son of God Himself.

All of this introduces us to a much more serious theological issue than the status of John. In verses 7 and 8 we have the message John preached described very briefly. He preached that one more powerful than he was coming, and he was coming with a different baptism. John says in verse 8, "I baptize with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." We see then that though the water baptism of John and that of Jesus were the same, there is another kind of baptism that Jesus was to perform that was all together different, and nobody could perform it but Jesus. Anybody can baptize with water, but only one can baptize with the Holy Spirit, and that is the Messiah. This text has led to all kinds of subjective interpretations that have influenced the lives of millions of people.

The Quakers, for example, use this text as the basis for eliminating water baptism altogether. They say the physical baptism in water was made obsolete by Jesus, and all that matters is being baptized in the Spirit. They have a strong emphasis on the inner life of the spirit rather than a focus on external rights performed on the body. They are godly people who have had a marvelous impact on the history of America. Nobody can fault them for their spirituality. We are not trying to put them down, but simply pointing out that according to the objective revelation they are wrong on this point. They are in good company, for from John on good and godly people have gone by their subjective conviction.

But we have an obligation to go by the objective revelation when we see it. Jesus in His great commission said to go into all the world and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is clear objective revelation that Jesus did not intend for the baptism of the Holy Spirit to replace and eliminate the practice of water baptism. The Quakers chose to make the baptism of the Holy Spirit a personal subjective experience, and the result is, they departed from God's objective revelation.

The Pentecostals and charismatics do the same thing. They are equally good and Godly people, and are part of the family of God. But they have chosen the subjective over the objective. John was no less the greatest in spite of his subjective mistakes, and we do not want to imply that Pentecostals and charismatics are less Christian because of theirs. They may very well, in many cases, be far superior to other Christians. That is not the issue. The issue is, is the baptism of the Holy Spirit a subjective experience, or is it an objective experience that was clearly fulfilled at a specific time?

Let's look at the facts. The first thing we need to see is that John had been given an objective way by which to identify the Messiah who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He tells us about this in John 1:32-33 where we read, "Then John gave this testimony: I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him.

I would not have known Him except the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, the man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."

John knew then at the baptism of Jesus that He was the one who would baptize with the Holy

Spirit. It is only Jesus who can do this. He never baptize anyone in water himself, for His unique ministry was to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Now the strange thing is Jesus did not go out and baptize with the Holy Spirit. He was the one, but He didn't do it, and we have no record that in all His ministry he ever baptized anyone with the Holy Spirit. So what is the problem? Jesus made it clear that the Holy Spirit could not come until He was taken out of the world, and so Jesus did not baptize with the Holy Spirit until He ascended to the Father. This baptism then was a work of Jesus as the ascended Christ. Just exactly when was it that He began this ministry that John said He was coming to perform? We don't have to guess, for Jesus tells us clearly in Acts 1:4-5. Jesus says to His disciples, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Jesus then ascended and on the day of Pentecost the promise was fulfilled, and the church was baptized with the Holy Spirit. This was no personal subjective experience. It was an objective historical event for the body of Christ. This was extended to cover the Gentiles later on. When Peter confronted Cornelius the Gentile, the Holy Spirit came upon him and his followers. Peter describes how it was a second Pentecost to convince him and other Jewish Christians that God had made the Gentiles equal to Jews in Christ. In Acts 11:15-17 Peter says, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came upon them as He had come upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So if God gave them the same gift as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

Peter was hung up on subjective feelings that Jews were superior to the Gentiles. All prejudice is subjective feeling and not objective fact. God had to give Peter objective facts that matched what they experienced at Pentecost to convince him the Gentiles were made equal to the Jews. The Apostle Paul sums up the significance of these objective facts in I Cor. 12:13, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." As soon as anyone receives Christ as their Savior, they are baptized into the body of Christ, and are one with the rest of God's children. How do we get into the family of God? By baptism of the Holy Spirit. We repent and believe and Jesus baptizes us with the Spirit into His body. This is objective fact, and not a subjective experience we are seek for after being saved. It is done for us by Christ. It is done for all Christians says Paul. It is not something some get and others do not, for all are baptized into the body.

There are all kinds of subjective experiences with the Holy Spirit after one is saved. John was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mothers womb, and the Spirit led in the life of Jesus, and Jesus gave the Spirit to His disciples to empower them. We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, and not to quench the Spirit, but cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. All of these experiences are personal and subjective. They involve our personal choices, and in any group of Christians some may be filled with the Holy Spirit and others not. We decide how much the Spirit will have control in our lives. It is subjective and individual. But the baptism of the Spirit is not a choice. This is the objective work of Christ the only baptizer with the Spirit.

No where are we commanded to be baptized with the Spirit. We are commanded, however, to be filled with the Spirit. So you might ask, what is the difference? Is it a matter of mere terminology.

No, it is a matter of objective verses subjective. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is the exclusive work of Christ. It is something He does as the ascended Lord by which He incorporates all who believe into His body. It is not a second work of grace, but the first. The filling of the Spirit is a subjective experience that is open to all believers to be repeated over and over. There is only one baptism, but there is no end to the number of fillings.

The point of all this is, we do not strive to have some subjective experience called the baptism of the Spirit. We are, if we believe in Christ as our Savior, already baptized into His body, and are, therefore, temples of the Holy Spirit. It is our responsibility to keep the temple clean and alive with the fruit of the Spirit. Another illustration of the contrast between objective and subjective is communion. We come to the table seeking forgiveness. That is a personal and subjective experience we are to seek. However, we do not seek an atonement for sin. That is the objective work that Jesus finished on the cross. He atoned for our sin once and for all. He died for the sins of the whole world. That is a once for all unrepeatable work of Christ. It is finished and is now the objective rock on which we build. But we have a lot to say about the application of His finished work in forgiveness. If we confess our sin He is faithful and just and will forgive. But if we do not confess we can claim no forgiveness. This is an subjective experience that depends on our personal response to the objective work of Christ. The goal of the Christian is to bring the subjective into harmony with the objective and make them one.

### **3. CONFLICT OF THE KINGS**

### **MARK 1:9-12**

Art Linkletter tells of how when he was 10 years old he was offered a job of tempting people to buy ice cream cones. The ice cream stand owner noticed the dramatic way in which he licked an ice cream cone, and so he offered him ten cents an afternoon if he would wonder through the nearby park licking cones. He writes, "I used such a seductive curling action with my tongue that passers-by couldn't resist and the stands business began to soar." He was demonstrating the power of temptation. That is what advertising is all about. It is a lure to motivate you to buy something by creating in you a hunger for it.

Satan specializes in creating hungers for that which is out of God's will, and he is good at it. He created in Adam and Eve a hunger for the forbidden fruit, and thereby, brought about the fall of man. And now ever since the fall he has succeeded in making every person hunger for the forbidden. All, that is, except one. The great exception is the Lord Jesus. He was the one exception who did not sin, but there are no exceptions to temptation. Every man, including Jesus has to face the universal experience of temptation.

If Satan could have succeeded in creating in him a hunger for the forbidden, he would have won his greatest victory, and would have defeated the plan of God for mans salvation. The temptation of Jesus was not only his testing, but the testing of Satan, for his whole destiny rides on whether or not he can succeed. Thus, again we see this seemingly minor incident in the life of our Lord as the hinge on which the door of destiny swings for Jesus, for Satan, and for all mankind. What is going to transpire on this desolate mountain called Quarantania just West of ancient Jericho is going to alter

all of history. Either Jesus or Satan will experience what nearby Jericho experienced when the walls of the city came tumbling down. The walls of one of their kingdoms will fall, and lead to their ultimate defeat. Thus, we have heard the conflict of the kings of the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light.

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down. Now we see Jesus the new Joshua facing the formidable wall of the kingdom of darkness. The only way he can invade that kingdom and set the captives free is by defeating its king. In the temptation of Jesus, who has just been by His baptism anointed the Messiah and King, we see the conflict of the two greatest kings in history. It is a duel that will determine which kingdom will ultimately rule this earth. Jesus said in Mark 3:27, "In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house." Jesus could not begin His public ministry of healing and casting out demons and setting people free from Satan's bondage until He first defeated Satan. That is why His temptation comes before His ministry.

Much ado is made about the heavy weight championship of the world boxing match. Millions go into it, but the outcome makes no difference as far as the destiny of the world, but here in the wilderness is an isolated encounter that nobody on earth is even aware of, and yet on its outcome hangs the eternal destiny of all mankind. This morning we want to take a ring-side seat, and examine in detail this conflict of the kings. The first thing we see is-

## I. THE TIMING OF THE TEMPTATION.

Notice verse 12 begins with the words at once. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in His baptism, and immediately without delay the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert to be tempted. This timing confirms all that we said about the importance of the baptism of Jesus. It was this event that made Jesus the Messiah and the second Adam. He was the representative man who would have to reverse the defeat of the first Adam for man to have a chance. Satan has been champion for centuries, but now another challenger has come to try and take that title away.

No doubt, Jesus faced temptation before this. This is hard to imagine living 30 years without some battles with Satan, but until His baptism and anointing with the Holy Spirit, Jesus was not the official representative of the kingdom of light. As soon as He received these credentials He was ready for the official encounter. The Holy Spirit was now His manager, and the first thing He did after the baptism was to drive Jesus to the scene of battle, where the duel of the ages could take place.

The Holy Spirit was saying that not since Adam I have we had a contender to face Satan with any hope of victory. Now Adam II was ready, and the Holy Spirit after all these centuries of waiting, wasted no more time before He deployed this new weapon of spiritual warfare. Like our atomic weapons, this Adamic weapon was tested in the desolate desert. The second thing we see is-

## II. THE TARGET OF TEMPTATION.

Satan was being lured in his defeat in this temptation, but Jesus was the target. He was deliberately set up to be a tempting target for satanic attack. He was driven into the God-forsaken wasteland giving Satan the home court advantage. The conflict would take place on his own turf.

On top of this, the Messiah would fast for 40 days and thereby weaken His resistance. He was made more vulnerable to physical, mental, and spiritual hunger. Jesus was made such a tempting target for Satan, he could not resist the challenge even though he knew this was the Son of God. If he lost, it would be his first failure in history, and would spell the beginning of his doom. But, on the other hand, if he could succeed it would mean he would do what he had always longed to do: Defeat God, and become superior to God. He could win in this conflict the prize he lusted for: undisputed authority over the earth and mankind. It was Satan's dream, and here was the target right in front of him luring him into battle.

How could he lose with a man as filled with hunger as Jesus was? He looked like a sitting duck to Satan, and so he went for the bait. Jesus was the target of temptation, but He was also the bait that lured Satan into a conflict where he would meet his Waterloo, and begin to lose his grip on humanity. Adam 1 was a snap to bring down, and he had paradise and all any man could ask for. How can I fail with Adam 2, who is starving in a God-forsaken desert? Such must have been the thinking of Satan as he accepts the challenge for the heavy weight championship of the world to determine who will have the right to decide the destiny of all mankind.

As the target, Jesus had to play the hero's role, and let the bad guy shoot first. I always admired Sheriff Dillon in Gunsmoke, but it always bothered me when he would let the bad guy get off the first shot. The idea is, the good guy never starts the battle. He is not the aggressor, but rather, the defender, and so acts in self-defense. This is the Christian view of warfare. The Christian ought never to start a war, but if he is attacked he has the right of self-defense, and should end the war as soon as possible by victory over the offender. So Jesus plays the role of the hero, and does not attack but repels the arrows of the tempter and defends his stand of loyalty to the plan of God.

As the target, he felt the power of Satan's darts. In His humanity it would be appealing to satisfy His hunger for food, for fame, and for power, by listening to the tempter. If Jesus did not feel any lure to Satan's offers, then there would be little to be impressed about in His victory. If someone comes to me and says leap up to the moon and grabs some green cheese and I'll give you fifty bucks a pound for all you can get, you are not going to be impressed when I tell you I took my stand against stealing and refused the offer. You know that offer could not move me in any way because it asked of me what I could not give. I am not tempted to do the impossible, but only the possible. Temptation is an appeal to do what you could do if you just chose to do it and not worry about whether it is right or wrong.

It is the reality of what Jesus endured that makes Him such a sympathetic intercessor for us. Heb. 2:18 says, "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted." Remember, when you are tempted, the biggest target Satan ever had was our Lord, but he could not bring Him down. He stood for God, but also for us. Had He yielded we would be sunk. But because He stood, we can also win the battle. As the target, Jesus took the shots, but it was the hunter that was most severely wounded. Jesus had a wounded heel, but He crushed the head of the serpent. The target triumphed over the tempter. The trickster was out-tricked. The third thing we see is

### III. THE TEMPERING OF THE TEMPTATION.

Matt. joins Mark in telling us about the comfort of the angels after His temptation. But Mark

only tells us about the detail that throughout it all Jesus had the companionship of wild animals. What a delightful detail. After all, the first Adam had the companionship of the animal kingdom. Why should not the second Adam who was also their creator? The Messiah was to be characterized by two things: (1.) The ministry of angels. (2) The mastery of animals. In the very text which Satan quoted to tempt Jesus we see these two things.

Ps. 91:11-13 says, "For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways: They will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent." The great lion and serpent that Jesus is trampling here is Satan himself, but the text also refers to the Messiah's mastery over the animal kingdom. We get a picture here of a Tarzan-like hero who has the friendship of the animal kingdom even when the forces of evil threaten to overwhelm him. Jesus has no human companionship, but faces Satan alone. Yet he is not alone, for the wild beasts are there.

Why are they there? First of all, it is their natural habitat. They live in the wilderness all the time. Some say that is all these words mean. They merely describe the wilderness of the setting. They dismiss this reference of Mark to animals as of no significance. But others say, it had meaning to Mark or he would not have added it. They see it as a tempering of the temptation. To temper means to moderate and regulate. You temper by adding something to the mixture to modify it. If something is too sour you add sugar to temper it and bring it back to a balance taste acceptable to the palate. The wild animals became a tempering factor in the temptation.

What is of interest is that God would use the animal kingdom to help His Son bear the burden of temptation. But this has always been an ideal. The truly blessed man has always been one who has been loved by the animal kingdom. Back in Job 5:23 Eliphaz describes the ideal man and says, "The wild animals will be at peace with you." The early Christians picked up on this image of Jesus, and in the Catacombs of Rome they represented Jesus as the Greek Orpheus, who attracted wild animals with the sound of his lyre.

What we see is that the first Adam fell, and this led to a deterioration of the relationship of man and animals. Now the second Adam comes to defeat man's greatest foe and reverse the effects of the fall, and in so doing restore this lost relationship of man and animals. One of the first signs that Jesus was the victorious Messiah was the friendly relationship he had with the wild animals. When His victory is complete, all the redeemed will live in fellowship with this kingdom which is now often fearful. We read in Isa. 11:6, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together and a little child will lead them." Jesus would feel an enormous encouragement by the presence of these animals, and they would help Him keep His eye on the final goal, and not be side tracked by the alluring shortcuts offered by Satan.

The first Adam let the animal kingdom down, and they lost paradise too because of his fall. But the second Adam opened the door for the animal kingdom to again have a permanent paradise, and perpetual peace with mankind. Little details that often seem insignificant can mean a lot, that is the case with this detail of Mark.

Every major redemptive event in God's plan for man includes the animal kingdom. The story of Noah's ark is the classic. But there is also the exodus out of Egypt where animals were also delivered. The saving of the people of Nineveh was also the saving of their animals, and Jonah ends



with God expressing His compassion on their cattle. God is the greatest animal lover in the universe, and animals will be a part of the new heaven and the new earth. Their destiny was also at stake in this conflict of the kings.

Because Jesus won this conflict, part of Christian history has been great saints with the spirit of Christ, who lived at peace with the wild animals. St. Francis of Assisi, in the middle ages, and in more modern times, Sadu Sundar Singh of India. He would often have his devotions in the middle of the night by the edge of the jungle. Witnesses have been paralyzed with fear as a leopard or other wild beasts would appear to be ready to leap upon him. But they would come near to him and he would caress their head and walked calmly back to the house. This is not a recommended practice for Christians until the total victory of Christ, but some have this gift as Jesus did of living at peace with the wild animals. All men will have this gift in the eternal kingdom because Jesus won this battle of the kings. The fourth thing we want to see is-

#### IV. THE THEOLOGY OF THE TEMPTATION.

James 1:13 states it clearly, "God cannot be tempted by evil." This means that Jesus as the Son of God was not tempted, for His deity was not subject to temptation. He could only be tempted because He was also man. This means that as a man, like the first Adam, He was capable of temptation, and thus, capable of sin. As deity He was not. This was the only combination that could make the temptation both authentic and also victorious for Christ. He had what the first Adam did not have: A link with God so close that His humanity could not do what His deity would not approve.

We do not know to what degree Jesus was feeling the lure to use His power to achieve self glory. We do not know if He seriously gave it some thought to bow to Satan and rule the world that way. But for it to be a real temptation He had to at least consider its pleasures in contrast to the pain of the cross which He knew was in His future. Whatever the degree of the struggle, He came to a point of surrender to God's will in each temptation. The key to victory over all temptation is the surrender of the will to the will of God. "Not my will but thine be done." That is what Paul meant by dying to self. When you seek first the kingdom of God you defeat the devil.

The next thing we want to note here is that Satan never changes his strategy. He has never had to before because it has always been effective. He said to the hungry Messiah some such thoughts as these: You are hungry and God has not provided for that need. You have a right to meet that need any way you can. Satan's basic temptation is to think of loyalty to God as only legitimate when He meets our every need. If He does not come through, get your need met regardless of the means. He let you down, so forsake Him.

This was the constant temptation of Job, and the world is full of Christians who have suffered loss, rejection, and sorrows of all kinds, and they are now mad at God and living in rebellion because they fell for this line that loyalty is to last only as long as you are content that it is paying off. This is the kind of self-centeredness that is destroying marriages also. I will love you as long as I feel you are meeting my every need. Let me down and I'm done with you. People do it to God, to mates, and to all of their relationships. Loyalty is so watered down in our world that people do not stay committed to anyone or anything that does not meet their needs.

This is Satan's greatest weapon to cause men to fall or to keep them falling, but he finally met his match in a starving man whose prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," was not answered for over a month, but who yet could say to the option offered by Satan, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." In other words, "I will starve before I will forsake my commitment to God's word." That is loyalty par excellence, and by loyalty Jesus defeated Satan. Most, if not all sin is yielding to the temptation to be disloyal to some person or some principle.

The first Adam fell because he chose a self-centered goal rather than to be loyal to God. The second Adam did not fall because he gave up self-centered goals and remained loyal to God. The only good general is a loyal general. The only good soldier is a loyal soldier. The only good Messiah is a loyal Messiah. That is why Jesus had to face this testing of temptation. From God's point of view it was a test of loyalty. When the heat was on would Jesus go for the easy way out, or be loyal to the plan that meant the hard way of the cross? The first Adam took the easy road even though it plunged the human race into a state of fallenness. The second Adam faced the same choice and took the high but harder road. Because he did, he won this battle of the kings. The fifth thing we see is-

## V. THE TEACHING OF THE TEMPTATION.

The bottom line for us to carry away from this event which Jesus won for God, for Himself, and for us, is that temptation is not sinful. The tragedy is Satan often wins the victory in the lives of people by persuading them that their awful thoughts make them guilty already, and therefore, they are sunk and just as well choose the way of darkness.

Do not be ignorant of Satan's devices. You can be filled with thoughts of evil and not be guilty of sin. You are not guilty until you choose to own these thoughts and will that they will become acts. Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher, tells of his experience out walking one day: "All of the sudden it seemed as if the very flood gates of hell had been opened, my head became a perfect pandemonium, ten thousand evil spirits seemed to be holding carnival with my brain and I held my mouth lest I should give utterance to the words of blasphemy that they were pouring into my ears. That temptation passed away, but, ere many days it was renewed, and when I was in prayer, or when I was reading the Bible, those blasphemous thoughts would pour in upon me..."

Greatly troubled, young Spurgeon turned to his grandfather. He told him he felt he could not be a child of God because of his awful thoughts. "Nonsense, Charles," said the godly grandfather. "Those thoughts are not your thoughts. They are the devils brats. Don't own them as yours. Give them neither house room nor heart room!" Spurgeon was greatly comforted by this counsel. We all need to be aware of this. The most wicked and blasphemous thoughts are possible in the most godly minds. But they are only temptations and not sins until you choose to make them your own, which nobody needs to do.

If a Christian falls it is because they choose to fall. They are like the young man who was told by his father not to swim in the canal. When he came home he had wet hair and dad asked him where he had been. When he said that he went swimming the canal, dad said, "I thought I told you not to." The son said, "but I couldn't resist the temptation dad." "Why did you take your swimming suit with you?" The son responded, "So I'd be prepared in case I was tempted." He violated the key law to

victory over temptation by making provision to fall when it came. Paul says in Rom. 13:14, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." If you prepare to say yes, then yes will be your response for you have planned to fall. We need to be prepared instead to say no.

You are starting, my boy, on life's journey  
Along the grand highway of life.  
You will meet with a thousand temptations  
Each city with evil is rife.  
This world is a stage of excitement  
There's danger wherever you go,  
But if you are tempted in weakness  
Have courage, my boy, to say, "No."

Encourage alone lies your safety,  
When you the long journey begin.  
Your trust in a Heavenly Father  
Will keep you unspotted from sin.  
Temptations will go on increasing  
As streams from a rivulet flow,  
But if you'd be true to your manhood,  
Have courage, my boy, to say, "No."

A seven year old boy was sitting on a fence looking at his neighbors apple tree. The owner came out and called to him, "Johnny are you trying to steal one of my apples?" "No," he shouted back, "I'm trying not to." Just say no is easy to say, but it is never easy to do. Temptation is real and hard to fight, but Jesus made it possible for us to win, and say, "Get thee behind me Satan, for you are no longer my master and king. I love a greater king who has defeated you, and I'll choose what pleases Him, as He chose what pleased His father."

Many of you may remember the atomic submarine called The Thresher. It could battle its way through the ice of the North Pole. It was made of special steel, but it could not take the pressure of the depths of the sea. It sank and was crushed like a paper model. Yet all around it swam fish that had no thick armor. They were made of just normal skin, flesh, and bones. How could they survive those depths that crushed the solid steel of that huge submarine? They had an enter atmosphere that off set the external pressure.

The Christian needs to put on the whole armor of God to with stand the attacks of Satan. But even more important is the internal atmosphere which off sets the pressure of the world, the flesh, and the devil. These forces are ever trying to force us into their mold, and our only hope of escape from their crushing presence is to be, as Paul says, "Transformed by the renewing of our minds." We have to have the Word of God in our hearts, as Jesus did. We have to have right thinking about our loyalties and goals to off set the temptation to take Satan's route. We need the inner presence of the Spirit to keep out the pressure that can crush us. We need the same filling of the Spirit that our Lord needed to be victorious in this conflict of the kings.

## 4. DESCENT OF THE DOVE

## MARK 1:9-13

What a surprise it would be to see a fish climbing a tree. Yet such a sight is possible because of the climbing perch of India. These three to eight inch fish have movable spines on their gills, and by thrusting with their tails and front fins they can scoot up a slanting tree by the water and catch insects. Some have been seen as high as five feet up the trunk.

There are a lot of surprising things in this world of infinite variety, and one of the most surprising is the Son of God coming to John the Baptist to be baptized. To John this was like a fish out of water, or even worse, up a tree. It just did not fit, and Matthew tells us he resisted the request.

After all, his was a baptism of repentance where people were confessing their sins. For the Lamb of God that taken away the sin of the world to come for a sinners baptism was out of line, he felt, and many Christians through the ages have felt the same. It seems incompatible for the sinless Savior to be seeking this symbol of the sinners surrender to God. From the earliest Christian writings to the latest life of Christ the question every author has to deal with is why would Jesus be baptized?

In the early church this act of Jesus led to a debate over his sinlessness. Jerome, back in the 300's, tells of the Gospel used by the Nazarenes in which this conversation is recorded. "The mother of the Lord and his brethren said to Him, John the Baptist baptizes unto the remission of sins, let us go and be baptized by him. But he said to them, in what have I sinned, that I should go and be baptized by him? Unless, by chance, this very thing which I have said is the sin of ignorance." The hint here is that Jesus may have been guilty of the sin of ignorance, or of omission. The apocryphal book called The Preaching Of Paul, has Jesus making confession of His sin at His baptism.

Others suggest that Jesus was not yet aware of His sinlessness, and so was just doing what He felt was right for all Godly Jews to do. The point is Jesus created a problem for a lot of people by His coming to John for baptism. Our task this morning will be to eliminate the burden of this act and expound the blessings of it. We will begin by seeing the baptism of Jesus as-

### I. AN ACT OF IDENTIFICATION.

G. Campbell Morgan, The prince of expositors, says of this act of Jesus, "In that hour he repented. He confessed sin. But the repentance was not for Himself, the sin was not His own. In that hour He identified Himself with the multitude who had been thronging out to baptism." In other words, Jesus did not wait to take the place of the sinner on the cross, but He began His public ministry by taking the place of the sinner in baptism. He started as one with the masses of repentant sinners.

This identification with the least, the lowly, and the last, confirms the conviction of many, who like Howard Marshall says, "The evangelical wing of Christianity has a strong temptation to concentrate its attention on the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, and to ignore His earthly life." He says we tend to have a Christmas and Easter Christology. We go from the manger to the cross, and the rest is just filler. But this is a denial of God's revelation.

What Jesus does here at the very start of His ministry is recorded by Matthew Mark and Luke, and is a vital part of our understanding of our Lord. His baptism, of course, was not His first act of identification with man. His birth was first, and then He was dedicated in the temple, and He lived a life of identification with the common man. He labored as a carpenter; attended the synagogue every Sabbath; went to the temple to worship and sacrifice. He paid his tax, and just lived a life for 30 years that was not enough different than anyone else's life, so that neither His family nor His community noticed anything highly unusual about Him. He so identified with man that He was one with His time and culture.

Now, at His baptism, Jesus goes one step further in His identification. This is a first sign that Jesus was going to identify with man as a sinner. We know Jesus in His first 30 years did not run with a wild bunch and break laws or defile Himself with wine, women, and song. He did not do anything that would be considered a sin. He lived a life of righteousness, for only as a spotless lamb would He be an acceptable sacrifice for sinners. But here in His choice to be baptized with the baptism of repentance, Jesus is taking that first step that will make Him so one with sinners that He will become the supreme sinner as the only way by which He can become the supreme Savior.

Jesus was sinless, yet nobody ever had to pay the penalty for more sin than He did. He who knew no sin became sin for us. On Him was laid the iniquity of us all. He died for the sins of the whole world. He actually experienced the full penalty of sin which is separation from God. The paradox is that the sinless Savior experienced more of the penalty of sin than do millions of sinners whom He saves. You and I who trust Jesus as our Savior do not need to experience hell and separation from God. We are, therefore, incomplete sinners. We do not take the destiny of sinners all the way, but Jesus did. He went all the way to hell to save us, and thus, the sinless one was the complete sinner. He never once sinned or violated the will of God. He had to be a perfect and spotless lamb to atone for our sin. But the cost was to become sin, and take on Himself the wrath of God against all sin.

This complete identification with the sinner began with His baptism. He had a choice. He could have said, "I'll not get involved. I am sin free and do not need to be baptized. But God is calling His people to repent through John, and I can choose to identify with this movement of sinners back to God. I'll make that choice," said Jesus, "and I'll be one of them."

People watching Jesus being baptized would see Him as another sinner repenting and confessing His sins. But He was confessing our sin and repenting for our sin. It was a tremendous act of humility for Jesus to identify Himself with sinful men. And God the Father said He was well pleased with His Son's choice, for He knew Jesus would get the job done He had set out to accomplish. Wilbur Smith, one of the greatest Christian scholars of the 20th century said this is the most sound of all the theories as to why Jesus was baptized.

Jesus had two choices. He could stand with the self-righteous who said we do not need to repent, and thereby reject John's baptism, or He could stand with sinners who said we will repent and return to God. He chose the second, and however many problems this creates in the minds of those who do not understand his choice, it was pleasing to God the Father, and that is all that mattered to Jesus. God sent Him to identify with fallen man, and Jesus shows He came to obey by His baptism which was His first public act of identification with sinners. He never went back on His choice, but went all

the way to the cross. J.D. Jones wrote, "If we want to understand the full meaning of the baptism, we must see in it an anticipation of Calvary." It was the same boundless love that sent Him to the cross that was motivating Him into the waters of baptism. The second thing we want to see is His baptism was-

## II. AN ACT OF INAUGURATION.

I have always known this was the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, but I did not realize that it was His inauguration into the office of Messiah. Christ means the anointed one. When was He anointed to be the Christ-the Messiah of Israel? It was right here at His baptism. The Holy Spirit came upon Him as a Dove, and the Father gave His words of approval, and from this point on Jesus was no longer a carpenter, but was the King-the Anointed One. As John was baptizing His humanity in water, God was baptizing His deity in the Holy Spirit. This empowered Jesus to exercise His deity in history, which He never did before He was baptized.

The parallels with the Old Testament story Joshua are amazing. Jesus and Joshua are the same name. Jesus is the Greek word for the Hebrew name of Joshua. Is it just coincidence that Joshua began his leadership of Israel at the Jordan River? We read in Joshua 3:7, "And the Lord said to Joshua today I will begin to exult you in the eyes of all Israel." This was right in the context of their preparing to cross over Jordan. In 3:12 God said to him, "Now then chose twelve men from the tribes of Israel...." Is it mere coincidence that Joshua and Jesus were each to chose twelve men of Israel to be leaders?

Then God says as soon as they enter the Jordan, the water will be divided and the people will cross over on dry ground. But you say there is no parallel there, for the Jordan did not divide for Jesus. That is true, but I want you to look closely at what Jesus saw when He came up out of the water of baptism. Verse 10 says, "He saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him as a Dove." There was no need for the water to divide for Jesus was not leading His people over into a new earthly kingdom. What Jesus saw was heaven divide, for He was to lead His people over to a heavenly kingdom.

The Greek word here is schizo, from which we get schizophrenia, the split personality. Jesus saw the heavens split apart and rent asunder. That is the same word all the Gospel writers use to describe the veil in the temple when it was rent in two. Here, heaven is torn in two, and for the first time man is exposed to the presence of the trinity. What a paradoxical picture: The heavens are literally ripped apart like a cloth violently torn in half, and then the Holy Spirit comes down in the form of a gentle Dove. It is one of the most momentous moments in all of history. Heaven and earth are linked, and all three persons of the triune God are on the stage of history for the first time.

It always seemed a minor incident in the life of Jesus, but like everything in His life, the more you meditate on it and study it, the more significant it becomes. Now, it seems impossible to exaggerate the importance of this event. Though Luther did by saying Jesus was here a substitute for all men, and buried the sin of the world in Jordan. This goes too far and makes the cross unnecessary. Luther was just trying to give it a place of great importance. It was that. It was the inauguration of the King of Kings, the greatest leader the world has ever known. He would not merely lead God's people over Jordan into the promise land, but as the new Joshua he would lead God's people from earth to heaven where He will reign forever and ever.

From this moment on Jesus was the anointed one, and began to demonstrate His power over the kingdom of darkness.

In the ancient world some peoples would select their king by letting a bird loose before the aspiring candidates, and the one on whom the bird landed was considered the choice of the gods. We do not know that Jesus knew of this practice, but the decent of the Dove did mean that to Him. He was the chosen one, and God confirmed it by a verbal message as well as by the symbol of that Dove. The Dove of the Holy Spirit revealed just what kind of a king Jesus was to be. Almost every king in history has had to be violent to defeat his foes and maintain his kingdom. Jesus went right from His inauguration to face His fiercest foe, and even there he fought and won by the power of dove-like gentleness. He won by the sword of the word, and that would be the weapon by which He would conquer all the powers of darkness.

The Old Testament Joshua wiped out the enemies of righteousness by the sword of metal. This new Joshua never used the sword of metal, but only the sword of the spirit. He took his enemies captive, and made them part of his army. No other king in history has been able to conquer so much territory with the power of gentleness. The Dove descended on the Lamb of God, and this Dove-filled Lamb became the world greatest conqueror. He sent forth his army telling them to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, and the church only wins when they follow these instructions of the Lamb. The third thing we want to see is that His baptism was-

### III. AN ACT OF ILLUMINATION.

There is a lot of speculation about the silent years of Jesus from age 12 to 30. Many wonder if Jesus fully understood that He was the Messiah. We do not know for sure, but we do know that if there was any doubt, it was all eliminated at His baptism, for His eyes were opened and He saw and heard what no eyes have ever seen and no ears have ever heard. He was given the full light of heaven on His path, and however dark it might get God assured Him He was pleased with His Son.

This is the key to any man's success in life. He has to know that He is loved by those who matter most. Jesus had to take a lot of rejection and a lot of sorrow, but He could always look back at His baptism where He heard His heavenly Father's words of approval. Every father owes this to his children: This assurance that however rough life gets they have won who loves and cares for them. God gave His Son this kind of illumination at His baptism.

Alexander White commenting on the Father's words from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son," said this: "Think of it, my brethren. Never once since the fall of Adam and Eve had the Maker of men been able to say these words till he said them to Jesus Christ that day at the Jordan. Almighty God had often looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did good and sinned not. But when his eyelids tried the children of men, it was always with the same result. Not one. Not Noah, not Abraham, not Jacob, not Joseph, not Moses, not David; no, not one single patriarch, or prophet, or psalmist, or saint, in all the house of Israel. But here at last is a man after God's own heart. Here at last is the second Adam, with whom God is well pleased."

Jesus would also be illumined by the decent of the Dove as to the nature of His kingdom. We have already referred to this. But consider further that the first image of the Holy Spirit in the Bible is in Genesis 1:2, where He is hovering over the waters, and God said let there be light, and with this

illumination the Holy Spirit began creating of the universe. Milton wrote of the Holy Spirit, "...Thou from the first wast present, and with mighty wings outspread Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss."

At the baptism of Jesus we see the Holy Spirit again hovering over the waters, and again God gives this illumination, let there be light, and the Lord Jesus, the Light of the world is installed as Messiah. The Holy Spirit descends again to begin a new creation. Jesus received a clear message as to His mission at His baptism. He was to be a gentle ruler, and one whose goal was to be to make all things new. A new Genesis begins at His baptism-a new beginning for a new creation.

Jesus was illumined and enlightened by this event like none other. He had emptied Himself of equality with God, and we do not know all the limitations He endured in those silent years, but God knew He needed this experience. From this point on Jesus begins to do miracles. There is not a hint of a miracle before His baptism. This illumination was also His inspiration, and His motivation to portray by action who He really was.

John the Baptist in John 1 emphasizes that he saw the Holy Spirit come down and remain on Jesus, and that this was the sign God gave him that the one on whom this would happen was the Messiah. The Holy Spirit came upon many in the past, but on no one but Jesus did he abide. Godet remarks, "This luminous appearance, then, represents an inspiration which is neither partial as that of the faithful, nor intermittent as that of the prophets." In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came and went, but at the baptism of Jesus he came down to abide on earth in Jesus, and when Jesus ascended he sent the Holy Spirit to abide in His body the church. The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of a special relationship of the Holy Spirit and man.

At His birth God the Son came to dwell with man.

At His baptism God the Holy Spirit came to dwell with man.

At His betrothal God the Father came to dwell with man.

We read this in Rev. 21:2-3, "I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them." The goal of God is to dwell with men, and each person of the Godhead accomplished this goal at different times. The baptism of Jesus was when the Holy Spirit entered history to dwell here. He came first into Jesus and later into His body the church. The baptism of Jesus was his Pentecost, and like his body later, when He was filled with the Holy Spirit He began His public ministry in power.

The Holy Spirit made Jesus His temple, and then Jesus shared the abiding spirit with His whole body. One of His missions was to baptize with the Holy Spirit that all of His followers might also have the spirit abiding in them. That which makes all God's people one, in spite of all their many differences, is the abiding Holy Spirit. Every Christian is a temple of the Spirit, and it all began at the baptism of Jesus and the descent of the Dove. The fourth thing we see is the baptism of Jesus was-

#### IV. AN ACT OF ILLUSTRATION.



He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. It was fitting that He take this step of obedience and become an illustration of what all believers are to do. Obey God in all of His ordinances because it pleases God more than anything when we have a spirit of obedience.

Jesus left His church two ordinances-baptism and the Lord's Supper. Objectively they both point to the finished work of Christ in His death and resurrection. We could argue that both are really unnecessary because they add nothing to His finished work. But Jesus wants us to keep these two ordinances as acts of obedience.

## **5. CHANGING YOUR MIND**

## **MARK 1:14-20**

A mother calling to her son shouted, "Johnny, tell your sister to get in the house out of the rain." "I can't mom," came the reply. "And just why can't you?" demanded his mother. "Because we are playing Noah's Ark mom, and she's one of the sinners."

We like to make the distinction between the sinners on the outside of the ark and the saints on the inside, and it is a legitimate distinction. But in so doing, we tend to cover up the reality that the saints inside are still sinners. Sinners saved by grace, but nevertheless sinners. Noah didn't take much time before he demonstrated that after the Ark landed.

Failure to be aware of this reality led the Pharisees of Christ's day, and self-righteous saints all through history, to feel that the message of repentance does not apply to them. Repentance is only relevant to those sinners outside the ark. It is a message you can preach at the mission, but it has no place in the sanctuary of the saints. Billy Graham said, "I have been shocked to find that the theme proclaimed so emphatically by the prophets and apostles is scarcely mentioned by contemporary preachers." I must confess that it is not a topic I would be preaching on this morning if I was not going through the book of Mark systematically.

One of the major values of expounding scripture systematically is that it makes you look at subjects that you would otherwise ignore, and in so doing you make many new discoveries. I have always thought of repentance as a rather negative subject, and not one that Christians would have any reason to get excited about. That is due to the fact that I have never heard the subject truly expounded, and I suspect that is true for most of us.

We are all victims of our culture where the only time we ever hear the word repent is in a context of scolding lost sinners. We have such a limited and distorted view of the word and its meaning that we have lost its Biblical content, and in so doing have lost a basic element in the good news of the Gospel. My task will be to try to restore to this word its Biblical content so that we can appreciate it as a positive experience for sinners inside the ark. In other words, see that repentance is not just for the lost anymore.

The lost only have to repent once to end their lostness, but the saved have to repent innumerable times. Repentance rightly understood is more relevant for the Christian than for the non-Christian.

To achieve our goal of understanding we will look at three aspects of repentance: The message of repentance, the motive of repentance, and the meaning of repentance. Let's begin first with-

## I. THE MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE.

Mark tells us that the very first message that Jesus preached was that the kingdom of God was near and, therefore, people are to repent and believe the good news. This was the same message that John the Baptist had been preaching. But John was now in prison. His voice was silenced, and so Jesus steps into the gap and goes on preaching the same message of repentance. So we see that the New Testament begins with this primary message-repent.

As we move into the ministry of Jesus, we come to a point where He sends out His 12 chosen disciples to preach, and Mark 6:12 tells us that their message was to be that people should repent. Then we go to the very end of His ministry, and we listen to the last message Jesus gave His disciples before ascending to heaven. In Luke 24:46-47 we read, "He told them, this is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations...."

We see clearly that repentance is not merely an introductory message that Jesus used to get started. It was the message He had all through His ministry, and the message He gave to His church to take into all the world. Repentance is not a side road, but rather, it is the main highway, and the very essence of the Gospel.

When we get into the book of Acts we see that, sure enough, this was the message the Apostles took to both the Jews and the Gentiles. New Testament preaching was repentance preaching. Peter in his most successful sermon ever at Pentecost concluded in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven." Repentance and forgiveness of sins go hand in hand. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, but it is also the case that without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins. No one can be either saved or sanctified without repentance. There can never be any positive movement of the sinner in the right direction that does not start with repentance. The first step toward God that a sinner makes is the step of repentance.

Three other places in Acts reveal Peter preaching repentance, and when Paul takes over as the dominant preacher of the book of Acts, the message does not change. To the Greeks in Athens he said in Acts 17:30, "In the past God over looked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent." In Acts 20:21 Paul said, "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." There is more of Paul's preaching repentance as well, but to top it all off, the final proof that repentance is a key message of the New Testament is the preaching of the resurrected and ascended Christ. We have His message to the seven churches in Rev. 2 and 3, and would you believe it, the key theme in his message to his own people is repentance?

To the church of Ephesus he laments that they have forsaken their first love and in Rev. 2:5 he commands, "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place." In four other churches he also calls for repentance. The last is the church of Laodicea. Rev. 3:20 is a verse we

are all familiar with-"Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he with me." But I wonder how many have ever memorized the verse before this? Verse 19 says, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent."

The evidence is overwhelming and conclusive. Repentance is a key message of the New Testament from start to finish. It is the message most needed by lost sinners and by loving saints. The idea that once you become a Christian you no longer need to repent is impossible to defend from Scripture. The message of repentance is the most relevant message there is for everyone on earth. So here we are again at a peak of importance. Mark's Gospel is fast and brief, but it is a Gospel of such quality that every paragraph deals with a subject of supreme importance. You have John the Baptist, the greatest of men. You have the baptism of Jesus the greatest event, for there Jesus became God's anointed. You have the temptation of Jesus, the greatest of battles, for there Jesus won the right to set Satan's captives free.

Now we have the first message Jesus preached, and again, it is the greatest, for it is the very essence of all that will ever be preached in His name. Having concluded this, we need to move on and look secondly at-

## II. THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE.

The Greek word simply means to change your mind. If we can grasp this basic meaning it can help us restore the value of this word and the experience of it to our lives. This experience has become a neglected subject in modern preaching, and not just by liberals but by the evangelicals as well. The reason for this is the narrow meaning given to the word. It brings images to our minds of some fanatic with a sign saying repent for the end is near. Or it makes us think of people going through agonizing emotional upheaval. We do not like this kind of emotional crisis in our culture. So because of a very limited concept of repentance, we have pushed it into a closet and have buried this subject out of sight.

It is not that this narrow view is not part of the truth, for it is. Repentance can be an overwhelming emotional experience. The problem is, that is only a part of the truth, and we have made it the whole. Most of the repenting we need to do as Christians does not demand a great deal of emotion. It is foolish if we think that the main goal of the New Testament preaching was to provoke emotions in people. It is not, for the goal was always change. Change is the key idea. That is what Jesus is after.

If I have a neighbor who peels out of his gravel driveway everyday and sends rocks flying into my yard, and I tell him the problem he is creating for me, I do not really care if he feels deep regret, or just shallow feelings of being sorry. All I really care about is that he will change his behavior and stop this offensive conduct. If it takes deep emotion to get him to change, then deep emotion is something I have to work at. But the goal is not his guilt feelings or the depths of his regret. The goal is change of mind that leads to change of conduct. That is what repentance is. Repentance is not so much something you feel, but something you do. You often do it because of what you feel, but it is not true repentance until the doing is done.

Deep feelings of remorse over one's sin is not in itself true repentance. The world is filled with

people who feel absolutely rotten about things they have done, and the consequences drive them to tears. If emotion was the goal these people would be forgiven and redeemed. But that is not the goal. The goal is change and all the feelings in the world without change is not true repentance. On the other hand, those who have little or no feeling, but who change, have true repentance. We often twist this around and demand that people feel bad to show how sorry they are. This is not the sign we should be looking for. The sign of true repentance is, have you changed your mind, and therefore, your behavior.

When Paul describes his conversion to King Agrippa, he made this very significant statement in Acts 26:19-20, "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." Notice, he did not say prove their repentance by their tears, but by their deeds. The proof of repentance is in change of conduct. If there is no change, there has been no repentance.

A cool calculated change of mind is more truly repentance than is a bucket of tears that produces no change. We need to stop measuring repentance with the wrong yardstick. It is not how bad you feel at all, but how real is your change of mind. If you really have changed your mind, your behavior will show it. Some poet put it-

Repentance is to leave  
The things we loved before,  
And show that we in earnest grieve  
By doing them no more.

The bottom line is change. You cannot command people to feel bad about things, but you can command them to think right and act right, and that is what repentance is all about, and why we are commanded over and over again to repent. It is a choice of the will.

If you are driving along and suspect you are on the wrong road because it does not seem right, and you begin to look for evidence with anxiety, that is a state much like the sinner or the saint goes through when they feel uneasy about the path they are walking. When you discover a sign that proves that you are going the wrong way, you can do several things. You can pull over and cry; you can pound your steering wheel, or slap your head and call yourself stupid. There are endless possibilities of emotional reactions. But in the end all that really matters is that you change your course. You get off the wrong road and get on the right one, and that is what repentance means. You might do it crying, or you might do it smiling, but whatever you do you have not repented until you've changed. Next we see-

### III. THE MOTIVE OF REPENTANCE.

We tend to think of repentance as a negative experience, because we think the motive for it is to escape the wrath of God. This is, in fact, a common motive for it. Ninevah was facing total destruction, but she repented and God spared her. But keep in mind, Jonah was not preaching good news to Ninevah. He was preaching bad news. It was a total negative message. In 40 days Ninevah will be destroyed. That was his message. When the wrath of God is about to fall in

judgment, repentance is a very negative experience.

But notice how different the preaching of Jesus was from Jonah's. Verse 14 says he proclaimed the good news of God. Verse 15 says the kingdom of God is near-repent and believe the good news. It is a completely positive message. Not destruction is near, but rather the power and the rule of God is near, and so get ready to be a part of this great event. Jesus is not preaching repent or you've had it, but repent for heaven is coming your way, and you won't want to miss it. The motive to repent is positive here. Do it to get in on God's best.

Change your mind about the power of evil. Believe it can be defeated, and that God's will can triumph. Repent of your complacency and surrender to the kingdom of darkness, for the kingdom of light is at hand. Jesus had just conquered Satan in the wilderness, and He is now invading Satan's territory to set the captives free, and His preaching is the good news that they no longer need to be in bondage to evil. The greater than Moses is here to lead His people out of the bondage of the Egypt of evil.

So repent, cries Jesus. Change your mind. Do not live in fatalistic despair. Do not let evil run your life. The motive to repent is positive, and this is the perspective we have lost. We are locked into the Jonah mode, and see repentance as a fire escape message completely. In our culture we have been burnt out with the you are going to hell message. Judgment is at hand, just does not move people, even if its true.

If repentance is going to become relevant to us again, we need to focus on the positive motive that Jesus preached. Paul preached it as well. He wrote to the Romans in 2:4, and said, "Do you not know that the goodness of God is meant to lead you to repentance." This is what Peter was getting at too when he said the reason God has not ended history is because He is long suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The positive motive is basic in New Testament theology. Sometimes people need to be told they are heading for hell, and they need to be frightened into repentance. But when they are hardened to this approach, or when they are Christians, they need to hear the good news: Repent because God has His best waiting for those who change their minds, and begin to walk in the way that He wills.

We can scold and demand, and yell change your life style so as to give more time to Christian service, or you will be suffering loss of reward in the judgment. This is a true message, but we don't like it, and stubbornly refuse to be threatened into change. But we can also say, change your mind and don't give all of your time and energy to world pursuits, for the kingdom of God is at hand. The rule and reign of God is ready to set you free, and you can enter into the joy of the Lord, and no longer be a captive of the culture. This is the message Jesus preached, and it is still the most relevant message in the world. The best motive for repentance is not the bad news of what will happen if you don't, but the good news of what will happen if you do.

Look at the many parallel accounts of repentance, or the lack of it, in the Bible. John the Baptist confronted Herod with his immorality, and he did not repent, but had John killed, and he was lost. On the other hand, Nathan confronted his ruler David with his immorality and David repented. David could have had Nathan killed to keep his mouth shut, but instead he repented. Nathan's life was spared for God's service, and David's life was spared, and though he suffered tragic consequences the rest of his life, he was restored to God's service, and wrote many of the Psalms by

which God is worshiped by His people all through history. The difference in the two stories hinges on repentance.

Repentance enables God to bring good out of evil. Without it, evil wins, and all lose but the devil. Repentance is the only way to defeat the power of Satan. Judas betrayed Jesus and he felt so bad he even killed himself, but he did not return to Jesus. Peter denied his Lord and wept bitterly in repentance, but he came back and was forgiven and made a leader in the kingdom. The difference is all in the change of mind.

This pattern is everywhere: The two kings, the two disciples, but there is also the two brothers. The prodigal who repented and the elder brother who would not. The two in the temple, the Pharisee and Publican. The one repented and the other did not. The two thieves on the cross-the one repented and the other did not. Heaven or hell are destinies determined by ones repentance or lack of it.

What I am trying to communicate is that we need this basic experience in our lives as Christians. If we ignore it because we have been conditioned to reject the negative, then let us focus on the equally valid positive motives, and restore it to our thinking and experience. The only way we can mature in Christ is to be ever changing our minds. Most kids do not like school. I didn't, but I changed my mind. I repented and stopped thinking it was awful, and because I did I began to enjoy learning. Christians are forever saying I don't like to witness; I can't pray in public; I just can't read the Bible for long; I just can't stand up and share with others. There are a lot of things Christians don't like, but they need to repent and change their minds. They need to stop limiting their lives and remaining in bondage to their limitations. The power of God can change every bondage and set us free if we will only change our mind and cease to surrender to our weaknesses.

The average Christian, and the above average Christian never leads another person to trust Christ as their Savior. American Christians are complacent about it, and since we are all in the same boat we comfort each other with our mutual neglect in evangelism. We live in the midst of a people who are lost and facing judgment without a Savior, and only once in a while do we even dwell on it long enough to be reminded that these are people for whom Christ died. Who can say that we as Christians do not need to repent? We need to change our minds and start thinking of ways we can change this attitude and become the tools God can use to change lives.

We cannot wait forever to witness. Lost people don't have forever. They may only have today. We need to repent and take seriously the need to plan, to pray, and to act. It is better to try and fail than to never try at all. Jesus defeated Satan that we might have the power to also overcome him. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church said Jesus. We can in the power of the Spirit invade every territory and set captives free. We can, that is, if we repent and change our weak thinking to strong and victorious thinking. We need to change, not because we will be condemned if we don't, but because others will be if we don't, and because they can be delivered if we do. If you have not really tried to touch some life for Christ, will you, for heaven's sake, your own growths sake, repent and get busy on the business of changing your mind.

## 6. KNOW THE FOE

## MARK 1:21-28

A young Christian woman, after only 8 months of marriage came to a counselor complaining that she was as frigid as a ice burg. She had promised herself as a teenager that she would be a virgin on her wedding day. But then she fell madly in love, and after he gave her the ring, and the wedding day was set, she let down her guard, and the result was, she was not a virgin in her wedding gown. This broken promise so plagued her that she blamed her husband for it, and developed a hostility toward him that led to depression and to her becoming frigid.

This story could have very well ended in years of unhappiness and then divorce, for here was a situation where Satan had a foot in the door of her life. Fortunately she got help, and was led to seek God's forgiveness for her broken promise. Her depression lifted, and she was able to develop a warm and loving relationship to her husband.

But had she not gone the way that Christ opened up by His atoning death, she could have become a demonized Christian, who would have ruined her marriage and become a bitter hostile person the rest of her life. She would not have been lost, but she would have been a prisoner of war. She would have been in demonic bondage as territory captured by the enemy, and thus, a breeding ground for the weeds of the wicked one, rather than for the fruit of the Spirit.

Can a Christian become a weed patch rather than a garden of God? This is the question we were answering last week. The answer this week is the same. It is yes, a Christian can be demonized. How can this be? It is really quite simple if you believe in the reality of the warfare between light and darkness, good and evil, Christ and Satan. Satan operates on the principle-take every inch the Christian leaves open for grabs. If we are ignorant of the enemy and his strategy, we can leave ourselves wide open for him to invade our lives. The superficial idea that Christians cannot lose in the battle of Satan is the cause of great harm. It is the war we can't lose, for Christ has already won the war, but there are many battles, and Satan can win battles every day because Christians are blind to his schemes.

Peter became a temporary opponent of the plan of God, and Jesus said to him, "Get thee behind me Satan." At that point, on that specific issue, Peter was a tool of the devil. Satan was in control of part of his life. Peter won the war, but he lost battles, as all of us can do.

Ignorance is our greatest danger, and that is why we need to learn all we can about demons to be better soldiers of the faith, and to avoid the extremes of finding demons everywhere, or believing that they are nowhere. So let's look at more evidence of the reality of the demonic.

Dr. Karefa-Smart, a distinguished physician, teacher, and diplomat, who held the post of Cabinet Minister in Sierra Leone, and was the Assistant Director of the World Health Organization, and visiting professor of International Health at Harvard, speaking to the western world said, "No African that I know doubts the reality of the devil. Living as close to nature as we do, the devil does not have as many technological devices to mask his presence as he does among you."

He recognizes the distinction between the demonic and disease, but he recognizes there is also a connection, for both are of the kingdom of evil. He has a point, for Jesus dwelt with both side by

side. They were different, and yet in the same category as evil. Dr. Smart writes, "The bacteria and viruses of disease may be called little devils; physicians recognize them as powerful foes. The derangement of normal physiological functioning of the endocrine system, chemical imbalances which cause disease, are the scientific counterparts of the spirit of the devil working within the human body."

In other words, all of the things that go wrong in the body, and all of those tiny foes of the body that make it sick are not part of the kingdom of God. They are part of the kingdom of Satan. Disease may not be demonic, but it is related, for it is an enemy to man. This African scientific perspective is easier to combine with New Testament revelation than the western scientific perspective that says bacteria and viruses are just natural phenomenon. They are not evil forces, but just forces of nature. It is not that this is not true, it is just questionable that this is the whole truth. Those closer to the demonic, like African doctors, may be seeing the connection of disease and the demonic in such a way that they are closer to the New Testament world view than we are as American Christians.

I have studied the virus enough to know that it is an amazingly clever creature. Man can learn how to destroy it by developing the code of its shape so antibodies can lock onto them and destroy them, but they can recognize they are doomed if they don't do something, so they change their shape so the anti-bodies cannot touch them.

These are smart little devils, and they drive the medical profession crazy with their defense system. They have a superior defense system that brings the offensive army of medicine to a halt. The question is do you think the vast army of the medical world that labors to defeat these clever foes of man is fighting the forces of God, or of the devil?

I believe medicine is on God's side, and viruses are the enemy of God and man. Disease, plague, and all manner of sickness may be used by God, for in His sovereignty He even uses evil, but these things are excluded from His eternal kingdom, and thus, they are a part of the evil kingdom that will be eliminated. The bottom line in my diagnostic analysis of the demonized and diseased is that they are two distinct problems, but they are nevertheless twins. They are often so much alike that you can't tell them apart, and Satan is the father of both.

Many demonized persons copy the same symptoms as are exhibited by the mentally and physically ill. This is their disguise, and it is very clever, for they are treated by mere natural means, and this is very ineffective, and so they are protected. Natural illness is subject to natural means, but the supernatural can only be cured by supernatural means. If you throw psychiatry and medicine at demons, they will laugh and maintain their control of a person. They can only be defeated by a power greater than themselves, and there is no such natural power in man or medicine.

Getting back to the African doctor, Dr. Smart: He points out that the mass of psycho-somatic illnesses in the world that imprison and keep people in bondage, are also the work of the devil. The fear and ignorance and negative emotions that bind men are demonic. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind. So when we are bound by fear, where does it come from? It is not from God. Just as temptation does not come from God. These things are satanic, but not necessarily demonic. They are often natural, for Satan uses the natural events of stress and crisis to get a foot in the door of our lives. The demonic may enter if we allow more than a foot in the door, and let stress overwhelm us to the point of extreme loss of control. But even if the



demonic does not enter in, the natural is enough to make life miserable and defeat us. So it is vitally important that Christians be aware of the forces of evil as being in partnership with all that leads to any form of sickness or abnormal behavior. Just because something is natural, does not mean it is not being used as a tool of evil. Our best hope to win any battle is to know the foe.

If something is on the natural level then even secular counseling can help deliver people. Many are healed by natural means. But if the demonic is involved you need to have the help of a spirit force greater than these evil forces. This is where exorcism comes in. It is a part of the battle for health in this world. The enemy may attack by land, ship, or plane, but whatever his strategy it is the same enemy. It is not flesh and blood we strive against, but spiritual forces. If you think all sickness is natural you will fight on only one front, and use natural resources. This is like using only depth charges because you know the enemy has submarines. But what do you do about his bombers? You need to be able to fight on all the levels the enemy has for attack. That is why the battle for health has to be fought on the physical, mental and spiritual levels to be effective against the weapons of Satan.

Doctors who believe in the reality of the demonic have developed a rule of thumb. If medicine which ordinarily works to relieve mental problems does not have any effect and prayer does, then there is strong evidence of a possible demonized patient. There are cases where strong injections do not have any effect, but where prayer brings calmness. Many who practice spiritual healing along with medicine are not fly by night quacks, but distinguished men of world fame. Dr. Paul Tournier, for example, the Swiss physician who authored many books read around the world. Dr. William S. Reed is another who wrote, "Many mental and physical illnesses result, in fact, from demonic attacks. Exorcism must therefore be given a place within present day psychiatry and medicine."

Dr. Lechler, for 35 years the medical superintendent of the largest mental hospital in Germany has seen all stages of being demonized. He is a medical authority who believes in the reality of the demonic, and of the need for exorcism. The point is, the Bible and many modern men of medicine agree that we need to see beyond the natural in the battle for health. We need to be aware of the reality of the demonic. We need to know the foe.

## **7. DEMONS DEFEATED**

## **MARK 1:21-28**

Gender Dysphoria is the psychiatric term for what is commonly called transsexualism. This is the obsession that one has been born as the wrong sex. This is so deep-seated that the only cure is thought to be sex change surgery. In all the literature there is only one report of a cure by means of months of hard work using behavior modification. But there is one report also of an instant cure with no medicine, and no psychiatry. D. Scott Rogo, author of over 25 books, tells of this amazing cure in his book *The Infinite Boundary*.

The story began when John was born in 1952. When he was four he started to imitate his mother by putting on makeup, and wearing his sisters clothes. He became more and more feminine as he grew older, and walked and talked like a girl. He enjoyed only the feminine things of life.

Eventually he was diagnosed as a transsexual. And unsuccessful suicide attempt brought him to Dr. David Barlow at the University of Tenn. Medical School. He was given a complete psychiatric examination which showed, for all practical purposes, he was a woman trapped in a mans body. He was advised to have sex-change surgery, and it was scheduled.

It was a long process to prepare for this, and so meanwhile John was living openly as a woman, even going by the name Judy. By the summer of 1973 he was ready for surgery. But to the shock of the doctors, Judy came back as John. He was dressed in a three piece suit, and looked completely masculine. He explained that he had gone to a Christian doctor who told him his problem was demonic. He agreed to have the doctor pray with him, and the doctor spent two to three hours praying that the evil spirits in him would leave. This exorcism worked, and now for the first time in 20 years he felt like a man. He was instantly cured, and all his feminine behavior vanished. Dr. Barlow asked him to retake the battery of tests, and all of the results showed he was restored to a totally masculine identity. The demons that had messed up his life had been cast out.

We think demonism is not for today, because we have been brainwashed by our culture, but the fact is, the New Testament is more relevant than modern psychology in explaining why we live in a society so filled with perversions. Why are there so many messed up people? Why are there so many child abusers? Why are there so many obsessed with all sorts of abnormal behavior? All this is a boon to talk show hosts, but it is a curse to millions who cannot enjoy a normal life. The New Testament tells us that much abnormal human behavior is a result of demon possession, or the more modern term, demonization. Men and women open themselves up to satanic influence, and he takes advantage of it, and sends his troops into their lives and takes control.

After reading widely in theology, medicine, and psychology, I have no doubt that the very thing that we see in the New Testament ministry of Jesus are going on all over the world today. But equal to the danger of not believing in the reality of demons is the danger of believing in them too much. The fact is, they are real, but still more rare than some believers like to think. It is hard to keep a balance on a subject like this. It is just too easy to go to one extreme or the other. We want to dismiss the whole bizarre subject as a matter of mental illness, or discover demons behind everything that is abnormal. Both views are clearly out of touch with the revelation of the Bible, and the realism of history.

The only way to approach a subject like this is to be a believing skeptic. We must come to it believing there is something to it, but be skeptical about all evidence until it becomes overwhelming. Catholic and Protestant authorities agree, you should consider every other possibility before you jump to the conclusion that anything is demonic.

Most cases of reported demonism are proved to be something else. There are even numerous cases of pseudo demonism where clever people rant and rave and foam at the mouth, and scream profanities because they have discovered it is a very effective method for getting attention, and getting their way. History is filled with the follies of being a demon hunter, but equally foolish is the life lived in utter unawareness of these dark powers. So let's begin our study of this sober subject by looking at-

## I. THE REALITY OF DEMONS.

When Jesus was confronted by a man with a evil spirit in the synagogue, He treated the man, not as a mental case of one going berserk, but as one possessed. He said with authority, "Come out of him!" And with a shriek the spirit came out shaking the man violently. There can be no question that Jesus believed in the reality of demons. The first miracle of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is that of casting out an evil spirit in verse 27. In verse 34 he drove out many demons. In verse 39 he drove out many more in Galilee. The evidence is very strong just in this first chapter that one of the major ministries of Jesus was exorcism, the casting out of demons.

Why was this so important? Jesus tells us in Matt. 12:28, "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." One of the major evidences that the kingdom had come was the fact that people in bondage to demons were being set free. The demonic kingdom could not stand before the kingdom of God, but had to retreat. Because of this, those nations where the Gospel has gone and converted a large segment of the population, so that it can be called a Christian land, have far less demonization than do those who still live in lands of darkness where Satan has strong control.

Because we have grown up in American, a land where the Gospel has been very powerful, we have come to question the very reality of demons. Many feel that Jesus was just accommodating Himself to the popular belief in demons, and went along with the belief just to capture people's attention. This is a very weak argument, for Jesus made a clear distinction between diseased people and demonized people. He never talked with diseases. These people were sick with natural causes, and Jesus did not carry on conversations with their bacteria or viruses. But when He cast out demons, He often talked with them and cast them out as living things. They often made terrible noises as He did it. Bacteria and viruses do not have loud voices, nor do they control the voices of their victims. The demons even talked back to Jesus, and if He was just going along with a popular false belief, He was encouraging superstition, which is totally inconsistent with His claim to be the truth. There is no escaping the evidence, demons were real, and Jesus fought them as real living enemies.

There is much in the Bible that cannot be understood apart from the reality of demons. It has always been one of the mysteries in my mind of how the Jews, who saw all of the marvelous miracles of God in the Old Testament, could yet go off to worship idols. It seems inconceivable to me that any idol could have a greater lure than the God who made the heavens and the earth. This power of idols over Israel all through the Old Testament can only be comprehended when we see that behind the idols were real gods, that is demons. The Old Testament does make this clear if you search for it. Demons and idols are linked as one. Look at Deut. 32:17. "They sacrificed to demons, which are not God-god's they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear." These demons were not God, but they were gods. The Old Testament is loaded with many gods of the nations round about Israel, and these were real gods, but they were demons.

Ps. 106:36-37 says, "They worship their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons." Paul confirms this in I Cor. 10:20, "The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons." In the book of Rev. the idols and demons are linked again as it says in Rev. 9:20, "...they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood..." There is no power in wood, stone, and precious metals, but if there is demonic power behind these things, then idols can actually have obsessive power in peoples lives. Idols are not merely harmless superstition, but they can be connections to literal demonic power.

It seems so irrelevant for John to say to Christians in I John 5:21, "Little children keep yourself from idols." Idols are about as irrelevant as demons in our culture. We dismiss them both as a obsolete ideas. But the facts of life will not support this conclusion. Any idol can become an obsession that opens the door to demonic influence in anyone's life. We still fight those same battles God's people fought in the Old Testament and New Testament days. We have thought these were cultural ideas no longer fitting for the modern scientific mind, but this is not so. Demons have not departed to the land of make believe. They are just as real today as they were in the days of Jesus.

But the question can still be, so what? The Lock Ness Monster may be real also, and so too the Abominable Snow Man. What difference does it make to us? To answer that lets look at my second point-

## II. THE RELEVANCE OF DEMONS.

Note that the first demonized person Jesus confronted was in the synagogue, a place of worship and study of the Word of God. In verse 39 it states that Jesus was preaching in the synagogue and driving out demons. The synagogue seemed to be the place where Jesus was most likely to practice exorcism. This seems strange, for you would think such people would be in a different crowd. We have an image of a demonized person that puts them all into the category of the Gaderene demoniac. He was the madman who hung out in the deserted cemetery, and was a raving lunatic.

Because of this limited view of the demonized, we find the subject very irrelevant. But Jesus made it clear that there are varying degrees of being demonized. Some people only have a single demon; others have multiple demons, and some have legions. Not only is there the number factor, but not all demons are equally powerful or wicked. They are just like people. Not all sinners are equally wicked and dangerous, and so it is with demons.

Jesus told of a man who had a demon cast out of him, but he did not take in anything positive to fill up the emptiness. The result was said Jesus in Matt. 12:45, "Then it goes and takes with it seven others spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there." Note, the original demon is not as wicked as the gang he takes with him. They were more wicked, and the result is the last state of the man is worst than the first.

The point is, all demons are not alike. They do not all make people go mad and do vile and violent things. Some of them just cause people to be ill. Others cause them to be obsessed with some behavior that is destructive. All these people that Jesus saw in the synagogues were not raving lunatics. They were Jews who likely came to the synagogue regularly, and were Godly people, but who were in bondage to Satan in some way. They were just like Christian people today who love the Lord, and long to grow in grace and knowledge, but are in one way or another in bondage.

They may be addicted to smoking, alcohol, sex, eating, gambling, or any number of obsessive type behaviors. They may be normal in every other way, but in some aspect of their life they are slaves to that which is out of God's will for them. Now you can begin to see that maybe the idea of being demonized may be relevant to us as Christians in the 20th century after all. Can a Christian be demonized? The evidence convinces most who study the subject that the answer is yes.

Back in 1952 Merril F. Unger published his great book called Biblical Demonology. In this

classic treatment he was convinced Christians could not be demonized. But since then, he has been so inundated with evidence that he has written several books proving that Christians can be demonized. I read his book, *What Demons Can Do To Saints*, and he has compiled Biblical and historical evidence that left no doubt in my mind that Christians can be demonized.

Why else would Paul urge Christians to put on the whole armor of God, so that we may stand against the devil's schemes? In the next verse, Eph. 6:12 he writes, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." All of this is meaningless if the Christian is automatically protected from the demonic influence. There is nothing automatic about it. We can stand with the right preparation, and we can win, and send the devil fleeing when we resist. But if we are complacent and convinced he does not even exist, we stand a good chance of being invaded, and losing control of some part of our life.

In Luke 13, Jesus confronted a woman who had been crippled and bent over like a hunchback for 18 years. She was in the synagogue listening to him teach. Jesus healed her, and in so doing made the synagogue ruler angry. Jesus called him a hypocrite, and said he treats his animals better, for he takes them to get water on the Sabbath, and then Jesus said in Luke 13:16, "Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for 18 long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

Jesus made this ruler of the synagogue feel ashamed, for this was a Godly woman. Yet, she was a victim for 18 years of a satanic bondage. This crippled saint was not a raving lunatic, nor was she was kind of wicked fiend plotting how to murder little children. She was just a child of God, who somehow had let Satan get his foot in the door of her life, and capture part of it. This is the aspect of demonism that is relevant to every believer, because every believer has the potential of losing control of some territory called the self. How else can we explain Godly Christian leaders suddenly doing acts of such folly that they lose all they have built up for the kingdom of God? What possesses such people? That is the question, and the New Testament answer is that they have let Satan possess some aspect of their being. They are demonized, and controlled by dark forces that compel them to choose the way of evil.

Paul was not just scribbling to test his pen when he wrote in II Cor. 11:3, "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." This is as clear as you can get. People with a sincere and pure devotion to Christ can be conned into being deceived and led astray. There is none who stand who should ever conclude that they cannot fall. This is the pride that goes before a fall. Those who stand and do not fall are those who know they could, and so they take precautions. The Christian least likely to fall is the Christian who knows his weaknesses, and who believes Satan is looking for ways to gain control in that area of weakness.

The Christian most likely to fall is the Christian who says, "I love Christ and have nothing to fear. I can think positive and enjoy life by indulging all my appetites freely, and throw caution to the wind." This is a rejection of the warfare mentality of the New Testament. It makes the Christian shed his armor, and become indifferent to prevention. The battle field is strewn with the bodies of believers who buy into this package of deception.

Not only can Christian be drawn into sin and sickness by demonic influence, but Paul makes it clear they can also be drawn into heresy. He writes in I Tim. 4:1, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." Christians can be so deceived that they will follow all sorts of heretical leaders of cults. I do not think these Christians lose their salvation because of this folly, but they become prisoners of war. The enemy has them captive, and they are eliminated as soldiers of the cross. They become tools of Satan to help keep the world in darkness.

Again, let me remind you, these are very sincere religious people. They may swear allegiance to the Bible, and their lives are dominated by spiritual things. They are basically normal people, but they are nevertheless demonized. They are under the control of evil spirit, because they have opened the door of their lives to demon occupation. The point of all this is not to kindle a spirit of fear, for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a power and of love and of a sound mind. The point is to raise our level of awareness so we can prevent being deceived. This is why Paul was writing to the Corinthians about the need to be alert and on watch, for he says in II Cor. 2:11, "In order that Satan might not outwit us, for we are not unaware of his schemes." The implication is that Christians who are unaware can be outwitted and lose battles for control of their lives.

Paul gets very specific in the area of anger. Anger is a strong emotion, and anything that is a strong emotion is a threat to rational behavior. Any person with strong emotions of any kind is a target for takeover by demonic forces. Any Christian in a state of strong emotion can lose control and choose a course that is the wrong way. Anger is just such a state. Paul warns in Eph. 4:26-27, "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold."

Paul is saying, all the devil needs is a foot in the door to put the Christian off balance and cause them to do stupid and sinful things in anger. At no time in the Christian life does a Christian have to pray for the mind of Christ more than when in anger. We need to talk to ourselves and ask, what are you doing? Is your thinking clear? Are you being wise? Are you moving in a direction that is pleasing to God? We have to fight like crazy to keep the rational in control, or we can become a captured weapon that Satan can use to do damage to the kingdom of God.

Christians have always been their own worst enemies, because they have allowed themselves to be outwitted by the devil. There is nothing more humiliating then to be shot by your own gun, which the enemy has cleverly captured from you. But this is the kind of defeat Christians endure all the time because they are not aware of the relevance of demons in every day life. Merrill Unger, after years of research came to this clear conclusion: "Clinical evidence abounds that a Christian can be demon controlled as a carry-over from free conversion days or can fall under Satan's power after conversion and become progressively demonized, even seriously. If such a person blatantly lives in scandalous sin, subscribes to an embraces heresy, engages in occultism, or gives himself to rebellion and lawlessness against God Word and will, he may expect a demon invasion of his life."

But let me again add a word of caution. There are few fanatics more offensive and abusive to the truth than those who blame everything on the devil, and point to demons behind everything they don't like. The greatest fanatics for belief in demons in the New Testament were the greatest enemies of Christ. They were constantly trying to pin the label on him that he was demon possessed. John records that four different times the Jews accused Jesus of this:

John 7:20, "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered.

John 8:48, "The Jews answered Him, aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

John 8:52, "At this the Jews explained, now we know that you are demon-possessed."

John 10:20, "Many of them said, he is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

The truth seems demonic to those in bondage to error. So let's not think that finding demons everywhere is good. It can be the very depth of depravity to call good evil. Every authority in the field of demonology warns against the danger of zeal without knowledge. To start diagnosing every disease and every disturbance in life as demonic is to be duped by the devil. But to be aware that every disease, disturbance, distress, and depression can be a crack in the door for the demonic is to be better prepared for prevention of loss to these evil forces. Greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world, and with proper awareness, and dependence upon Christ we can be assured that all demons will be defeated.

## **8. INTIMATE COMMUNICATION MARK 1:35-39**

If we had as many answers to prayer as we have books on prayer the battle would be won. Unfortunately it is easier to write a book on prayer than to pray effectively. It is easier to preach a sermon on prayer than to pray. It is easier to give a lecture on prayer than to pray. It is easier to do just about anything concerning prayer than to actually pray well and wisely.

The reason this is so is because we have not taken Christ as our guide to prayer, and have tried to follow men who claim to be experts, but who have made the matter of such complexity that it is too discouraging, and we lose our motivation. If we went into a library and found a dozen volumes on how to order a hamburger, we would probably figure it is too complicated, and never bother to order one. So it is with prayer. There are books galore, and seminars, and special retreats, and so many people trying to teach us how to pray, that we automatically assume that it is in the same category with learning brain surgery and international law. So we lose hope, and just accept the role of being poor at prayer.

People who are good at saying prayers only confirm our despair. We say, come Lord Jesus be our guest, let this daily food be blest. They can give a lesson on Bible history, and give guidance to government leaders, and a challenge for world missions, all in a prayer of thanks for a hamburger. It makes the rest of us feel like we are not even really thankful for our hamburger, and also feeling like we just don't know how to pray.

The vast majority of Christians would list as one of the weaknesses of their Christian life, their prayer life. We do not spend enough time in prayer. We don't pray for enough people. We don't pray as fervently as we ought, or as persistently as we ought. There is hardly any aspect of prayer that we do as adequately as we ought. Christian guilt feelings about this make them easy targets of manipulation. They can be made to feel they need to go along with some prayer gimmicks to get back into God's favor. Maybe it's an all night prayer meeting, or some kind of prayer chain, or large

group prayer service, as if the length of your prayers or the quantity of them is the key to God's reluctant heart.

All of this Jesus put into the category of paganism in Matt. 6, where He said the pagans think they will be heard because of their many words. Jesus taught that God already knows what we need, and so a short and simple prayer is all that is necessary. He never told His disciples to get a big crowd together, but said get alone in your own room and close the door. He didn't give them a manuscript of hundreds of prayers when they asked Him to teach them to pray. He gave them a single prayer of about 50 words as an example.

My point is, the reason that prayer is so hard for Christians is because they have made it hard. The Bible doesn't. Jesus didn't. Christians have so complicated the simplicity of the Bible with pagan ideas, they have put a satisfying life of prayer beyond the reach of the average Christian. One Christian writer said she could visualize the millions of prayers hurtling toward God at mealtime, and so she decided to do her praying between meals when the prayer traffic was not so thick. She also got up early to get her prayer in before the heavy breakfast crowd. Of course, this is silly, but so is every aspect of prayer that implies God is not omniscient. Jesus said in Matt. 6:8, "Your father knows what you need before you ask Him."

If that is the case, then being eloquent is no big deal, for we do not have to persuade God. It is not as if we have to be intellectuals, and be able to speak with great logic to get through to God. Neither the quantity nor the quality of our prayers are the issue, for God already knows what we seek to communicate. This puts all God's children on the same level. So what if we can go on for a half hour with flowery words of oratory, and another can only say thank you Lord for today, give me guidance for tomorrow?

The Pharisee in the temple was no doubt better at prayer than the publican. If we took a vote among men after hearing them both pray, the Pharisee would win on both length and eloquence, but Jesus said the publican went away justified, not the Pharisee. "God be merciful to me a sinner," was his prayer, and on the cross the thief said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And the father of the demonized boy prayed, "Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief." When you look at the prayers that Jesus answered in his life, you can't help but be impressed with their brevity and simplicity. They are little more than cries for help.

When the disciples were caught in the storm, and feared the ship was going down, they woke Jesus and their prayer was, "Lord, save us! We are going to drown." When Peter was going under his prayer was, "Lord, save me!" All these prayers were answered. Of course, they were emergency situations where eloquence and length are not only irrelevant, but potentially deadly. But what we want to see as we examine the prayer life of Jesus is that even the normal prayer life of the believer is to be simple and not complex. Our text reveals three simple truths about prayer that can make effective praying possible for all of us. First-

## I. THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER.

Notice Mark 1:35 says Jesus got up to pray very early in the morning while it was still dark. Prayer was a priority in His day. It was the first thing on His list. Prayer was not reserved for some crisis, or great need out of the ordinary. Almost everybody prays when they come to their



Gethsemane. When there is a terrible time ahead, or one faces problems that are overwhelming, then prayer becomes a priority. But for Jesus prayer was a priority when all was going well, and there was no great opposition, or huge obstacles to hurdle.

This text comes early in His ministry when people were delighted, and even His future enemies were not yet sniping at Him. Yet, Jesus made prayer a priority in His life-style. From this we need to see that prayer is not primarily a tool for crisis. A hammer can be used to fight off an attacker, or to break through a wall to rescue someone from a fire. But this is not its usual function. It is usually used just to pound nails, to fix things, and to hang pictures. Prayer has its crisis value, but like all tools, prayer has its usual commonplace function as a tool of communication. We need to make prayer habitual and not situational.

Look at your relationships to people, and what you will see is that some of them are based on habitual communication, and some on situational communication. I have people I relate to once a year because we communicate through Christmas cards. There may be a crisis that leads to more communication during the year, but basically this is it-crisis or Christmas. Some of these people were at one time very close friends or relatives. There was a lot of communication, but times change. They moved, or we moved, and new relationships developed, and the old ones got pushed to the back burner. They no longer have a place of priority.

The ones that have priority are those where there is habitual communication. You talk to these people on a regular basis. There does not have to be any crisis or occasion, you just open the lines of communication, and you relate to these people. Now the point is, the degree of intimacy you experience in any relationship is determined by the priority you give to communicating with them. What happens in life is that we lose intimacy with those we love because we let communication slip from a place of priority. Husbands and wives do this all the time. It does not make them cease to love each other. But it does mean they have lost their intimacy, and it can only be restored by renewed communication.

I had a friend many years ago who was a book fanatic just like me. Every time we got together we could go on endlessly about books, authors, and ideas. Talk, talk, talk. We were the best of friends. But he moved away, and then I moved, and we just lost touch with each other for many years. I still have fond memories, and would consider him a friend, but he has no priority in my life at all, for lack of communication has ended all the intimacy we had.

This happens with people, but it also happens with our relationship to God. We drift away from God. We do not necessarily love Him less or trust Him less, but we cease to put communication with Him on the front burner. It is no longer a top priority, and the result is we lose intimacy with God. There's no longer that closeness that we call fellowship.

Every relationship of life faces this same struggle of keeping intimacy alive. In every case the only way to do this is by means of communication. That is why prayer was a priority in the life of Jesus, and why it has to be in the life of every Christian. A growing relationship to God can only take place in a life where intimacy is developed. And intimacy can only be developed by communication. You cannot get close to people who will not talk to you, and God has the same problem. If we do not spend time with God our relationship with Him will cool.

We have had neighbors we only see out in their yards a few times a year as we go walking, but we get into a good conversation and share who we are, and what we are about, and when we go away from these talks, we feel we are closer to these relative strangers than we are to relatives that we never talk too. Communication is the key to every degree of intimacy. If God is going to be a priority relationship in our lives, we need to talk with Him. Forget the idea that prayer is bringing to God a shopping list. You can ask God for all you need in a few minutes, and you can intercede for all the needs you know in a few more minutes.

The reason we often get bored with prayer is because we have such a narrow view of it. Frank Laubach said, "If your prayers are boring to you, quite likely they are boring God too." Get out of your rut where you just list your needs. I can't imagine that Jesus got up before sunrise just to say, "God bless Peter and Andrew, and James and John, and John the Baptist," and on and on through all His disciples. Jesus had a relationship to the Father. It was His most intimate relationship, for there was no one else that could understand Him and His mission. I imagine Jesus sharing with the Father, and telling of His problems, and seeking insights for solutions. I think we often forget that Jesus had to live a human life. He did not use miracle power to make all the bad things go away. He had to endure the limitations of His flesh, and cope with crowds, criticism, quarreling disciples, and a host of the same problems that plague us all. Jesus needed someone to talk to, and to think through strategy with, in order to sense the direction to go.

Thomas a Kempis says of prayer that it is, "Pondering a matter with reference to God." To think, to plan, to question, and wrestle with issues in God's presence, is all part of prayer. You are most intimate with those with whom you talk most. If prayer is not a priority than we have put God in a category like those to whom we write just once in awhile. He may be very important to us, and we acknowledge His love and influence, like we do good old uncle so and so, but we only communicate situationally and not habitually. The result is loss of intimacy.

We need to see this truth. You can love someone greatly, and yet lose intimacy with them. I have relatives and old friends I love dearly, but I have no intimacy with them, because I have little to no communication with them. This can happen with God as well. God never moves away, but we do. We let life change our priorities and let God be pushed to the side lines. We do not change our theology, and we love Him as much as ever, but we lose intimacy. This is a simple but vital issue in prayer. We need to make prayer a priority to maintain intimacy with God, as Jesus did. Secondly, look at-

## II. THE PRIVACY OF PRAYER.

Notice, Jesus left the house and went out to a solitary place to pray. I am not aware of a single occasion when Jesus called for a public prayer meeting. He condemned the Pharisees who prayed in public to be seen, and He told His disciples to pray in secret in their closet. By both precept and practice, Jesus made it clear, prayer is primarily a private matter.

Again, we go back to intimacy. You can talk to someone you love in public, but you can never be as intimate as you can in private. When you are alone you can develop a deeper intimacy. This is even true with people you just meet. I counsel every once in awhile with people who are strangers. If we are in the presence of others, the conversation stays general, but when we come apart and are alone, we get to the real issues that are bothering them. Privacy and intimacy go hand

in hand.

So it is with our relationship to God. It has to be private to be effective in developing intimacy. Jesus could not pray in public, "Father help me to figure out how to cool off these sons of thunder, James and John, and help me to teach Peter not to be so quick to judge and take foolish actions before he thinks things through." There were all kinds of issues that Jesus had to talk to the Father about in private. It is not that public prayer is not legitimate. It is, but it is not intimate. It is not that aspect of prayer that enables us to get closer to God.

Too often I think Christians worry about their ability to pray in public. I don't think the Bible gives any support to this kind of anxiety about public prayer. In 28 chapters of the book of Acts we do not have a single prayer of any apostle recorded. It is the public record of their deeds and not of their private devotions. We know they were men of prayer, but we do not have great examples of their prayers. Why not? Because prayer is a private matter between them and God. Like their master, they did not do a lot of praying in public, but developed a private prayer life where they talked with, and shared intimately with their heavenly Father. We are told that they prayed, but not what they prayed. So it is with our Lord, and for most of the prayers of His life. They are private, and known only to God.

Don't worry about public prayer, for it is a minor issue compared to the importance of private prayer. This is where you develop intimacy with God. It is in private sharing with God we can unload our burdens, and tell God of the struggles we have with temptation, resentment, hostility, envy, or any other evil that plagues us. We can be one hundred per cent of who we really are, and still be loved in spite of it. A friend is one who knows you, and still loves you. God can be our greatest friend if we enter into the closet, and open ourselves to Him. Total exposure to God leads to the ultimate in intimacy. You can share with God things you can't share with anyone else. In the privacy of prayer we reach the level of infinite intimacy where we are totally known and totally loved. Thirdly, look at-

### III. THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER.

Look closely at this text. Peter and the others found Jesus, and told Him, "everyone is looking for you!" The implication is, what are you doing off here praying in secret when the needs of the world are clamoring to be met? People need the Lord, was there song to the Lord. So come on they are saying, let's go meet the needs. But Jesus replies in verse 38, "Let's go somewhere else-to the nearby villages so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

This response reveals a profound purpose that Jesus had in prayer. There was no end to the needs to be met. There was always more to do than anyone could do. He needed to get away from the crowds, and the constant needs they had, for the purpose of sensing God's guidance.

In a world where nobody can do everything, we need to get alone with God in prayer to sense which things to let go, and which things to go for. Jesus needed this same guidance. Without prayer you just keep responding to the needs that present themselves. Jesus did not do that. He knew when to move on to give new people a chance to respond to His preaching, and feel the power of His healing ministry. The purpose of prayer was to stay in touch with God, and develop an intimacy that enabled Him to know the will of God for His life. Prayer is private, but it has a great public

impact, for it enables you to know where God wants you to go to accomplish His purpose. People in villages all over Galilee experienced a public impact because of the private prayer of Jesus.

This clearly implies that Jesus did not just ask God for things. He listened and thought through the point of His being in history, and what was the wisest strategy to follow to fulfill that purpose. The purpose of prayer is to help us get the guidance of God that we need to fulfill His purpose.

We often think prayer is to get God to do our will. Do this for me, and after that do this and this and this. The whole idea of power in prayer which is so prevalent revolves around the idea of getting your will accomplished by the power of God. Prayer power can make you rich, popular, and healthy. All things can be wrought by prayer, and we are urged to get our hands in the grab bag of things available to us if we only pray right.

It is not that there is no truth in this, it is just that it is so perverted that it seems like a primary purpose of prayer is to figure out how to make God your servant. Whereas the prayer life of Jesus teaches us the purpose is to help us become more effective servants of God. There is considerable difference in these two approaches. In the one we follow the Savior, and in the other we follow the self.

Jesus could have done anything and gone anywhere, and He would have touched people, but He did not come just to do His own thing. He came to do the will of the Father, and the Father wanted Him to cover the villages of Galilee. Jesus prayed in order to be sensitive to the leading of His Father. He had to get away from the voices calling Him for help to hear the Father's voice. The bottom line is, prayer is to help us know the will of God. In a world of clamoring voices, how can we do what is right and best? The only way we can even be close is to listen to God. We need to make listening to Him a priority so that we can get our other priorities of life in order.

If Jesus would have gone by the pressure of the events of life as they unfolded, He would have followed Peter and the other disciples to the people who were looking for Him. But Jesus had a more intimate awareness of God's will, and He thus, led Peter and the others to minister to people who were not looking for Him because they did not know He even existed. Because of prayer Jesus heard, not the voices, but the Voice of God that gave Him directions as to the purpose He was to pursue. Prayer helped Jesus stay on the track God laid out for Him, and not get sidetracked by pursuing the good at the expense of the best.

Jesus could have done all sorts of good without prayer, and so can we. We do not need God's guidance to do good. We are moral agents in the world, and can choose to do good in many ways. So the non-praying Christian can still do much good in this world for the kingdom of God, and to meet human need. Prayerlessness does not mean nothing gets done. It means there is a loss of intimacy, and what does not get done is the best. The good gets done, but not the best, because we are not in touch with God's will. We do not know His will intimately enough to choose it. Jesus had an intimacy with the Father that enabled Him to do God's perfect will. He had that intimacy because He was a man of prayer. That is the purpose of prayer, and that is why it is to be a priority, and that is why it is to be private, for it all comes down to intimacy.

The person you talk to most, and the person you talk to most privately, and the person you talk to in order to know their will most completely, is the person with whom you have the greatest intimacy,

and that person for Jesus was God. To live the best Christian life that we can we need to be like Jesus in practicing prayer as intimate communication.

## 9. TOOLS FOR HEALING

## MARK 1:40-45

One of the great wars of all time was a war where all men were on the same side. The enemy was the small pox virus. It made all other foes seem puny in comparison. One of the greatest dangers for the Pilgrims and Puritans in coming to America, was this dreaded pox. They died in large numbers from it, and they brought it to the Indians who had no immunity whatever, and tribes of 9,000 were reduced to a few hundred by epidemics. Joel Shurkin in his book *The Invisible Fire*, traces the awful, but awesome story of this battle.

In 1722, one of worse disasters in the history of Boston hit with a spread of small pox. So many people died that the church bells never stopped ringing day or night. All businesses and public meeting were banned. People were caught in a bind. If they were inoculated for the disease they could get it and die. If they refused it they could get it and die. For decades this was the agonizing decision people had to make in the colonies. Listen to this paragraph from the pen of Benjamin Franklin in his *Autobiography*. "In 1736 I lost one of my sons, a fine boy of four years old, by the small-pox, taken in the common way. I long regretted bitterly, and still regret that I had not given it to him by inoculation. This I mention for the sake of parents who omit that operation, on the supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a child died under it; my example showing that the regret may be the same either way, and that, therefore, the safer should be chosen."

Few if any wars in history created more misery than this war with an invisible but powerful enemy. But the marvelous news is, by world wide cooperation, man was able to defeat this foe, and eradicate it from the face of the earth. The last case reported was in 1977. Most of us don't even know what small-pox is, because it is one of the major diseases that man has defeated. This makes it all the more puzzling that man has not yet been able to eliminate one of the oldest and most dreaded diseases-leprosy.

Leprosy is the only disease which is fully described in the Bible. We know it was common in both the Old Testament and New Testament, but most of us think of it as an ancient disease of no relevance to modern medicine. I have to admit it was a shock to me when a few years back I read a book by the Christian doctor, Dr. Paul Brand, who operated on lepers in the United States. I never dreamed there were leper colonies in the states, but there are, and there are hundreds of people with leprosy in our nation. Most of the world's leprosy victims are in Asia and Africa, but they are also in America.

The polite medical name for this disease is Hansen's disease. It was named after the Scandinavian physician who in 1874 found the rod-shaped bacteria that caused leprosy. This marked the first time a micro-organism was found to be the cause of a specific disease. Obviously we cannot look at the vast history of this disease, but there are some facts we should have in our awareness to get the big picture of this second disease the Great Physician conquers in the Gospel of Mark. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were 200 hundred known cases of leprosy in

Israel.

We need to see here that Jesus did not buy the age old prejudice that leprosy was a curse of God. There are some Old Testament examples where God did judge people, like Mariam, by giving them leprosy. But this has been blown out of all proportion, so that all lepers have been seen as under the curse of God. This has led to all kinds of unbelievable prejudice and cruelty. Jesus treated them just like any other people with diseases. Death is one of God's judgments too: Are we conclude that all who die are cursed of God, and to be treated as such?

The facts are, leprosy is a disease like all other diseases. It has a known cause, which is bacteria. Jesus did not discriminate against those with this disease. He freely healed lepers when He met them. We have no example of a disease that Jesus refused to heal. He did not pick and chose, or discriminate against anyone on the basis of their disease. Jesus was a general practitioner, and He accepted every patient who came to Him. He never refused a patient, nor did He ever refer one. He handled this leprosy with the same love and swiftness as He did the fever of Peter's mother-in-law. Christlike compassion has no disease discrimination is the point of all this. Show me an exception in the healing ministry of Christ, and then I will be open to arguments of why some diseases should not be healed.

Prejudice and discrimination has led to lepers suffering more from the depravity of man than from their disease. The bacteria that causes leprosy does discriminate, however. It can live in no other creature but man. All attempts to cultivate it in laboratory animals have failed. It also prefers men to women. We see this in the New Testament, where all the victims are men. We want to focus on this man in our text this morning, because even though the account of his healing is so brief, it gives us a glimpse at the three key tools that Jesus used throughout His healing ministry. These three tools for healing are still powerful today, and they work for those who understand them. All of us have these three tools, and so in a very real sense, all of us carry around a doctors bag with those instruments that can bring healing. The first one is,

## I. THE WILL.

You will note that the main concern of this leper was not if Jesus could heal him, but whether He was willing to do so or not. "If you are willing you can make me clean," he said to Jesus. As far as he was concerned the whole thing hinge on Christ's will. The implication being, not everybody is willing to help a leper. Who knows what the history of this man had been? How many had rejected him as a patient? We do not know his past, but it is obvious he had learned one thing clearly: There is only hope where there is a will. Where there is a will there is a way, but where there is no will, there is no way.

When Jesus said, "I am willing, be clean," He opened the floodgate for faith, and the man was cured instantly. Willingness was the wonder drug of the Great Physician. Jesus did not hesitate or speculate, or go off to meditate on this case. He just responded with what this man most needed, and revealed it was His will to heal him. Very little happens in the world of healing unless somebody is willing. When the Crusaders brought leprosy back to Europe from the Holy Land, there were people who were willing to care for them. So hospitals were built called Lazarettos, after Lazarus, the New Testament leper. At one time there were 2 thousand Lazarettos in France, and 200 in

England. The point is, where there are people willing, there will be help and healing.

The reason anyone can be made whole forever, is because God is not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance. Any and every person can be saved, simply because God is willing that it be so. The will is the greatest healing instrument in the world. Wherever there is a willingness there is the potential for healing. Jesus was never unwilling to heal anyone, or any disease. That is why Jesus was the only 100% successful healer in history. I never realized it before I began to study healing, but this is the only area of Jesus's ministry where He never failed.

Jesus was a powerful and persuasive preacher, but He did not win over the Pharisees. He was an excellent teacher, but not everyone who heard Him accepted His teaching. There was nothing that Jesus did that was 100% successful, except His healing. When Peter preached to Cornelius and his household, he summed up the life of his Lord in Acts 10:38 like this, "...He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil." He did not convert everyone who came to Him. The rich young ruler went away, and left Jesus in tears. But nobody ever went away from Jesus saying, "He never healed me." He was willing that all be healed, and so there were none who failed to be healed.

Jesus was willing that people be healed even though their sickness may have been caused by their own sin or folly. We see this in the young man in chapter 2, who was a paralytic. He was the equivalent of an AIDS patient in our day. His sin put him where he was, but Jesus was willing that he be forgiven and healed. Since we have no example of a case where Jesus was not willing to heal, we are led to the inevitable conclusion that He was always willing that healing take place.

Modern doctors have confirmed that one of the keys to healing is the will. Those who believe God is willing to heal them have a better chance of experiencing a miracle. Those who do not believe that God is willing to heal can die, even when it is not medically necessary. Dr. Bernie Siegel in his book, *Love, Medicine & Miracles*, has many examples. He specializes in cancer surgery, and has many examples of people who are fatalists about cancer. When they hear that they have it, they lock in on the idea that death is inevitable, and God is not willing to deviate from the statistics.

Irving was a financial advisor, and when he was told he had six months to live with his liver cancer, he refused to think otherwise. He said, "I've spent my whole life making predictions based on statistics. Statistics tell me I am supposed to die. If I don't die, my whole life doesn't make sense." He went home and died on time.

15 to 20% of his cancer patients do this, for they say there is no willingness in the universe that it be otherwise. But Dr. Siegel started a therapy group called, *Exceptional Cancer Patients*. He discovered there are another 15 to 20% of his patients with the same cancers who refused to believe there is no willingness in God to heal them. In fact, they believe just the opposite. They believe it is His will to heal no matter how bad they are, and how grim the statistics. These people break all the rules, and like the leper in our text, they walk away clean from hopeless situations.

Miracles take place when people are convinced someone is willing to heal them. These exceptional cancer patients refuse to be victims. They are the doctors' worst patients. They will not follow the herd and do as they are told. They question everything, and demand answers and explanations for everything, and if it doesn't make sense to them, they won't do it. They are

independent, but they are the ones who are most likely to get well. Those who never question, and just go along with the routine, are ideal patients, but they are the ones most likely to die.

There were a lot of lepers around, but only this man was on his knees before Jesus. He was the exception, and he was healed. The passive pass away, but the aggressive fight to stay. This has now been established scientifically. Aggressive bad patients tend to have more killer T cells in their blood. These are white cells that seek and destroy cancer cells. The docile good patients do not produce as many.

For all we know, this man with the leprosy had fled from a leper colony resisting the rules, and defying the establishment. We do not know all the details, but he was obviously an aggressive man who knew healing was possible if there was a willingness, and he was determined to find that willingness, or die trying.

A London research group found that 75% of cancer patients who react with a fighting spirit survive for 10 years. Only 22 % survive that long who respond with a stoic spirit of acceptance and helplessness. The bottom line is, all healing is partially psychosomatic. It begins in the mind, and from there it reaches into the body. If this leper had not had it in his mind he could be healed, he never would have come to Jesus in the first place. Would he have been healed had he stayed where he was praying for it? Maybe, or maybe not. All we know is he received a miracle because he came looking for one and begging for one. He was an aggressive seeker for healing. Dr. Franz Alexander, the father of psychosomatic medicine said, "The fact that the mind rules the body is, in spite of its neglect by biology and medicine, the most fundamental fact which we know about the process of life."

This leper got a miraculous healing because he believed that if Jesus was willing, he could be healed. This belief motivated him to come to Jesus. His mind already had a picture of what could be. And it made his body conform to its goals, and the result was he put himself in a place where he was ready to receive a miracle. How many miracles never take place because, though Jesus is willing to give them, we are not willing to aggressively seek them. We wait passively hoping for them, but we do not go aggressively seeking them. The facts of both the Bible and modern medicine confirms that the will of both the patient and the healer play a major role in healing. The record shows, Jesus always has this tool in His doctors bag. How we will to respond to His willingness, makes all the difference in the world. The second tool we want to look at is,

## II. THE HANDS.

Verse 41 says, "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man." He touched this leper, and the leper, I am sure, would have loved to know the song, "He touched me, and now I am no longer the same." The tool of touch was one that Jesus used all the time. He established for all time the reality of healing in the hands.

Healing is a hands on experience. This contact between the healer and healed is like the contact between the appliance and the electricity. Without the contact, there is no power. With it, there is power. The power of Jesus to heal was not limited to His hands, but there is no doubt, as you look at the evidence, His hands were His key tools for communicating His willingness to heal. Look at the record just in the Gospel of Mark.



1:31. Jesus took Peter's mother-in-law by the hand when he healed her fever.  
1:41. He touched the leper to heal him.  
5:23. Jairus came pleading to Jesus, and said, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."  
5:41. When Jesus got there He took her by the hand and raised her up healed.  
6:5. Jesus in His home town could not heal many because of their lack of faith, but this text says, "He could not do any miracles there, except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them."  
7:32. People brought a deaf and dumb man and begged Jesus to place His hand on him.  
8:23. Jesus took a blind man by the hand, and then laid hands on him several times to restore his sight.  
9:27. Jesus lifted the boy who had an evil spirit cast out of him. All thought he was dead, but Jesus touched him and lifted him to life.  
16:18. Jesus said all who follow Him will use this same tool. He says, "They will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." Thus, we have the whole history of the laying on of hands as a means of healing.

We have accounts of a St. Philip who healed cancer by the laying on of hands, back in the reformation period. There is a whole history of English kings and queens who laid hands on the sick as a royal favor, and many of them were made well. This may seem a little far fetched and superstitious, but the facts are clear: The hands have played, and do play, a major role in all aspects of healing. The chiropractor's key tool is his hands, and so it is with the surgeon. The word surgery comes from the Greek word meaning, "Working by hand." This is quite obvious, but what is not obvious is the importance of the hands even in the more technical science behind healing.

Professor Dorothy Hodgkins, at the University of Oxford, was awarded The Nobel Prize in 1964, for her work on the molecules of penicillin and vitamin B12. She became the first woman since Florence Nightingale to have the Order of Merit conferred upon her. In an interview she said something that caught my eye. She said in explaining how she was able to do what no one else had ever been able to do, "I think with my hands." She was no Florence Nightingale out on the battle front ministering with healing hands. She was in the laboratory, but she was saying even there, it was her sensitive hands that were feeling out the unseen realities of God's creation. She was dealing with atoms and molecules, yet her hands were the key tools in her research.

I do not pretend to understand it, and, in fact, I am somewhat skeptical, but there is a modern movement in developing what is called Therapeutic Touch. That is the name of the book by Dr. Janet Macrae. She has taught over 200 work shops on this touch therapy in nursing schools across the U.S. She writes, "Therapeutic Touch has been derived from the ancient practice of the laying on of hands." The gist of it is this: The chiropractor says the body is not aligned properly, and so, he uses his hands to get it back in line, and this leads to healing. The therapeutic touch people say, there are also energy forces that surround the body, and they get out of balance. Gravity is a force field around all bodies, and there are others as well. By means of the hands these can be restored to balance, and this leads to healing of the body. This unorthodox method is gaining ground in the world of orthodox medicine.

I am not qualified to make a judgment on its value. I am just using it as an illustration of how our contemporary world of health care people are exploring the use of the hands in healing. There is just no escaping the evidence that Jesus linked the hands and healing. There are some obvious

conclusions we can come to. For one, the touch of the hand conveys a concrete message of willingness and love. Jesus could have just said, "Be clean," and forget the reaching out to touch this leper. He had to do that when the patient was far away. But when the patient was within reach, Jesus touched them. Jesus was saying something by His touch. He was saying, "Your faith in me is confirmed. I do care. I will heal you." His touch was therapeutic in that it would raise the level of faith of the person needing the healing, and give them assurance that Jesus was going to heal them.

By using His hands to stimulate faith, Jesus was using natural means for healing, and, therefore, put His stamp of approval on man's development of therapies to bring about healing. We will see more of this as we pursue the subject, but once you admit Jesus used His hands for some purpose in the healing process, you are forced to be open to the use of all means as possible ways God can work in healing. If even Christ's miracles were in conjunction with therapeutic means, then any objection to medical treatment and therapy is contrary to the Spirit of Christ. The third tool we want to look at briefly is,

### III. THE VOICE.

Jesus spoke to the leper, and said, "I am willing, be clean," and he was cured. As soon as the voice of Jesus was recorded in the leper's brain, the leprosy was healed. Voice therapy is what we could call it. It was the most common tool Jesus used. He did not touch demon possessed people. He used His voice only on them. He would shout at them, "Come out," and the power of His voice made demons vacate the ones they possessed.

Jesus had a healing voice. It was one of His best therapies. He said to the sickest of the seven churches in Revelation, the church of Laodicea, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he with me." Note, they do not hear His knock but His voice, for He uses a verbal knock. It is His voice they will hear at the door. By means of His voice Jesus will heal their blindness and their hard hearts, and restore them to wholeness. The greatest test of His voice therapy was when He cried out, "Lazarus come forth," and it worked. He came out of the tomb healed and whole.

The Reformers rejected many healing practices, but voice healing seemed so natural. When Martin Luther found his fond friend and fellow reformer, Melancthon, in a dying state, not able to eat or drink, and semiconscious, he was greatly agitated, and went off to pray fervently for him. When he returned, he took his friend by the hand and said, "Be of good courage, Philip, you will not die: give no place to the spirit of sorrow and be not your own murderer, but trust in the Lord, who can stay and make alive again, can wound and bind up, can smite and heal again." His friend began to improve immediately and was restored to health. That was voice therapy. A therapy now established as a valid scientific method of healing.

We have all heard that people in comas have good hearing yet. But do you realize those who are anesthetized can too, and they can by the spoken word be made to do things that they can't do when they are conscious. We do not have time to share about the marvelous things that are being done with voice power, but let me share just one paragraph from the cancer surgeon, Dr. Bernie Siegal. He writes,

"In the operating room I'm constantly communicating with patients about what is happening, and

I've found that this can make a difference between life and death. Talking reassuringly to patients who are having cardiac irregularities during surgery can reverse the irregularities or slow a rapid pulse. Recently I was operating on a very husky young man, built like a football player. His size led to some minor technical problems, and while solving them I looked up at the monitor and saw that his pulse was 130. I knew that he had been anxious about the operation, so I said to him, "Victor, I'm having some mechanical difficulties because you're a big guy, but there's no problem with the surgery. This part is just a little difficult to do. You're doing well, Don't be nervous. I'd like your pulse to be 83.' During the next few minutes, without any other medication, his pulse came right down to 83 and remained there. Many anesthesiologists who've heard of such episodes have begun speaking to their anesthetized patients, giving them calming messages. Fear filled messages can increase the incidence of cardiac arrest."

What I am trying to establish is that the tools of healing used by Jesus, the Great Physician, are tools that never have become obsolete. But more important, they are not tools and techniques that only trained professionals can use. We all have wills, hands, and voices, and with the capacity to also have Christ's compassion, any one of us can be a healer. In some ways we have all already used these tools for healing. My goal is to help you see what you have, and to realize that Jesus may use you to do much more if you become aware of the power of the tools you already possess, and become more deliberate and more aggressive in using them. As we close, let us pray that God will help us be channels of His love in this needy world, by using the tools of healing.

## **10. THE MEDICINE OF FORGIVENESS MARK 2:1-12**

Language can be lethal. Dr. Bernard Lown, professor of Cardiology at Harvard, tells of how he learned this, very dramatically. He had a middle age woman as a patient, who had a narrowing of the tricuspid valve on her heart. She had this problem for a decade, but one day a Dr. Levin was leading a group of visiting physicians through the clinic, and when he came to the particular patient he turned to the doctors and said, "This woman has TS." As soon as they left the room, the woman began to hyperventilate, and her pulse accelerated to 150. Her lungs began to take on fluid also, and Dr. Lown asked her what was going on. She said, "Dr. Levin said I have TS, which means terminal situation."

He was amused at her misinterpretation, and informed her that it meant tricuspid stenosis. But she didn't buy it. She got worse, and nothing they could do would reverse the congestion, and later that day she died of heart failure. She was no worse that day than she had been in a decade, but she died because she heard a death sentence in a doctors use of two words. It is a rather trivial reason to die, but since our bodies believe what the mind tells them, faith in a false idea can have deadly power.

There is, however, a positive side to the power of the spoken word. It can also lead to amazing healings. Dr. Lown has marvelous examples of this also. He had a heart patient who was at the end of his rope. They had exhausted all their means to help him survive. On his morning rounds of what should have been this mans last day, he commented to his staff around the mans bed that he had a wholesome, very loud third-sound gallop. This was a poor sign, for it meant the heart was

under a great strain, and was failing. But to the surprise of all, this man suddenly took a turn for the better. He made such a marvelous recovery that he went home.

When he came back to the doctors office for a check-up, Dr. Lown asked him why he thought he made such a recovery. He said, "Doctor, I not only know what got me better, but even the exact moment it happened. I was sure the end was near, and that you and your staff had given up hope. However, Thursday morning when you entered with your troops something happened that changed everything. You listened to my heart....and announced to all those standing around my bed that I had a wholesome gallop....I figured I still had a lot of kick to my heart, and could not be dying. My spirits were for the first time lifted, and I knew I would live and recover."

Fortunate for him, he did not understand what the doctor meant, for it probably would have led to his death that day. His misunderstanding saved his life, because it gave him renewed hope. Words can kill or make alive, and all of us have this potent potential at all times. The snake has his venom, and we have our vocabulary, and both are capable of giving or taking life. The world is a sicker or healthier place everyday, just because of the things we say.

This is the truth so relevant as look again at the Great Physician at work. Jesus did not write out prescriptions, He spoke them. His very words were the medicines that people needed to get well. The wonder drug of words was his specialty, and no where do we see a more potent dosage than we see Him using on this young paralytic. In verse 5 Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

The Greek word for son here is teknon. This is not the usual word for son in the New Testament. This is a much rarer word, for it is an endearing word. It is the word Paul used in calling Timothy his beloved son. It is used only a few times in the Gospels, and Jesus uses it for this pathetic paralytic. Not only does Jesus address him with this loving term, He unconditionally says to him, "Your sins are forgiven." If this is not spiritual penicillin to a sin sick soul, there is no such thing. This was the verbal anti-biotic that set the sick sinner free. Just as Jesus spoke the word and the sea was calm, and just as He spoke the word and the demons fled, so here he spoke the words of comfort, love, and hope, and brought healing to a paralyzed body. Jesus had a bedside manner that was excellent, for there are no better healers than those who make it clear to the patient that they are determined to heal.

Hippocrates, over 25 hundred years ago said, "Some patients, though conscious that their condition is perilous, recover their health simply through their contentment with the goodness of the physician." The words that came out of the mouth of Jesus could have been words of anger at being so rudely interrupted by this paralytic, but they were not. They gave instant assurance that Jesus had compassion for him.

Jesus was determined that this man be made well, and so even though He knew it would anger the Pharisees, He said to him, "Your sins are forgiven." These words that gave the paralytic back his health made the teachers of the law sick. They were so disturbed by his audacity that they said, "He is blaspheming." This was the beginning of the end for Jesus, for the charge of blasphemy is what led Him to be crucified. Jesus really stuck His neck out for this sick sinner. But in so doing, He revealed to us for all time one of the most powerful wonder drugs of the universe-the medicine of forgiveness. Jesus did not invent this medicine, for it was clearly linked to healing even in the Old Testament. Jesus just highlighted it, and made it clear that it is more available than we realize. Let's

look at the linking of forgiveness and healing.

There is no way to separate the two, for any time you forgive another, you cause healing to take place. Healing of relationships, and healing of guilt in the offender is common by forgiveness. If sin is a great cause of suffering, then forgiveness is a great cure of suffering, for whatever eliminates the effects of sin, heals. To forgive is to heal, and thus, the two are inseparable. Ps. 103:3 says, "He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases." Is. 33:24 says, "No one living in Zion will say, I am ill and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven."

Here we see that forgiveness is a panacea. It leads to total health, and freedom from all disease. To be totally forgiven is to be totally healed, and thus, totally healthy. The greatest healer in the world would be one who could provide forgiveness for all sin. This would be the ultimate, for this would guarantee that all disease could be eliminated. All sickness ultimately has its origin in sin, and therefore, whatever can lead to all sin being forgiven, can lead to all sickness being healed.

Many ask, "Is healing in the atonement?" If the atonement deals with forgiveness, then it by its very nature deals with healing. You can't forgive and not heal, and so you can't have atonement and not have healing. If Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins, then He died for the healing of our diseases. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil says I John 3:8. Sickness and disease are the devil's works, and Jesus destroyed them in His life ministry, and also in His death.

If our sickness has any connection with sin, Jesus is ever ready to heal, for He is every ready to forgive. If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and this leads to healing. If, of course, the sickness is not due to sin, forgiveness cannot be a cure, for there is then no connection between it and the disease. All sickness is a result of sin, but not necessarily the sin of the one sick.

In the healing passage in James 5, there is a clear distinction between sickness that is sin related, and what is not. But the connection is made very clear, and the idea of forgiveness is made crucial to healing. James 5:15-16 says, "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

Forgiveness, both on the divine and the human level, leads to healing. Christians are often sick because they are not forgiven by God or by other Christians. Bad relationships clouded by sin lead the Christian to physical problems. The remedy is to be found in forgiveness, which is a medicine that God is ever ready to dispense from the pharmacy of His heart. It is a medicine that each of us possesses also, and which we can dispense if we are willing. All who can forgive are, to that degree, into healing. Gift or no gift, all can heal by the medicine of forgiveness.

A great deal of the sickness in the body of Christ is due to the lack of the medicine of forgiveness. Christians do not forgive themselves, or others in the body, and they will not forgive those lost sinners outside the body, and the result is weakness and sickness within the body. No relationship can survive without forgiveness. No two persons can relate as family, friends, mates, or partners, in anything without offense. We not only sin against God, but against every person we relate to, and sometimes even against total strangers. We have all heard this famous prayer,

God, grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change;  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

One of the things you can't change is that people you love and care about will sin against you, and offend you. This is the bad news of a fallen world. But the good news is, there is an antidote to prevent this negative reality from destroying relationships. It is the medicine of forgiveness.

There is a power greater than the power of sin, and that is the power of forgiveness. By this power we can restore to wholeness what sin has broken. By forgiveness we can even raise the dead, and bring to life again that which has been killed by sin. If we were as willing to be as forgiving as Jesus was with this sin sick paralytic, we would all be in the healing ministry. It works for everyone.

Gigi is Billy Graham's oldest daughter. She is married to a doctor. One day he had several patients with heart breaking problems, and an emergency took his lunch hour, and he was behind all day. A traffic jam on the way home added to the tension. He was uptight as he arrived home to his wife and seven children who demanded his attention. Gigi had a rough day as well. She had a sleepless night with the baby, and a rainy day that kept the kids confined in the house all day. After a hectic supper and clean up, these two weary Christians found themselves in bed together.

The potential for conflict was high, and they took full advantage of it, and were soon into a quarrel saying things they didn't mean. Soon Stephan was slamming the door and driving away, leaving Gigi to dissolve into her tears of discouragement. It happens to the best of mates. But the best of mates, Christian mates, know the antidote to this poison that destroys millions of marriages. Their separation was not used to plot vengeance, but rather to deal with their Lord. Robert Quillen said, "Marriage is the union of two good forgivers."

Listen to the way Gigi describes the rest of the story, and how that evening ended. "I fell on my knees beside the chair, asking the Lord to forgive me and to fill me with His Holy Spirit so I could be to Stephan all he had ever dreamed. I asked for His strength, His sensitivity, His wisdom so I could juggle my own schedule, the demands of my home and children, and still have time to meet my husbands needs when he came home from the day's work. Then I added a timid P.S., asking Him to give Stephan a change of heart, too.

I felt peace and a sudden refreshing. I got up, washed my face, adding a little color to my cheeks and lips, combed my hair, lavishly sprayed perfume on myself, and climbed into bed to wait. Presently I heard the front door open and familiar footsteps in the brick hallway. Our bedroom door opened quietly and Stephan stood there, his tired face and kind, loving eyes drawing me like a magnet. I flew into his arms. Later, our loving erased the last traces of frustration and anger. Clinging to each other as we fell into a much-needed sleep, I couldn't help wondering why we hadn't thought of this in the first place."

We so often forget the power of forgiveness until we have a broken relationship, and then realize that forgiveness is the only cure. Marriage is the testing ground for Christian principles. If you can't forgive your mate-you can't be forgiven by God, Jesus made clear at the end of the Lord's prayer. A healthy relationship towards God is dependent upon a healthy relationship to your mate. If you are

not a healer you can't be healed. The medicine of forgiveness only works in those who dispense it themselves.

There are only two things you can do with sin. You can make it worse, or you can make it better. It's like a stain on your tie or blouse. You can make it worse by smearing it over a wider area, or you can make it better by finding a way to get rid of it. Forgiveness is the stain remover. Anything else just smears it and increases the damage.

Jesus is sometimes accused of being soft on sin. He so freely forgave people who were clearly guilty of sin. But we need to examine this clearly, for it is a misconception which I have had too. Non-forgiveness is what is soft on sin. If you do not forgive sin, it grows in its power and influence. Wars, murder, and divorce are the results of the lack of forgiveness of sin. Sin not forgiven is magnified, and it spreads until many are affected, besides the original victims.

Forgiveness hates sin too much to allow it to have greater impact. Jesus could say, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more," because His goal was to decrease sin and its influence. Forgiveness is the only power that can eliminate the spread of sin and its influence. The most radical thing you can do to sin is to forgive it. Anything else you do may only spread it. Forgiveness is sin's most deadly enemy. It does to sin what penicillin does to a culture of bacteria-it destroys it. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, and forgiveness is the weapon that most often does this. In the war on sin and disease the most powerful weapon is forgiveness.

The other side of the coin is, Satan's most effective weapon is the unforgiving spirit. By this one weapon he is able to produce misery beyond calculation. In contrast to Gigi and Stephan, we have these words of Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady*, where he says of Eliza Doolittle-

But I will never take her back,  
If she were crawling on her knees!  
Let her promise to atone  
Let her shiver, let her moan  
I will slam the door  
And let the hellcat freeze.

This is the spirit that keeps the world sick, and so full of broken relationships. There is only one cure, and that is the medicine of forgiveness. Joyce Landorf tells the typical story of her relationship with Laurie her teenage daughter. "I recall somewhere in her 14th year, she had her own rebellion about everything from skirt lengths to hating peas and carrots. She made it very difficult for us to love her. And she casually, yet deliberately, drove us all up the wall! She didn't go into drugs (four friends did). She didn't have an abortion (one friend did). But for 18 months she doubted everything about the Lord, she disagreed with everything we said or did, and she made life in general miserable. We refused any of her ugly actions stop our loving her-it wasn't easy but we managed in spite of her.

By the power of forgiveness they limited the damage of her rebellion, and she came through it to be a beautiful Christian woman they were proud of. At the heart of every good news story is the power of forgiveness.

It is, in fact, the very essence of the Gospel. Jesus died for the sins of the world, that all of us

might be forgiven. Forgiveness is no mere sideline, it is the very heart of the Christian faith. Without forgiveness of sin there is no good news that makes any ultimate difference. But with it, it makes all the difference in the world. This poem by an unknown author says it all.

Not far from New York, in a cemet'ry lone,  
Close guarding its grave stands a simple headstone,  
And on it is graven this one word alone-  
FORGIVEN!

No sculptor's fine art has embellished its form,  
But constantly there, through the calm and the storm,  
It bears this one word from a poor fallen worm,  
FORGIVEN!

It shows not the place of the silent one's birth,  
Reveals not his frailties nor lies of his worth,  
But tells out its tale from those few feet of earth,  
FORGIVEN!

The name is unmentioned, the date is untold;  
Beneath lies the body, corrupted and cold;  
Above rests the spirit, at home in the fold-  
FORGIVEN!

And when from the skies the Lord shall descend,  
This stranger will rise and to glory ascend,  
Well-known and befriended, to sing without end-  
FORGIVEN!

The greatest healing in the world is to be forgiven, and the greatest healing you can give is the medicine of forgiveness.

## 11. THE OLD OR THE NEW

## MARK 2:18-22

In his book *Like A Mighty Army*, Halford Luccock tells an interesting story about theatrical history. In the middle of the 19th century the right to produce dramatic performances was limited to a few theaters which had been able to develop a monopoly. Some bright boys of the theater found a loophole, however, and made a breakthrough. The law said plays were forbidden, but it did not apply to operas. Plays with music were permitted. So when they began their play one of the staff would give one loud bang on the piano. That made it an opera, and they could go safely ahead with their play.

This is one way that progressive people overcome the obstacles of the establishment. They find a



loophole and the basis of a technicality they worked their way on to the stage of history. Others take a more radical approach in which they ignore and defy the laws of the establishment. This was the approach that Jesus took. Jesus was a revolutionary who told the leaders of the establishment right to their face that His business was to put them out of business.

When they approached Jesus about His disciple's lack of conformity to the laws of fasting, Jesus told them that He had no intention of making His movement a patch on their old garment, nor did He intend to pour His new wine in to their old skins. Jesus did not come to be a reformer of Judaism, or to patch it up and give it new life. He came to revolutionize the relationship between God and man in such a way that Judaism would become obsolete.

Jesus was a revolutionary, but not in the same sense that many think of it. No Christian can condone the tactics of extremists who are violent for violence sake, and who attempt to destroy the establishment, but who offer nothing better to replace the old they seek to eliminate. Jesus offered something new that was so much better that the old was no longer needed. Jesus was revolutionary in the same positive way that we use the word in industry. Many men are hired to spend all their time trying to come with something new. They are looking for some new process, product, or technique. They want something that will revolutionize the industry, for this kind of revolution builds, and is profitable, even if it does render the old obsolete and useless.

Harold Bosley tells of a man who perfected a new process in the manufacture of pigments. In a twinkling of an eye he made millions of dollars of equipment in his employers plant obsolete. Did they fire him for this radical change? No! They made him vice president. Even though he destroyed their old machinery just as effectively as if he would have blown them up with dynamite. The difference between the revolutionary who blows up the plant, and the one who invents something new is that the man who comes up with something new makes it so the old is no longer needed. The destructive revolutionary eliminates something that is still needed, for there is nothing new and better.

Men recognized the value of the revolutionary in the world of industry, for the prophets speak loud and clear, but when it comes to ideas and religious values, men are not progressive. Moncure Conway said, "It is the darling delusion of mankind that the world is progressive in religion, toleration, freedom, as it is progressive in machinery." It is clear to anyone who studies history or human nature that there is perpetual tension between the old and the new. It was the greatest tension Christ faced, and also the early church, and it is still the primary cause of tension in the world today.

The old strives to grow older by making sure the new does not survive. It is Herod killing all the babies to make sure there was no new king. The crucifixion was the answer of the old to the new. The Pharisees hoped that the cross would preserve the status quo, but instead it shattered the foundation beyond repair. The supporters of the old never learned, and they continue to fight the futile battle to suppress the new. When lady Montague brought back to England from the East the practice of inoculation she was roughly spoken to by medical men who were angry, for that practice was not in their books. This story is repeated thousands of times in the history of new ideas. They always have to fight for survival, because men who have lived long and well with the old ideas oppose them. Their theme song is, "Come weal or come woe, My status is quo."

Everyone tends to fall into one of two categories: Those who strive to preserve the old, and those

who struggle to promote the new. All of history is a battle between the liberal and the conservative. One of the most fascinating paradoxes of Scripture is that Jesus was both a liberal and a conservative. Much Scripture supports His conservative nature. He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, and He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In this passage, however, Jesus is fighting the conservatives of His day, who were the hardened Pharisees bound by old tradition. Their traditions were so strong on trivialities that they have survived even into this modern age among Hasidic Jews. These extremely orthodox Jews, like the Pharisees, are so concerned to make sure they do not work on the Sabbath that they have invented a device called the Sabbath Watcher. You switch it on before the Sabbath and it turns the thermometer on and off in the refrigerator periodically so that when you open the door at an incorrect time it sets off an alarm making you guilty of work on the Sabbath.

This same ultra-conservative attitude characterizes some of the old leaders of the Catholic Church. Cardinal Ottaviani had embroidered on his robe the Latin words *semper idem*, which mean always the same. He was expressing the attitude that the Catholic Church was right from the start, and never needs to change, for you can add nothing new to the changeless truth. Protestant churches are just as notorious for holding to traditions, and the most common view in many churches toward something new is "We never did it that way before." Christians of all groups tend to be over conservative, and it is understandable because truth never changes, but there is more than truth involved, and we cannot forbid and hinder the new. This is the attitude that Jesus fought, and was, therefore, a liberal in His philosophy of life concerning progress. Jesus believed in the new. He came to establish the new covenant, and to make all things new in the lives of men who received Him.

Jesus came to do radical work in men. Paul says, "If any man in be Christ he is a new creation. Old things are passed away and behold, all things are become new." If conservatives in theology faced what Jesus does through the Gospel, they would realize that they, by proclaiming that Gospel, are real liberals, and the liberals are the reactionary conservatives, for they are the ones who want to make Christianity a patch on the old life. They are the ones who spread the patchwork Christian theory of getting a little religion into all areas of life. There is nothing new about this, for it is as old as paganism, but the man who believes Christ makes all things new is as liberal and radical as they come. He is for doing away with the old man completely. We have a revolutionary theology, but we are not as wise as Jesus. We do the very thing He said He would not do because it is foolish. Let us examine these parables and learn His attitude so that we too might be wise and not foolish in how we relate the new and the old. First consider-

## I. THE PARABLE OF THE GARMENTS.

Jesus is saying that no one is so foolish as to ruin the new in order to preserve the old. Anyone who would cut up a new garment to patch an old one is in need of some common sense. Jesus is saying He will not link His new teaching to the old forms of Judaism, for Judaism was worn out and old, and it would be folly to ruin the new by trying to patch up the old with it. If Jesus would have encouraged His disciples to fast, wash their hands ceremonially, and keep all the Sabbath laws, as did the Pharisees, He would have guaranteed that Christianity would have gone to the bottom with the sinking ship of Judaism.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees that His movement is no mere reform of the old, it is a totally new

religion designed to replace Judaism. It is a new religion of joy and a marriage atmosphere where fasting and solemn trivialities are completely out of place. You can see why the Pharisees hated Jesus, for this was a challenge to a duel unto death. He said they were old and worn out and obsolete, but the old does not go down without a fight. Even after the cross some of the Apostles such as Peter had a hard time becoming disengaged from the old ways of Judaism. So radical and new was the Gospel of grace that even its top promoters had a temptation to be reactionary, and tie Christianity to Judaism. Christianity was a whole new garment, and not a patch on Judaism. Jesus encouraged His disciples to defy the old traditions in order to protect the new from entanglement with the old.

A.B. Bruce wrote, "...in accustoming His disciples to disregard existing Jewish religious customs in certain particulars he was educating them for the ultimate abandonment of the whole system." The principle that Jesus is teaching is that the new must be kept independent and free from entanglement with the old to be preserved. If this is not done, the new becomes a mere patch on the old, which ruins the new and does not improve the old. In marriage, example, God says a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. Marriage is to be a whole new garment in life, but so many make it merely a new patch on the old garment. Parents look upon their son or daughter as still basically theirs. The marriage just adds a new patch to their old family life. Sometimes a couple themselves feel this way. There is no radical new life developed independent of the old, and, therefore, the best things of marriage are lost.

One of the greatest perpetual tragedies of history is the patch work theory of Christianity. It is the theory of being religious in some areas of life make up for deficiencies in other areas. When the Franks were baptized, whole armies went into the water at once. Many held their right hand above the water so they could use that hand for evil, since it was not baptized. This is the patch work type of Christian. It is not a radical new and beautiful garment like Jesus meant it to be, but an old garment patched up. It is a little patch of prayer, and possibly even a patch of Bible reading, with a patch of church attendance added to the old life. The patches do not have a powerful influence, for the old is dominant. The patchwork Christian is no different than the non-Christian. All things have not become new, because he has not put on the bright new robe of the righteousness of Christ. He has only cut out a few patches to put on his old robe of self-righteousness.

Jesus was a radical to prevent this, and to preserve the new as distinct from the old. We are only truly Christian in the sense that Jesus meant when we let the old die. A true Christian is a revolutionary Christian, for the old has passed away, and all things are become new, and not just mended or modified. Next look at-

## II. PARABLE OF THE WINE.

Jesus again uses an example from common life that is so obvious no one can miss his point. No one does this He said. No one is so foolish they will risk the loss of their new wine by putting it into old wineskins. A new and radical faith cannot be held in old forms. The old forms just cannot hold the creative fermentation of the new faith. The new is active and expanding, and the old skins are hard and not flexible, and so they would burst. Jesus is saying that the new must not be mixed with the old, for the new can only survive by developing its own independent methods.

Paul lamented the fact that the foolish Galatians could not see this and were trying to pour to the

new wine of grace back into the old skins of the law. Christians are constantly doing this, and suppress the freedom of the spirit. This is the reason for the generation gap in the church. The older people who have lived well with their ideas expect the youth to conform. Like all conservatives they feel their wineskins are the best. What are good wineskins are good forever is how they feel.

Young Christians feel different. They have new ideas that are explosively relevant. The old skins cannot hold them, for the old skins are not flexible enough. Thus you have today as always the encounter of the new and the old. Those who hold the old forget that it was once new and radical. Those who believe the King James Version of the Bible is the best do not realize the controversy it stimulated when it first came out. The old does not stop to think that the church does not exist to promote the schemes of men, or the leaders of the past. We do not exist to preserve the conviction of any group. We exist to serve Christ, and to offer the world in His name the radical new garment of grace.

Where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Each generation is free, under the Holy Spirit, to use new methods to reach its generation with the Gospel. If the old methods are not flexible enough to be effective, then according to Jesus, one is foolish too pour the new wine into the old skins.

The paradox of these parables is that Jesus is being liberal for the sake of being conservative. He wants to keep away from the old and let it die in order to preserve the new. There are two kinds of conservatives, therefore, those who want to preserve the old, and those who want to preserve the new. The conservative who wants to preserve the new does so because he knows this is the only effective way to insure the progress of eternal truth. Those who preserve the old preserve only a fragment of the old old story. Eternal truth cannot be poured into any limited historical mold. It must be free to expand along with man's progress in every other area of life.

The true conservative who conforms to the conservatism of Christ is one who strives to keep the Gospel ever fresh, beautiful, and appealing. Anything that makes it appear old and shabby is to be set aside. Tennyson put it,

May freedom's oak forever live  
With stronger life from day to day;  
That man's the true conservative  
Who lops the moulder'd branch away.

The true conservative is a liberal who is constantly changing to keep the old old story relevant to his day. He does not point to the victories of the past as proof. He offers fresh fruit as evidence of the vitality of Christ in contemporary life.

What this means for us practically is this: we ought not to reject anything just because it is new. Much that is new is folly, but not because it is new, but because it comes out of man's old nature, and not a new nature filled with the fresh wine of the spirit. It is folly to say we have never heard of that before, or we never did that before. The Pharisees could say, we never heard of anyone being saved by free grace before apart from the law. So what? Is God bound by the limitations of man? Not at all! God is a perpetual revolutionary making all things new where ever He can. He will make a new heaven and a new earth. There is yet to come new bodies, new robes, new songs, in the New Jerusalem, and eternal new adventures. The changeless God has an every changing progressing plan

of newness. God never gets into a rut.

May God help us to be among those who do not sit and sigh for the good old days, but who rise and labor for good new days. George Buttrick has these words of challenge to us as conservative Christians. "A conservative which, for the sake of the future, safe guards the treasures of the past wins its crown. A conservative which denies the future, counting its little system as full and final truth, has blood upon its hands-the skyline of the ages is black with the cruel crosses it has raised." Let us be among the progressive conservatives who are always laboring with Christ to make all things new.

## **12. LOVER'S ARE WINNERS**

## **MARK 3:1-6**

Dr. Richard Selzer, the famous surgeon and author, in his book, *Taking The World In For Repairs*, tells about Interplast, which stands for International Plastic Surgeon, Incorporated. Since its founding in 1969, this organization has performed over ten thousand free operations on poor people in undeveloped countries. Dr. Selzer was part of a team of 20 surgeons and nurses who went to Peru for 2 weeks to patch up people who could never dream of affording a plastic surgeon.

This is indeed, a loving organization that meets the need that no one else is meeting in our world. But as loving as it is, it does not yet reach the level of agape love, which is unconditional giving. These surgeons give plenty, but their motive is still to get plenty in return. Dr. Selzer writes very honestly about the motives.

"The surgical residents have come for the experience of operating on great numbers of these deformities. Within two weeks they will have performed more of these operations than most surgeons will do in a lifetime. For some, it is the opportunity for virtue that we are seeking. Such opportunities are not without the element of self-aggrandizement. For still others it is the exhilaration of the exotic that beckons, or the lovely sense of camaraderie that is to be found in working together for a purpose we think high. Last, there is a need for human beings to challenge themselves. In surgery it is best done by tackling the most difficult of clinical situations and prevailing."

I am sure the people who have their bodies restored do not care what the motive is. They consider it an act of love. The world can be grateful for love on any level, and Christians too should be grateful that even millions of non-Christians have an humanitarian heart that does loving things for others. Maybe their motives are mixed, and maybe they do good for selfish reasons, but it is still better than doing evil. Most all that any person does, is done with mixed motives.

Jesus alone illustrates pure agape love. He heals with nothing to gain for Himself. In fact, in the healing miracle of this man with the shriveled hand, Jesus really had to reverse the usual doctor-patient arrangement. He had to pay to heal the man. It cost Jesus His peace of mind, for He became very angry at the stubborn hearts of the Jews who resented His healing on the Sabbath. He had to argue for His right to do good, and the end result was the Pharisees and the Herodians went out of the synagogue that day plotting how to kill Jesus.

Jesus gave up His reputation, and laid His life on the line just to heal a man's hand on the Sabbath. This was not a life-threatening problem. The man was not having a heart attack or choking on a piece of steak. He could have waited until the Sabbath was over to be healed. But Jesus was as stubbornly insistent that he be healed on the spot as the Pharisees were as stubbornly insistent that he not be healed on the Sabbath. This healing incident reveals the moral issue in the world of healing, and it makes clear there is a right and wrong side. This miracle thrusts us into the morality of healing, and establishes two basic principles: It is wrong to resist healing, and it is right to restore to health.

The Jewish leaders said, it is right to resist this man's healing. They said it is right because it is wrong to work on the Sabbath. They said the law was more important than this man's health, and that it should be respected and held sacred even if it means the man has to wait to be healed. Jesus took the other side and said it is right to restore this man now, for love takes precedent over the law. The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath. The law is to prevent evil, not good. It is a perversion of the law to use it to prevent good from happening. It is always right to do good on the Sabbath, or any other time, and to resist the doing of good, such as healing, is wrong.

Thus, the lines are drawn, and all the world is separated into two categories on this issue: The legalists and the lovers. The man with the withered hand is not the issue. Jesus could have put a robe on a cold child, or given a cup of cold water to a thirsty stranger, or anyone of a hundred acts of love, and the result would have been the same, for the issue is, which is to be the supreme loyalty of our lives, the law or love? Which you chose determines if you are a winner or a loser in the eyes of Christ. The legalist is a loser, and the lover is a winner. The successful Christian life is achieved by avoiding one, and being the other. Let's look at these two choices so we can learn to clearly identify them, and chose to be a winner.

## I. THE LOSERS.

The legalist is a loser because he rejects love as the supreme virtue, and puts law there instead. Paul says in I Cor. 13 that everything minus love equals nothing. It is zip, zero, absolutely nothing. The Pharisees would not buy this new math of grace. They said the law minus love is no loss. As long as the law is upheld, love is irrelevant. Love has its place, but it can never replace the law. Law is supreme.

The power of legalism to blind one to the light is nowhere more evident than with the Pharisees. They saw Jesus do miracle after miracle, and people rejoicing and praising God, but they were plotting to kill him as an enemy of God. How can this be? How can anyone be so blind to love? It is easy. All you have to do is put any value above love, and you are a prisoner of that value. They said it is evil to do good on the Sabbath. No matter how loving and compassionate it is, it is evil to do it on the Sabbath. So the love of Christ meant nothing, and neither did it mean anything that he could do miracles. All it matters to a legalist is that the rules be kept.

They had to see the joy on people's faces, and they had to hear their voices lifted in praise to God, but all this was mere background static. All they could see and hear was a big no no. Their rules were being broken.

Amos Wells has described how this man with a withered hand may have responded to his

healing.

"Praise God! Praise God! Give me my tools again!  
Oh, let me grasp a hammer and a saw  
Bring me a nail, and any piece of wood,  
Come, see me shut my hand and open it.  
And watch my nimble fingers twirl a ring,  
How good are solids! Oak, and stone, and iron,  
And rough and smooth and straight and curved and round!  
Here, Rachel: For these long and weary years  
My hand has ached to smooth your shining hair,  
And to touch your dimpled cheek. Come wife and see  
I am a man again, a man for work,  
A man for earning bread and clothes and home,  
A man, no more a bandaged cumberer.  
And did you hear them muttering at him?  
And did you see them looking sour at me?  
They'll cast me from the synagogue, perchance:  
But let them: I've a hand, a hand, a hand!  
And, ah, dear wife, to think he goes about  
So quietly, and does such things as this,  
Making poor half men whole.

The Legalist is not moved by this emotion of joy, for any joy gained at the expense of the law is illegitimate and not acceptable. Thus, the legalist is a loser in the judgment of Christ. All of us have some of the loser in us. All the record of the Pharisees and their blindness is not recorded for all time so posterity can look back and laugh at these ecclesiastical dinosaurs. This is recorded so men of all ages can see and identify the Pharisee in themselves. To the degree that any of us care more about anything rather than people, is the degree to which we are losers. The only way to stop being a loser is to become a lover.

Leighton Ford in the magazine, World Vision, gives a very contemporary illustration of the conflict between the legalism and love that can be in all of us. Life is full of civil wars because of this conflict. He writes, "A 16 year old girl once told me, 'my father is a leader in the anti-abortion forces back home in our state.' Then, her voice trembling, she said, 'what he doesn't know is that I had an abortion. And I can't tell him because when my brother made a serious mistake, my father threw him out of the house. If I tell him I've had an abortion, I'm afraid he'll do the same to me.' Yes, as Christians we must struggle with the issues facing the market place, the laboratory and the public square. But we must win more than arguments and political stands, we must also win people. We cannot change society without changing people's hearts." Many Christians have lost their own children because they chose legalism over love. Any of us can make this bad choice if the issue is one we have strong feelings about. Any of us can be the Pharisee on some issues. Now let's look at-

## II. THE LOVERS.

The lovers of the world are synonymous with the healers of the world. To love is to heal, for to

love is to care, and to act in such a way that healing is the result. Lovers are people people. They put people before power, possessions, or position. This makes the losers of the world mad, for they are often, as they were in the day of Jesus, the people with the power, possessions, and positions. Lovers and losers are usually in conflict. The people who made Jesus most angry in life were the legalistic losers who resisted loving and healing people, because it did not fit into their legalistic agenda.

In deliberately provoking these people by not waiting until the Sabbath was over, Jesus was making a strong statement. He was saying, "Lovers are to act and express their love, and not be restrained by the legalists who would try to limit their love, so as to force it to be submissive to legalism." The essence of idolatry is making the infinite subordinate to the finite. This is what the Pharisees were up to, and Jesus was angry. He refused to let His love be bound by their legalism. Anger is a virtue when it makes you a winner, and it does that when it motivates you to acts of love that overcome attitudes of resistance to love.

Abraham Lincoln was one of the great lovers of American history. He loved people intensely, and though he, like Jesus, was hated and attacked by those whose legalism resisted giving all people equality, he in anger went right ahead and did it anyway. He said, "I know there is a God, and that He hates the injustice of slavery. I see a storm coming, and I know that His hand is in it....I know I am right, because I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God." A detailed study of Lincoln reveals he had mixed motives in all he did to liberate the slaves, and in all he did to end the Civil War. But the fact remains, he was a lover. There has never been a President in our history who so fought to show mercy when the legalists were ever on his back to judge and condemn.

Lincoln spent a great deal of his time as President finding ways to pardon soldiers who would have been shot had he not spared them. He said one day to a visitor, "Tomorrow is butchering day, and I will not be interrupted until I have found excuses for saving the lives of these poor fellows." One young soldier who had deserted was to be shot, but Lincoln found in his record that he had been wounded. He said, "Scripture says that in the shedding of blood there is remission of sins. I guess we will have to let him off this time." Lincoln took a lot of flack for being a lover. It is one of the paradoxes of life that lovers have to suffer and endure conflict in order to be lovers.

Jesus created a civil war by His love for the sick. He refused to wait to do good. He healed people on the Sabbath because that is when He saw them in the synagogue. This led to the legalists plotting His death. But Jesus refused to halt His healing on the Sabbath. It was right and good, and His love went marching on.

Julian Ward Howe wrote her famous Battle Hymn Of The Republic for the Union Army, as they marched forward fighting for truth and love in the Civil War. They were marching to the rough popular song, John Brown's Body when she visited their camp in 1861. That night she slept soundly, but woke before dawn with this song in her mind. She wrote down the stanzas in the dark, and then went back to sleep. She wrote 5 stanzas, but most hymn books have only 4. The one left out is this:

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel;  
As ye deal with my contemness, so with you my grace shall deal.



Let the hero, born of woman, crush the serpent  
With His heal, since God is marching on.

The point is, the legalists and losers can make life miserable for the lovers, and even kill them, but the lovers will eventually win and crush the foe, for they are fighting for that which is ultimate, and God's will, and that for which He will keep the troops marching on to victory. America is a great nation because all of its major wars were fought as lovers against losers. We fought for liberty and equality, and for the freedom of people to determine their own destiny. We have fought against oppression, repression, and depression. I know enough to know our nation has not always been pure or perfect, but the reason we have been blessed of God is because we have always chosen to march against the legalists, and carry the banner of the lover.

Charles Colson was a legalist who became a lover. He never felt any of the things that he did in Watergate were wrong. They were all done according to the rules of the game of politics. He was playing according to the rules, and even if the rules were unloving, and hurt others, that was tough. When Chuck came to Christ, he ceased to be a legalist and a loser, and became a winner, because he learned to care more about people than the rules of politics. In love, he now reaches out to thousands of people in bondage, who are in prisons all over the world. He brings healing and love, and is now a winner because he is a lover.

The fascinating part about being a lover is that, not only does it make you a healer of others, it makes you the healer of yourself. Jesus had an enormous amount of stress, and yet we have no record of His being ill. He was exhausted and hungry, and He went through all the stress that anyone else would under His pressure, but He never became ill. Modern medicine has learned that the more loving we are, the less likely we are to become ill. Jesus was the greatest lover who ever walked the earth, and thus, the healthiest person as well.

Dr. Mack, a fifty year old surgeon at Swedish Medical Center in Seattle said, "It has been said that love cures people, both those who give it and those who receive it." Dr. Bernie Siegal, surgeon and professor of surgery at Yale Medical School writes, "If I told patients to raise their blood level of immune globulins or killer T-cells, no one would know how. But if I can teach them to love themselves and others fully, the same changes happen automatically. The truth is: Love Heals."

If you are into love, you are into healing. You can't escape it. God so made us that love has healing power in our bodies. Dr. David McClelland, of Harvard, has demonstrated this scientifically. He showed a film to a group of students that portrayed Mother Teresa caring for the poor in the streets of Calcutta. It was designed to inspire feelings of love and caring. He then checked their bodies and discovered an increase in the anti-body salivary IgA, which provides major protection against colds and upper respiratory infection. Then he showed a film on Attila The Hun, and their anti-body levels dropped. This study revealed that people who are friendly and interested in close loving relationships are healthier. Married men live longer than bachelors because they experience more love.

Dr. Blair Justice, professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston, and author of over 50 professional journal articles, goes so far as to say in his book, Who Gets Sick, that love may be more important to health than healthy living. He gives an enormous amount of evidence to support this. Hans Selye, the most quoted researcher on stress in the world, also

concluded that the healthiest people in the world are people who love others. The voices of authority in medicine and psychology are telling us, lovers live longer and healthier lives.

Lucy scorned Linus who just announced that he planned to be a doctor. "You can't be a doctor," she laughed, "because you don't love mankind." "I do so love mankind," said Linus, "its people I can't stand." The Pharisees loved mankind too, but they did not love this particular man, or other individuals that Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Their love was flawed. Jesus not only died for all mankind, He came to minister to obscure people even though it cost dearly. If we are not involved in loving specific people, we are playing the role of the loser.

When Jesus said love your neighbor as yourself, we had no idea it was the Great Physician giving a prescription for health, but that is exactly what it is. A loving life style is the healthiest life style. The doctors of the world are coming to the conclusion that the Great Physician had the best medicine of all. "He who loses his life saves it." The legalist clings to his life and refuses to share it. He will not break his rules for the sake of meeting another's need, and by so doing becomes a loser, for he loses his own life, and loses the chance to be a channel of life to others. The lover not only gives life to others, but by so doing, gets life for the self. The message of this miracle of Jesus is very simple: No matter what the cost, be a lover.

If Jesus was willing to pay any price, even the cost of His life, to heal, how much more should we be willing to be lovers at any cost. The legalist in us will find a thousand excuses to resist and hold back, and not try to win the lost. But our prayer should be that the lover in us will find just one reason to do it, and the one reason that can motivate us is this truth: Lovers are winners.

## **13. ACCEPTABLE ANGER**

## **MARK 3:1-7**

I had an awful temper as a child. When I was in first or second grade I broke a pool cue over the head of one of my brother's friends, and for years after I was reminded that I caused the scar on his forehead. My older brother came close to getting even worse. In one of our fights he picked me up and threw me down on the floor. In a rage of anger I grabbed the steel stove poker, and would have clobbered him had it not been for parental interference. Blood banks could triple their business if they could figure out how to prevent parents from preventing sibling violence.

I don't know how many doors my father had to fix because of my angry slamming of them, and yes, I was one of those kids who shouted at my parents in anger, "I hate you!" The point is, I didn't learn it all from TV, for it didn't exist then. I know from personal experience how anger can be filled with potential for evil and senseless destruction. In the process of maturing, and by growth as a Christian, I got over being a hot head, and gained control of my anger. This is the case with many, and even most Christians, but my question is, can we get so in control of our anger that we lose the value of being capable of anger?

Is it possible that we eliminate the vice of anger, but in so doing also eliminate the virtue of it? It is obviously not Christ like to be losing your temper and blasting people, and seeking revenge. But

on the other hand, it is also not Christ like to never be angry at the forces of evil. Jesus was the perfect man yet He got angry at the Pharisees for their hardness of heart that made them more concerned about their Sabbath legalism than the life of a fellow worshipper. So what we have in this same context is perfect illustrations of the two sides of anger-the awful anger of men, and the awesome anger of God.

The worse kind and the best kind of anger are illustrated right here side by side in verses 5 and 6. We want to focus on each in order to see the clear distinction, and thus, be able to channel our own anger in the proper direction. Let's look first at-

## I. THE AWFUL ANGER OF MEN. v. 6

This verse reveals the most wicked example of anger the world has ever seen. Here were good and godly men who were the religious and political leaders of God's people, and yet they let anger motivate them to plot the murder of the only perfect man who ever lived. This is depravity at its lowest depth. Anger is the worst emotion man is capable of, for it leads to the justifying of the murder of another human being. Cain in anger killed his brother Abel, and most murders every since have been motivated by anger. Every person in a state of anger is a potential killer, and, therefore, anger is the most dangerous of human emotions.

Anger is the emotion that led men to despise and reject Jesus, and then crucify Him. You look in vain to find a more dangerous emotion. But let me keep the paradox before you. Jesus was angry, and so we cannot lose sight of the fact that there can be value in this most dangerous of emotions. In 1899 a school teacher by the name of Billy Rankin was convinced that a certain hill in Idaho was filled with copper. He started to dig, and continued to do so for years. He left off from time to time to work in a saw mill to buy enough dynamite to keep blasting deeper into the earth. He dug for 50 years until he died. He poured his whole life into a hole in the ground, and found nothing of value.

It would seem equally futile to try and dig into the dark pit of this emotion of anger to find anything of value. But the fact is, there is treasure to mine from this pit that has produced so much evil. This emotion which can make us potentially among the worse of men is also a vital ingredient in the character of the best of men. This is a paradox if there ever was one. So as we look at the awfulness of anger I don't want you to forget it also has great potential for good.

The usual message about anger is that it is bad stuff, and so get rid of it. Paul in Eph. 4:31 says just that: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger...." In Col. 3:8 he says, "But now, you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." There are a lot of things that are just not appropriate for the Christian, and among them is anger. The Greek word Paul used in these two texts is the same Greek word Mark uses to describe the anger of Jesus. So we can forget trying to make a case for two different emotions, and pretend that righteous indignation is some sort of sanctified version of anger. Anger is anger, and whatever the cause or the consequences, it is the same emotion in the saint and the sinner. Christians do not have a specialized anger. It is the same anger they had as non-Christians. The emotion that Jesus felt was the same as that felt by Cain when he killed Able.

Paul is negative about it because anger in Christians is almost always just as bad a source of evil as it is in non-Christians. It is just a high risk emotion anyway you look at it, and the primary goal

of the Christian is to avoid it. You do not have to be a bad person to be a poor handler of the emotion of anger. Some of the best people in history have failed to control their anger. Moses made God mad because of his hot temper, and he was shut out of the promise land because of it. Jonah, one of the best known prophets in the Bible, was a temper-tantrum prophet, and has a terrible reputation because of it. James and John, two of the three closest disciples to Jesus, were such hot heads that Jesus had to rebuke them and calm them down or they would have been guilty of homicide against the Samaritans. The best of people as well as the worse of people can have a problem with anger control.

Paul wrote to Christians, "Be ye angry and sin not." It was also to Christians that Paul wrote in Eph. 4, "Never go to bed angry, don't give the devil that sort of foothold." The point is, Christians do this and let Satan trip them up all the time in the area of anger. It is the sin of the most morally upright and other wise outstanding Christians. Joyce Landorf in *The Fragrance Of Beauty* is one of the famous Christians who admitted her battle with anger.

She was a hot head who often lost her temper, and she was a mother-monster. Not as a non-Christian, but as a Christian. She was 5 foot 6 inches tall before she became a Christian, and 5 foot 6 inches tall after she became a Christian. She had the emotion of anger before she came to Christ, and she had it after she came to Christ. She was a Christian for 15 years and still had her inner fire. The problem was not in having the fire. The problem was that the fire had her. She was not using it, but it was using her.

She realized that a Christian woman should not be having temper tantrums, and so she worked at control and she grew. But the point I am making is that Christians have this battle. It is not won by coming to Christ. There is a lot to do in Christ to learn anger control. Paul Hauck in his book *Overcoming Frustration And Anger* says that the single greatest cause for divorce is anger. Yes, there is money, sex, in-laws, jealousy, job stress, and dozens of other factors. It is anger over these things that destroys the marriage. If people did not get so angry, all of these things could be worked out. Awful anger multiplied by two equals disaster. The world and the church are both damaged by the awful anger of men.

Will Rogers said, "People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing." Anger is often far more hurtful than the injury that caused the anger. We could go on and on about the awful anger of men, but we need to shift gears and figure out how our Lord could have anything to do with an emotion that is so awful. So let's look at our second point which is-

## II. THE AWESOME ANGER OF GOD.

The anger of Jesus here is the anger of the God-man. It is human anger, but it is Godlike, and thus, not a vice but a virtue. It is a part of the very holiness of God. C. S. Lewis in the *Narnia* tales says, "Aslan is not a tame lion." The lion, of course, represents Christ. For God not to be angry at sin, cruelty, and injustice would be to deny his very essence. It would be like a bride not being angry at one who threw mud pies at her wedding gown. It would be like a surgeon not being angry at one who put all his surgical equipment in a pail of bacteria infested slime. It would be like anybody not being angry at one who deliberately violates their being and values.

The person who does not have the capacity to be angry at such evil has gone to the opposite

extreme, and does not murder the evil one, but murders the Spirit of God. The Bible calls it quenching the Spirit, but it is a form of murder, for it kills the Spirit of God and eliminates the will of God from the conflict, and lets evil have the victory. For Jesus to have said, "I'm sorry fellas, I didn't mean to upset your traditions by healing this brother on the Sabbath," would have been to choose evil rather than good. That would have been sin for Jesus. He would have lost His state of perfection had He not gotten angry at these men. To be indifferent to the need, and to walk away saying, "I must conform to their hardness of heart," would have been to forsake the will and love of God. The only way Jesus could avoid sin was to become angry and to defy their evil attitude.

Some Christians worry that Jesus was bordering on sin by getting angry, when the fact is, He would have fallen into sin had He not become angry. So we see this emotion, which is the worst of human emotions, as the best emotion that is possible in certain settings. Jesus could not remain sinless without anger, just as God the Father could not remain holy without it. How does this awesome power of anger differ from the awful power of anger we considered first? It is really quite simple to grasp as we compare them in this text. Awful anger leads to evil, but awesome anger leads to good.

The anger of the Pharisees led them to plot murder. To do this they had to lie, deceive, bribe, and break the law, and who knows what other evils? The awful anger of men is known by its fruit, which is rotten fruit. In contrast, the awesome anger of God, which is seen in the righteous anger of those who walk in His Spirit, leads to good. Jesus did not ask Simon the Zealot to revert to his old ways and put a dagger in a couple of his enemies. Jesus did not do anything to His enemies. Good anger is not interested in revenge, but in doing what is right and just. The anger of Jesus compelled Him to heal the man, and to go on healing every chance He got. Henry Ward Beecher said, "A man that does not know how to be angry does not know how to be good."

Unrighteous anger is self-centered. It says, "I'm going to get him for doing this to me." Righteous anger is other-centered. It says, "I'm going to help this man even if it hurts me." The focus is altogether different. When Paul said, "Be ye angry and sin not," he was saying the emotion of anger is as natural as the feeling of hunger. Anger just is. It is not good or evil in itself. We make choices as to which way our anger goes. We decide if our anger is going to be evil or good. If we chose to let it motivate us to do harm, it becomes evil, and we sin. If we let it motivate us to do what is helpful, it becomes a force for good, and we sin not.

Anger then is like any other energy source. You can use it for good or evil just as is the case with fire. You can become an arsonist with it and destroy houses and forests, or you can become a furnace installer to warm the home and comfort people. Energy is just the power that is used to express love or hate. Anger is a power source that both love and hate can use. The Pharisees used anger to express hatred, and Jesus used anger to express love. Anger then is just energy, and you decide whether it will be used for good or evil-the worst or the best emotion.

Secker said, "He that would be angry and sin not, must not be angry with anything but sin." Jesus was angry with the sin of the Pharisees and nothing else. Anger at sin is always right, for it is Godlike. But it is possible for even this kind of just anger to lead us to make wrong choices. If Jesus would have said to His disciple Simon the Zealot, "I want you to follow these Pharisees and use your old skills and sink a dagger into a couple of them in a narrow alley. This will let the scoundrels know that I won't tolerate their opposition any longer," then Jesus would have been

choosing to make His anger a force for evil, and He would have been as guilty as they were.

Jesus did not chose to let His anger go that direction. In fact, as you read this chapter of Mark, and come to verse 22, you see the teacher of the law accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub. Jesus could have been so angry, but instead He warns them so they could escape this eternally deadly trap they were so close to choosing. Jesus does not want revenge, but He wants them to be saved, and not to perish by committing the unforgivable sin. Evil anger would leave them in the dark, and let them stumble into the pit of eternal darkness. Righteous anger does everything possible to save the sinner even as it hates the sin. Evil anger says, "I'll make you pay forever for being rotten to me." Righteous anger says, "As rotten as you are I will not let evil have you forever, but make the way clear so you can escape its clutches."

The awesome anger of God is the power behind the whole plan of salvation. God will not let Satan win and drag the human race to hell with him. He provides a way of escape, and in love makes it possible for His enemies to become a part of His eternal family. The test of all anger is simple: Does it lead you to do the hateful and revengeful thing? If so, then it is evil. Does it lead you to do the loving and helpful thing? If so, then it is good. Anger is neither good nor evil. You determine that by the choices you make.

It is like lust, or sexual energy. It is a source of power to motivate you to action. You decide if you will use the power to do what is out of God's will or within His will. You choose to use this energy to do harm to the institution of marriage, or to help it be all God wants it to be. The energy just is; you choose to make it good or evil, and so it is with the energy generated by anger. Sometimes we can only be truly righteous, as Jesus was here, by getting angry. The absence of anger in some situations is not a sign of a good man, but rather of a hardened man.

David became very angry when the prophet Nathan told about the rich man with great flocks who took the poor man's one pet lamb and killed it, and his anger was just, for it was a great evil to be angry about. But Nathan was illustrating David's own sin of taking the one wife of Uriah when he had a harem of wives. Had David been angry at this evil, as he was of the stolen lamb, his anger would have kept him from the sin. Anger at what sin does to you as well as others will keep you from sinning. His lack of anger led him to adultery and murder. So we have come full circle. Anger can lead to murder, and lack of anger can lead to murder. The only solution to these two extremes is the Christ like anger that hates all evil, and keeps us motivated to a life of loving action that is perpetually counteracting the consequences of sin.

One of the highest degrees in the school of spirituality is the Master of Anger. Prov. 16:32 says, "Better is the man who controls his anger than one who takes a city." To master your own anger is to be a general and a hero in the army of the Lord's disciples. You master it, not by eliminating it, but by channeling it so that it is energy put to good use for the kingdom of God. If you are never angry, you will not have much energy for the kingdom, and so getting rid of anger is not the answer, but learning to channel it is. Get rid of anger when you feel it compelling you to acts that are not loving, and which will damage rather than heal relationships. But if you feel your anger compelling you to acts of love and helpfulness, then be angry and sin not. Let the fire burn and bring warmth to those around you.

Most anger is going to burn you and others, and is, therefore, to be dropped like a hot match

about to reach your finger. But some anger will move you to give your energy to bring healing and blessing, and enable you to outwit the forces of evil. This anger is good, and ready to accomplish a task without risk of doing injury. Anger is a part of life, and all of us need to deal with it wisely, or it will become an enemy and never a friend. It was always a friend to Jesus because he never let it push him in a direction He did not want to go.

Many write of the anger that comes to them when they see a loved one have to endure long suffering. They get angry at God and the medical profession for not solving the problem. They get mad at the loved one who is dying for putting them through this ordeal, and because they didn't take care of themselves. They finally get angry at themselves for feeling so angry at everybody. The result of all this hostility is often a victory for evil over the person who goes through all this. If they survive, they may be bitter resentful people who become an added burden to their family and society. There is plenty of this going on all the time, and anger is doing its dirty work non-stop. But the other side is also alive and well, and the fact is, most of the good things done in this world to help the victims of sin and folly come from people who are angry, and use this energy for good.

Cindy Lightner was devastated by the loss of her 13 year old daughter who was killed by a drunken driver. Her grief became an intense flame of anger at a society that would tolerate drunk drivers on the road. She could have gotten a rifle, and gone to an overpass, and started to shoot drivers as they approached her. That is what anger does to some. But she formed the Mother's Against Drunk Drivers called MADD. This group has channeled their anger into constructive ways of changing the system to save other people. Their goal is not revenge for their loss, but prevention of the loss of others. Their anger has changed laws and saved lives. It is this kind of anger we see in Jesus, and we can thank God for this anger, and others like it, which change our world for the better. Thank God for acceptable anger.

## **14. POSITIVE ESCAPISM**

## **MARK 3:7-12**

Some of history's greatest battles have been won by means of retreat. The 13 colonies won the first day of battle with England in the Revolutionary War because of a wise retreat. When Captain John Parker saw several hundred British Redcoats marching on the double toward his 70 or so minute men, forming a line on the Lexington Green, he knew at once he was facing a disaster. They had vowed earlier never to run from the British, but Parker realized there is a time for everything, and now was the time to run. He shouted, "Disperse, you men! Do not fire. Disperse!" They made a hasty retreat into the countryside. Paul Revere and others took off warning the people that the British were coming.

The result of this strategic retreat was that only a few Americans were killed in that first encounter. By the time the British were marching toward Concord the Americans were prepared. The British were shocked that these untrained farmers could shoot. The British suffered 250 casualties, and the Americans suffered less than 100. It was a day of victory because of a Captain who knew the wisdom of withdrawal. The Captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus, demonstrated this same wisdom in His conflict with His foes.

Take note of the context of our text. In Mark 3:6 it says, "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus." The kid gloves were coming off. No more games. They were in a conspiracy to murder this miracle worker. Homicide was their only solution for the solving of the mystery of a man like Jesus.

It is in the light of this context that we read verse 7: "Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the lake." The Greek word for withdrew is *anachoreo*, and it caught my attention because Matthew uses the same word in telling this account of the reaction of Jesus to the plot to kill Him. The word is most often used to refer to a retreat, and a getting away from a dangerous situation. Jesus is not ready for a showdown, nor does He have any macho need to prove His courage by courting death. Instead He retreats from the city, and escapes the clutches of those who seek to kill Him.

By so doing Jesus makes it clear that there is a time to take your stand, and there is also a time to retreat from your enemy so that you can be in control, and not at the mercy of the enemies choices. This same word is used to describe the withdrawal of the wise men in Matt. 2:12. They took a new route home to their country to escape Herod. Were they cowards by this retreat and refusal to face up to the wrath of Herod? Not at all. They would have been fools to die for no cause, and they would have done just that had they not taken the way of escape.

It is not only right to flee from evil men to avoid their anger and evil schemes, it is a Christian obligation. To cooperate with evil by letting evil men kill you when you can escape is folly. The wise men are heroes because they escaped and outwitted Herod. The same word is used also in Matt. 2:14 where Joseph took the Christ child and Mary, and departed to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. Joseph did not stay and fight for his right to have a son who would grow up to be a king. He ran away. There is such a thing as positive escapism. We almost always think of escapism as negative. It is a refusal to face reality, and a fleeing from reality. But the fact is, there is some reality that it is wise and right to escape from. There is the deadly reality that evil men will do you harm and even kill you, and it is not usually God's will that you die at the hands of evil men.

The theme of positive escapism runs all through the Bible.

Noah escaped the evil world and the flood.  
Lot escaped from Sodom.  
Israel escaped from Egypt.  
Jonah escaped from the whale.  
Daniel escaped from the lion's den.  
His friends escaped from the fiery furnace.  
David escaped from Saul.  
Job escaped by the skin of his teeth and lived.  
Peter escaped from prison and Herod's wrath.  
Paul escaped from the Jews in the night.  
All believers have escaped the judgment of God in Christ.

The greatest escape artist of all is Jesus. In John 10:39 we read that in a context where the Jews were trying to stone Him, "They tried to seize Him, but He escaped their grasp." On another occasion Dr. Luke tells of the mob spirit that arose so that the Jews dragged Jesus to the hill on which Nazareth was built, and were about to throw Him over the cliff to snuff out His life, but Luke



4:30 records, "But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way." The crowning event was when Jesus did finally decide to lay down His life and be taken captive by the power of death. Then came the grand finale; an event that Houdini could only dream of: Jesus escaped from the clutches of death, and rose again in triumph. He became the way of escape from sin, death, and hell, for all who will trust Him as Savior.

Positive escapism is the very essence of salvation. It is the goal of God for all His people. The ideal life is the life where there is perpetual escape from reality. It is folly to think that all reality is somehow good. This has led to the corruption of the media. People curse God and profane all that is noble and precious. Therefore, because this is part of reality it must be made a part of all our entertainment. The same logic is used to justify all manner of evil being displayed because it is part of reality. The Bible says this is the very part of reality the Christian is to escape.

The Bible fully agrees with the thesis that sexual temptation and the temptation to break every commandment of God is a basic part of reality. But it has a different answer as to how we are to deal with it. The world says exploit it and experience it, but the Bible says to escape it. Paul in his well known words of I Cor. 10:13 says, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." Here is the recognition of the reality of our being subject to all the temptations of a fallen world, but here is also the recommendation that you take the way of escape that God provides.

The Christian who is not into escapism is a Christian who is a victim rather than a victor. There is no way for the Christian to conquer all evil. He has to retreat from it and gain his victory by escape. Like Jesus, we must withdraw from the battlefield when it will only give evil the advantage. The Christian who thinks he can stand up to evil and win the battle is often the Christian who falls. It is he who stands who is to beware lest he fall. Why? Because his very stand may be his biggest mistake. It is more often the wiser strategy not to stand, but to flee. Paul gives this advice over and over.

In I Cor. 6:18 he told them to flee fornication.

In I Cor. 10:14 he told them to flee idolatry.

In I Tim. 6:10 he told Timothy to flee from love of money.

In II Tim 2:22 he told Timothy to flee youthful lusts.

There is just no escape from the reality of positive escapism in the Bible. Those who refuse to practice this Biblical escapism end up as victims of reality rather than victors over reality. You can't escape the need for positive escapism. It is wise; it is good, and it is right. It is also Christ like. He practiced positive escapism, and He expects His disciples to do the same. Peter makes this clear in II Peter 1:4, "...He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

Escapism is a vital part of the Christian life. Like Jesus, we need to practice the wisdom of withdrawal. Instead of charging the enemy, or trying to make a stand against the onslaught, we need to retreat. We have stressed the point that greater is He that is within you than he that is in the world to the point where Christians are often presumptuous. They think they can face any foe and not be injured. This leads them to fight according to the enemies game plan, and they often fall. Jesus, by

His example, teaches us to develop our own strategy, and if retreat is to our advantage, then we are to do it. He was not ready to confront the wrath of man, and so he escaped. The Christian has no obligation to suffer at the hands of those who plot evil. Preventing evil from succeeding is more noble and heroic than submitting to it.

If we explore just this one chapter of Mark, we see Jesus practicing the excellence of escapism over and over. In verse 9 we see Jesus preparing His disciples to have a boat ready so He could escape the pressure of the crushing crowd. Here is an example of very practical positive escapism. Jesus could see that the circumstances were shaping up to produce a problem. The mob could be dangerous, and He could be crushed by their enthusiasm, or be so surrounded that He could not have an effective ministry to them. He had to plan for a way to escape this negative circumstance, and keep open the door of opportunity.

Many times we assume that the sovereignty of God means that we must accept everything that is as His will. Not so! The reality of a fallen world is, that even those who mean well can spoil things, and we need to be aware of what can go wrong, and make a plan for a way of escape from negative circumstances. Jesus had foresight, and could see what might develop that could be a problem, and He had a plan to escape that problem if it arose. He did not just expect God to solve all his problems without any thought or planning on his part.

History shows us that when the good guys do not have a good plan the enemy can win. Peter Marshall in his book *The Light And The Glory* has a fascinating account of the American invasion of Canada during the Revolutionary War. We do not have the time to detail this great historical folly, but everything went wrong. There was no plan to escape all the things that could go wrong, and the result was a nightmare for the American soldiers. Many died from sheer exhaustion and lack of supplies.

They ate their dogs, leather boots, and even their cartridge boxes. By the time they arrived to attack Quebec they were a pitiful lot. All the officers were killed in seconds, and they were without leadership and had to surrender. The whole fiasco was over in a few moments, and the entire American force of 400 men was taken prisoner. Those who fail to plan, plan to fail, and this goes for the good guys as well as the bad. If Christians expect to escape negative circumstances, they have to follow their Lord and plan for a way of escape.

In verse 12 we see Jesus giving orders to the evil spirits not to tell who He was. Jesus had to escape being accepted by everyone as the Messiah, or He never would have been crucified. So in order to assure He would go to the cross for us, He had to hold back the storm of popularity that could have spoiled that plan. The worst thing the evil forces could have done was get Jesus so popular with all men that He no longer had enemies who would kill Him. Jesus had to escape from their plot to destroy His own plan of dying for the sin of the world.

In verses 13-19 He escapes the loneliness of being the Messiah by choosing 12 to be with Him. He also by this method escapes the dying of His movement with His own death by having disciples to carry on His plan.

In verse 20 we are reminded again of why Jesus had to escape the crowds. They could not even eat because the place was so packed.

In verses 22-30 Jesus is engaged in argument with the teachers of the law over the source of His power to cast out demons. They say it is by the power of Beelzebub the prince of demons. Jesus escapes this accusation by the logic of pointing out that a house divided against itself cannot stand. He also warns them to beware of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness is man's ultimate escape from all sin and evil, but there is no escape for this sin. Escaping is the goal Jesus has for all men, and He wants even His worse enemies to escape the consequences of their sin and folly, and so He warns them to avoid this path of no escape.

If Jesus would have had a spirit of revenge, He could have let them walk this path to their own destruction, but He warns them, for He wants all to escape. Escapism is the very essence of His ministry. He taught, that men might escape the darkness of ignorance. He healed, that men might escape the bondage to sickness. He died, that men might escape the slavery to sin. Everything Jesus did He did to provide a way of escape. Christianity is a way of escape from the reality of a fallen world, and fallen nature that is out of God's will. To escape the world, the flesh, and the devil is what Christian living is all about.

In about 250 A.D. Cyprain of Carthage wrote a letter to his friend Donatus. Listen to a portion of that letter that has survived the centuries.

"This seems to be a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden under the shadow of these vines. But if I climbed some great mountain and looked out over the wide lands you know very well what I would see. Brigands on the high roads, pirates on the seas, in the amphitheaters men murdered to please applauding crowds, under all roofs misery and selfishness. It is really a bad world, Donatus, and incredibly bad world. Yet in the midst of it I have found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasures of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians-and I am one of them."

To be in the world but not of it is Christian escapism. By thinking ahead and planning; by avoiding and by retreating, the Christian is to rob the forces of evil of their victories. The time came when Jesus no longer withdrew, but put Himself in the hands of His enemies. Even then the goal was that He might die for us and make a way of escape that is permanent, and gain a victory over all the forces of evil forever. The goal of all Jesus did was positive escapism. Let us be thankful, and follow our Lord in practicing in our own life the value of positive escapism.

## **15. PRIVACY**

## **MARK 3:7-21**

Jean Paul Sartre in No Exit has three characters in the play who are one by one ushered into hell. To their surprise it is not a place of punishment. There are no demons torturing and inflicting pain. They are left in a moderate size room with a few articles. There are no windows or mirrors, but only each other to look at. They are, at first, quite pleased with their good fortune. But then it dawned

on them, none of them had eyelids. They were condemned to live forever with their eyes open, and under the gaze of one another. "It is a life without a break." This endless lack of privacy was their hell.

The lack of privacy was part of the cost that Jesus paid to be the Messiah. He descended into hell in His death, but He also did so in great measure when He left heaven and descended to live the life of a man in a fallen world. Aristotle said, "The ideal man is his own best friend, and takes delight in privacy." Jesus was the ideal man and He loved privacy. But He had to fight for it, and live an unusual life style to get it. The only two ways that Jesus succeeded in getting some privacy was by getting up early and going off by Himself to pray, or by getting in a boat and going out into the sea of Galilee. But then He was still with His disciples, and so Jesus had a hard time being alone.

In Mark 6:32 Jesus departed into a desert place privately. He thought by going to a remote place He could be alone, but the people ran around the lake on foot, and when Jesus landed the crowd was there already waiting for Him. That is when He had compassion and fed the 5000. Imagine trying to get away from it all and ending up hosting 5000 for supper, and all of them unexpected guests!

In our study of Mark 3 we discover we are in Mark's crowd chapter. He uses two words to refer to the vast crowds around Jesus 5 times in this chapter. He nowhere again refers to the crowds so often, even though Jesus is in the midst of crowds all through this Gospel. The crowd here, however, is very specifically described as nowhere else. It is unique and impressive. The popularity of Jesus had spread across the land. Jesus was no local preacher, but had national and even international fame. The crowd from Galilee in the North was joined by many from Judea in the South. They were coming from Maine to Florida is what we would say using our geography. From one end of the country to the other people were flocking to Jesus. Mark adds, from Jerusalem, to show that though the leaders of Israel were out to kill Jesus, the people saw Jesus as a friend. Sometimes people know more than their leaders.

Mark adds that people came from Idumea and the region across the Jordan. It is surprising to note that this is the only place in the New Testament where Idumea is used. It is the land of the sons of Esau; the land of the Edomites, the traditional enemies of Israel. Yet the fame of Jesus had spread across the Jordan to those people, and they came over the Jordan to expand the massive crowd that followed Jesus. Finally, Mark records that the people also came from Tyre and Sidon, the two great cities of the Phoenicians. The crowds were a mixed multitude of both Jews and Gentiles.

There was no discrimination in the ministry of Jesus. He healed people of all races and nations. He was a friend to all, and He died for all. Jesus is getting a taste of what He will experience in eternity. In Rev. 7:9 we read, "...there was before me a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne." John goes on to say they were shouting, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." Jesus will be popular forever among people's of all the world. We see it already in His life on earth in this crowd chapter of Mark. Jesus was the most popular person of His day, and He will be the most popular person for all eternity. There was a price to pay for this popularity, however, and that price was loss of privacy.

This is one of the costs involved in the motto, we will follow the Lord to win the lost at any cost.

We tend to think in terms of time and money, but these are even easier to give up than to give up privacy. But this is what it takes to break down the walls between the Christian and the world in order to reach the world. Billy Graham learned this, and it is a major price he had to pay to be used of God. "Billy is often asked, "Does being a public figure bother you?" "Yes," replies the evangelist. "One of the most difficult things I have had to face was the loss of personal privacy. I did not seek the publicity, and how it all came about I truthfully don't know. I'd much rather be the minister of a small parish somewhere, but Ruth I and decided long ago that as it was this way, we'd go ahead with it. Years before I discovered that if your wife is behind what you are doing, the path becomes much smoother."

Graham often comes home after a long time away in crusades, and even though he lives in the mountains, tourists find him and he has to visit with them. But over the years he has led scores of individuals to Christ in his own study. In every eight hour period there are fifty long distance phone calls to his home. This, of course, is beyond human endurance, and so most of them are diverted to assistants. He has to eat alone because if he tries to eat in public he is recognized, and people want to express their gratitude and get his autograph. It may sound glamorous, and we all think we would love such attention, but the fact is, it gets old very fast, and is a burden rather than a blessing. When Graham tried to visit Disneyland he had to give up in half an hour, and when he took his son to the New York World's Fair they only got to three pavilions before the friendly mob made it impossible to go on.

The price Graham has paid to win the lost is his privacy, and that is no small price. Every once in awhile he says to his associate T. W. Wilson, "Wouldn't it be a tremendous relief just to have a little pastorate and preach three sermons on Sunday and visit a few people, and see lots of our families and play plenty of golf?" Envy is a two way street, and many who envy Graham are also envied by him. It is a heavy price to pay when you have to sacrifice your privacy to serve Christ. But that is the price Jesus paid to save us. Once He began His public ministry Jesus was seldom able to find privacy. His life was so hectic that His family seriously felt He was having mental problems from the stress of it. Verse 20 says the crowd so filled the house where He was that He and His disciples were not even able to eat. What a reverse of the feeding of the 5000. There He fed the crowd, and here the crowd is keeping them from being fed. Jesus did not feed every crowd, and here was a case where He was so busy He didn't even feed Himself.

The next verse tells us His family was fed up with the whole business of His perpetual business with the crowds. They came to restrain Him, for they said He was out of His mind. If your son or brother worked from morning to night day after day dealing with masses of people pushing and shouting, and trying to get near Him, and He was so dedicated He didn't even eat right, or get His rest, what would you think? I have a hunch most of us would say, "Son, you must be out of your mind." They didn't know that He only had a short time to live, and He just as well use His strength in service rather than conserve it for no good reason. Jesus was burning the candle at both ends, for there was no end to the human needs about Him, and He knew He was going to die in the prime of life. But for those who loved Him, He was running a 24 hour three ring circus, and they felt He was losing it and cracking up.

The fact is, Jesus did experience a lot of stress, and when His disciples were able to stay awake and keep going, He needed to sleep. He would send them into town for supplies, and He would stay by the well and rest. Jesus pushed Himself to the limit, but He did not demand the same from His

disciples. He would rise and pray long before their day began, and He did not scold them for not rising with Him. His plan was not that they all die at 33, but live on to spread the Gospel to all the world. Jesus did not expect any of His followers to burn out in 3 years, so there are some things that Jesus did that are not for our example. If you know you are going to die in the prime of life, then it would be legitimate to be fanatical and burn the candle at both ends, but Jesus does not demand that of us.

Jesus is our example in the area of privacy. There are two things He did in relationship to privacy that are guidelines for all Christians. He searched for privacy, and He sacrificed privacy. This sounds paradoxical that He would both search for it and sacrifice it, but this is what the record shows. It is part of the whole battle for balance in the ideal life, and Jesus was able to keep that balance by both finding and giving up His privacy. We want to look at each side of this struggle, and start with-

## I. HIS SEARCH FOR PRIVACY.

Jesus taught His disciples to enter into their closets to pray, and to not be like the hypocrites who love to pray in public and make it a matter of public display. God hears the private prayers of believers and rewards them. Public prayer is a high risk practice, for it leaves you open to pride. We never see Jesus praying in public except to give thanks for food, and for the raising of Lazarus. He only prayed very brief sentence prayers, and not once did He give a lengthy prayer in public. The only long prayer we have of Jesus is the one in John 17, which was given in the upper room with only His disciples present. This is a comforting fact for many Christians, for they do not feel comfortable in public prayer. There is no New Testament goal of trying to get Christians to learn to pray in public. The goal of Jesus is that we learn to pray privately, and this is what He practiced Himself.

I remember A. W. Tozer saying that he felt it was very unbiblical and wrong for any person to tell another person to lead us in public prayer. Prayer is a matter between an individual and God, and is not to be assigned at the whim of someone else. I have done it, as have many of you, but the point is, there is nothing Biblical about it. It is just a popular custom. Jesus always sought to be alone, and to pray in private. We do not even see Him calling for small group prayer with His disciples. Alfred North Whitehead said, "Religion is solitariness and if you are never solitary you are never religious." In other words, it is in privacy that you validate your religious faith. The person who only has a public faith has no faith at all, for it is mere show. If a person is only publicly religious, he is a hypocrite, for his religion has only the intent to please men and not God. The religious faith of such a person is nothing more than an act, and has nothing to do with a relationship to God. A relationship to God by its very nature has to be private.

There is the social side to religious faith as well, but it is much ado about nothing if there is no private foundation. If you do not love God, loving your neighbor is of no value religiously, even though it has humanistic value. All that Jesus did for man grew out of his private and personal relationship to God, and commitment to do the Father's will. Mark tells us in vv. 13-19 of how Jesus went up into the hills to get away from the crowd to appoint his 12 Apostles. Dr. Luke tells us he spent the night in private prayer before he did this. The disciples came to Jesus privately on a number of occasions to ask him to clarify his teaching in his parables. Jesus had to spend a lot of time with his 12 disciples in private and closed sessions to keep them ahead of the masses of

disciples who followed him.

The example of his life teaches us this: You have to develop your private relationship to God to be all you can be spiritually. There is no substitute for this private devotion. Now we do not know precisely what Jesus did in his private time because they were private and not open to even the Gospel writers. He prayed is about all we know. But the very secrecy and silence on this issue gives a loud message. Private devotion is to be private. It is personal and individual and does not have to conform to anyone else's practice or conviction. That which blesses many leaves me cold. I have never once been able to enjoy devotions by reading a chapter out of a devotional book. I gave that up in college and developed my own method for devotions. I share this because I know many feel guilty because they cannot seem to develop a devotional time that corresponds with what they have read and been told. My advice is to find a way to learn of God, and relate to Him that fits your personality and schedule. It is a private matter and will not be meaningful until it fits who you are. Now, let's look at the other side-

## II. THE SACRIFICE OF HIS PRIVACY.

Jesus refused to become a religious loner who forsakes society to go off into the desert to pray and meditate, and to spend His life relating to God alone. The monk finds no example in our Lord. He was a social Savior, and He gave up a major portion of His private life to seek, save, and to serve the lost. He sometimes had to give up more than He wanted to, or even intended to. Once He became a public figure He often lost His choice, just as we have seen with Billy Graham. Jesus tried to get away and could not. He sought for privacy and did not find it.

In Gethsemane Jesus was involved with the intimate spiritual struggle of His life with His heavenly Father, and He wanted His disciples to watch and stand guard over His privacy. He was greatly disappointed that they fell asleep, and could not watch with Him even one hour to assure He would not be interrupted. Jesus gave up more even than what was necessary because of the impossibility of regulating human choices. The crowds, and even His disciples, did not always cooperate, and He could not leave them free and still control their choices. The result was that Jesus sacrificed His privacy, not only willingly, but also by the necessity of circumstances beyond His control. By so doing Jesus has fully identified with the stress filled life of the popular public figure. He sacrificed His private life for the sake of a public cause greater than His privacy.

It is not only Billy Graham that needs to see this, but all Christian workers who feel the pressure and wonder if the sacrifice of so much of their private life is worth it to serve the cause of Christ. Ledia Munsell shares the experience of five girls who were on their first vacation together two years after their graduation. They were all busy workers with people, and this is how their conversation developed.

"I dearly love my work," said one of them,  
"But sometimes it seems to me I would give  
anything to get away from people awhile. I  
never have a quiet moment to myself. There  
is always someone who wants to see me. Do  
the rest of you ever feel that way?"  
"Oh, yes," said one; and "Yes," sighed another,

"I feel as though I would like to go off to a desert island where I would not see a soul." Then Mary Vaine spoke. "I know just how you feel. I have felt the same way. But when it seems to me I can not stand it any longer I think of how the throngs followed Jesus. He never turned any away. He must have been very weary at times, But He was never impatient with the crowd. That thought has helped me so often." There was silence for a moment, then the first speaker said, "I had not thought of that, but it does help."

When you are giving up time in Christian service that you could be giving to achieve personal and family goals, remember, that is the price Jesus paid. He does not expect us to burn out in three years like He did, but He does expect that all who follow Him be willing to make some sacrifice of privacy. Nobody can do it all, and that is why Jesus chose the 12. They could not do it all either. Nobody and no group can meet the needs that are endless, but all can do a share of sacrificing to serve the cause of Christ.

It is a busy world, and life is full of more than any of us can do. We have to sacrifice every day out of necessity, just because we are not ten people. But the issue we need to focus on in the light of our Lord's example is this: How much do we search for privacy, and how much of the world do we give up to develop our relationship with God? How much do we sacrifice our privacy to give our life to the public causes of the kingdom of God? To love God with all our heart is to seek privacy. To love our neighbor as ourselves is to sacrifice privacy. I challenge you to evaluate your Christian life in the light of this truth, for to truly be a disciple of Christ involves the seeking and sacrificing of your privacy.

## **16. PUZZLING APPOINTMENTS**

## **MARK 3:13-19**

Jamie Buckingham is one of the great preachers and authors whose books have sold in the millions. What I like about him is that he makes so many comical blunders in his ministry that he makes other pastors feel less threatened by their human errors. If you sometimes feel like your life is a comedy of errors, you will be relieved to know you are not alone. In one solemn service where he was piously leading his people to a point of silence, he bowed and heard laughter rippling across his congregation. It suddenly dawned on him as his mind replayed what he had just said: "Please bow your eyes and close your heads."

On another occasion he was to officiate at a formal wedding, and he came into the sanctuary directly from the restroom. He did not realize until he was in front of all those people that stuck to his shoe and trailing behind was a eight foot stream of toilet paper. Seldom to never is this fitting for formal occasions, regardless of the beauty of the pattern. Even more embarrassing, if that is



possible, was when he put his hand on a casket at the front of the church, and the flimsy stand it was on gave way. It was not the send off he had planned.

Most laughable of all, because it has come close to happening to many pastors, is the time he baptized a very large woman on an Easter morning. She displaced far more water than he had anticipated. The overflow rushed into his waders, and filled them to the brim. When the woman came up, the water went down leaving him stranded in the middle of the baptistery with 400 pounds of water in his boots. He was rooted to the bottom of the baptistery and could not budge. Before an entire Easter congregation he had to lower his suspenders and crawl out of his boots in his underwear.

Have you ever wondered why God chooses the people He chooses, and why He lets the leaders of His people do so many strange, foolish, and embarrassing things? They could be multiplied by the millions you know. Maybe it is just because God loves a good laugh, and the angels never blunder, and so He has to get His enjoyment through men. I do not doubt that God is entertained by the silly mistakes of His people, just as we are by those of our children and grandchildren. But I think there is another reason for why God chooses men who fumble and blow it time after time. I think the reason becomes more and more evident as we study the 12 men that Jesus chose to be His special disciples who would become the 12 Apostles.

You do not have to examine these hand picked men for very long before you realize they were a fallible lot who added their share of blunders and folly to a world already in the flood stages of this stuff. We must assume that these 12 were the creme of the crop, but it seems incredible how soon they begin to exhibit that they are often sour cream. We all know about Judas, of course, and that is a whole issue in itself. The rest of these men are not exactly paragons of virtue, and knights on white horses in shining armor.

The fact is, some feel that the greatest miracle Jesus ever performed was His endurance of these men as they blunder their way through to the point of their final desertion of Him as He goes to the cross. Never did 12 men ever change the course of history like these 12, but never did a noted leader ever have more trouble with His followers than Jesus had with these 12. I do not like to be critical of the judgment of Jesus, but the New Testament evidence forces us to ask, why in the world did Jesus choose this bunch? Did they lie on their resumes, and did Jesus not check them out and call former employers? Did Jesus turn off His deity, and go only by His human feelings in making these choices? These questions are motivated by the New Testament evidence, which reveals to us that which we want to study.

## THE NATURE OF THE 12.

If there was anything extraordinary about these men, it is not evident to the naked eye. Jesus was debating theology at 12 years old, but none of the 12 were sharp theologians. They did not understand what Jesus was teaching most of the time, and He was perpetually giving them private tutoring to help them grasp His parables. In Mark 4:13 Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?" Then He went on to explain the parable of the sower. You can detect the frustration in the voice of Jesus. It is the teacher's frustration with students who cannot see the obvious. It is like asking, "When the war of 1812? Or who is buried in Grant's tomb?" The student is puzzled as he searches for an answer. "Magellan made three trips

around the world, and on one of them he died. Which one was it?" The teacher begins to lose patients when the student cannot come up with an answer to such questions. How will they ever answer a hard question if they cannot answer these?

The frustration of Jesus grows, as they seem to get stupider with each lesson. In Mark 8 Jesus warns them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and they get into a discussion about bread. In Mark 8:17-18 we read, "Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?'" He goes on to explain again what He means.

Jesus, the greatest teacher who ever lived, and He is stuck with a class of boneheads. But it's hard to feel sorry for Jesus; after all, He chose them to be His students. Most teachers just have to take what they get. Jesus had a choice, and these were the ones He picked. Some people like a challenge, and Jesus was one of them, but we see signs of regret that make us wonder if He would make the same choices if He had to do it over again. In Matt. 15:15-16 Peter says, "Explain the parables to us." Jesus replies, "Are you still so dull?" It is obvious Jesus did not select these 12 on the basis of their school records or IQ. Peter is the leader, and he is about as sharp as a tack after it's been run over by a train on the track.

Peter had some high points where he pulled an A, like the time when in Caesarea Philippi he said to Jesus, "You are the Christ the Son of the Living God." That was the best answer he ever gave to a question Jesus asked, and Jesus praised him as never before. But 6 verses later, after Jesus said He must go to Jerusalem and die and rise again, we read this response from Peter that puts him back to nerdsville. Matt. 16:22 says, "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never Lord!' he said, 'This shall never happen to you.'" With the disappointment of a teacher whose A student has just flunked, Jesus says in verse 23, "Out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me..." In John 13 Peter cries out, "No you shall never wash my feet." Jesus has to rebuke him again. Here was the leader of the 12, and he had to be dragged into understanding, kicking, screaming, and resisting all the way.

The others were no better, however, and how Jesus must have envied the Rabbi's who had students who learned rapidly and who obeyed their precepts. But let's not forget they were not assigned to him, and they did not apply. He chose them, and that is the mystery-why? Why these puzzling appointments? They seem like rejects who were the least likely to succeed. Even after all that Jesus taught was fulfilled in the resurrection, these guys were the last to let the evidence penetrate their thick skulls. If you think this is being disrespectful to the noble company of the Apostles, let me point out that I am only reporting what the record reveals. Mark 16:14 reveals our Lords closing remarks to this chosen band. "Later Jesus appeared to the eleven as they were eating; He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen."

No wonder Jesus once complained in Mark 9:19, "How long must I put up with you guys?" Jesus could not have had a harder time training His elite band had He chosen them from the hells angels. We haven't even scratched the surface of the negative file on these men. It is thick with blotted records of their self-centeredness. In Mark 9:33-34 we read that when they entered the house in Capernaum Jesus asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road? But they kept quiet

because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest."

Don't kid yourself that Jesus can't identify with teachers of kids. These men were just like Jr. boys fighting over whose father or brother was the biggest or strongest. Two of them, James and John, even cooked up a scheme by which their mother was to help them get the right and left hand seats next to Jesus when He was king. The other disciples were so angry at this, mainly because they did not think of it first.

Jesus had to spend a great deal of His time and energy dealing with discipline problems. A lot of His teaching was just to get this elite class of His to grow up and act like men instead of the brat brigade. As with every new idea, there is a period where the bugs have to be worked out. Jesus was building His church on the foundation of these chosen men, and talk about bugs! It is hard to believe He ever shaped these men into a team that would turn the world upside down. You would think Jesus would have learned a lesson from the Old Testament. God chose the Jews to be His special people, and what a lemon of a choice. Sure, He was able to make lemonade and accomplish His purpose, and bring the Messiah into the world as the seed of Abraham, but what a job. They were so rebellious, stiff-necked, and slow to learn. God was rebuking and judging them most of the time. And yet after all this history Jesus turns around and starts the New Israel, then new people of God with 12 guys who do not look like a greatly improved product over the 12 sons of Jacob that God used to start the old people of God.

Are we to conclude that even God does not learn from history, and is, therefore, condemned to repeat it? Let's face it, there is a lot of mystery as to why Jesus would chose these particular men. Even more so, since we know He had other options. These 12 were not the only men who qualified to be one of the 12. Peter in Acts 1 tells us the requirements to be one of the 12. They had to be men who were with Jesus from the beginning, from the baptism of John until Jesus ascended to heaven. There were more than the 12 who could fill these requirements. They proposed two men, Joseph and Matthias, and Matthias won by the drawing of lots. The point is, here were two men who qualified to be of the 12, but they were not chosen. 12 was the cut off number even though Jesus could have had at least 14, and no doubt many more.

The 12 was obviously a symbolic number that Jesus insisted on maintaining. He later sent out 70 to preach, heal, and cast out demons. All of the 70 probably could have qualified to be an Apostle, but the number 12 was not to be tampered with. It was to be no more or no less. When Judas was dead they voted in another to bring the 11 back up to 12, for 12 was the sacred number. Commentators are in agreement that Jesus was clearly saying that He was the new king of a New Israel. The 12 tribes failed to fulfill God's purpose to be a blessing to all the families of the world. His 12 would not fail, but would fulfill the promise of God, and they have.

Jesus and His 12 were a public symbol that He was the Messiah, and His 12 disciples were the beginning of the New Israel. The number 12 was not to be changed either in the Old Testament or the New. Jacob had 12 sons, but he also had two grandsons by Joseph named Ephraim and Manasseh, and these two were counted as one tribe. But this would make for 13, and in order to keep it at 12 the Levites were not counted, for they had no land. But if they were counted the two grandsons would not be, for it always had to be an even 12. This important symbolism would be shattered if Jesus had appointed 11 or 13, or any other number but 12. This number is maintained all through the Bible right to the very end where we read in Rev. 21 that the New Jerusalem has 12 gates, and on them the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, and 12 foundations with the names of the 12

Apostles.

There is perfect and precise consistency on this number 12. It is so easy to be orderly with numbers. Precision and accuracy is characteristic of the mathematical sciences, but this does not mean that the 12 men themselves can be tied together in such a neat package. There is no way to avoid loose ends and complexity when you are dealing with men and so we are back to the mystery of the issue we are seeking to understand. Why did Jesus chose these particular 12 men when a blind man can see they are such fallible specimens of humanity. If he had other choices, why did He choose them, and why does He go on all through history choosing to use instruments which are so weak and inadequate, and who blunder as often as they bless? We are questioning the choices of God and His Son. As someone said, "How odd of God to choose the Jews, "And another mystery is why did He choose the 12?

We have asked the question enough times. Now we must start trying to answer it. First of all, we need to see that the Bible reveals that the God of perfection deliberately chooses imperfect instruments to accomplish His purpose. For one thing, if He is going to use men then He really has no choice but to use imperfect instruments. That is all there is, and even God has to settle for less than perfection in all except His Son. His options are not the good or the bad, but the bad and the less bad. God is infinite but His choices are not. Even He has to live within the limits of the reality that is. He does not have the choice to use just perfect people and ideal instruments, and so He does just what we do, He uses what is. But God goes further yet, and He even deliberately chooses to use less than the best of what is available.

There were peoples in the world who were better than Israel. The Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians, not to mention the Greeks or the Romans, would have been better choices. They had more power, and more in the way of civilization and arts, and we could go on and on about their superiority to Israel. God did not choose Israel because she was the best choice. She was a nothing; a zip, and a zero with the rim off. God even calls her an abandoned baby left in her blood to die. Yet god chose her, not for what she could do for God, but what God could do for her, and with her.

The same is true for Christ's choice of the 12. They were not the best men in the world. They were extraordinarily ordinary. Jesus does just as the Father did in the Old Testament. It is God's way, and Paul described it so clearly in I Cor. 1:27-28, "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him."

God deliberately uses inferior tools to build His kingdom so that the beauty of all He creates can be attributed to Him and His wisdom and not to the cleverness of men. It is sheer folly to praise Israel for anything she has done, or to praise the church, for that matter, for its turning the world upside down, and changing the course of history. The glory does not belong to the 12, or the 70, or the 120 at Pentecost, or to the millions of Christian servants through the centuries. The glory is God's alone, and all praise is to the Lamb who by the fallible instruments of men has succeeded in building a universal empire greater than any ever seen, and one that will go on forever.

The amazing good news in all this is, you don't have to worry about being qualified to be used of God. If you lack self-esteem and feel ungifted and inadequate, do not fret, for that makes you just

the sort of person God can use if you surrender your inadequacy to Him. He specializes in using people who are not fit for the job. The reason is simple, for when God does a beautiful thing through such an inadequate channel both the channel and those who see it cannot fail to recognize the grace of God.

I have a suspicion that the greatest untapped resource in this world for the kingdom of God is the mass of ordinary Christians who feel unqualified to do just about anything. They feel unable to teach, and incapable of witnessing, and unprepared to achieve any task for the kingdom. They become pew potatoes because they think the Lord of perfection will take none but the best. Give of your best to the Master is a song we sing, and we look at our best and say its second and third rate, and He deserves better, so we let only the gifted people do the job. This misses the whole point that God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

Job said, "I abhor myself."

Moses said, "Pick somebody else, I'm no good at speaking."

Isaiah said, "I am a man of unclean lips."

David cried out, "My sin is ever before me."

Peter said, "Depart from me, for I am a wicked man."

Paul said, "The evil which I would not, that I do."

If you want to find dirt on God's elect, and the elite among the elect, take a shovel for you will find plenty. Why does God use such vessels of clay? Because, that is His strategy. He wants to show a fallen, lost, and sinful humanity that anybody can be used for the glory of God. Don't ever use your weakness and inadequacy as an excuse for not being a more useful Christian. It won't hold water. If you surrender who and what you are to Him, He can do wonders through you just as He did through the 12. It is possible that you will make even fewer blunders than they did. Jesus chose the 12, not for what they were, but for what they could become. It was their potential that made them His choice. What is your potential for being a disciple? Certainly you can be used just as well as these puzzling appointments.

## **17. CHRIST AND CRITICISM**

## **MARK 3:20-30**

Some years back at the University of Wisconsin a group of literary students formed a club. The purpose of the club was to criticize. The members would submit a story, and it would be dissected mercilessly with no punches pulled. The sessions were so brutal that the club members dubbed themselves, "The Stranglers." This was a masculine club only, so the girls on campus formed "The Wranglers." They read manuscripts also, but the criticism was much gentler, and more constructive. Every effort, however feeble, was encouraged. 20 years later an alumnus made an analysis of his classmates careers. He discovered that not one of the Stranglers had made a literary career of any

kind, but out of the Wranglers had come half a dozen successful writers. The Stranglers had fulfilled their name well. They took developing talent and by excessive criticism they strangled it. The Wranglers by use of constructive criticism lifted struggling talent to its feet so it could climb to success.

There are few things more destructive and harmful than criticism. The only sin Jesus ever said was unforgivable is directly connected with criticism, for blasphemy of the Holy Spirit means to speak against the spirit with scornful and malignant criticism. There is a legitimate place for expressing critical feelings. It is just that it is a delicate matter. It is almost as delicate as trying to catch soap bubbles on a pin. Dr. Curtis Hutson says we must make distinctions in criticism.

There is:

1. Destructive criticism. Jesus forbids this when He says, "Judge not." It is a desire to damage and destroy.
2. Deluded criticism. The brother with the log hanging out of his eye trying to help another get the speck out of his eye. This is folly.
3. Discriminating criticism. Jesus says, "Give not that which is holy to dogs, and don't cast your pearls before swine." You have to be critical and make judgments to avoid being stupid.

Jesus was critical of the Pharisees.

Paul was critical of the Judaisers.

Christians are critical of the cults.

Americans are critical of communists.

Criticism is what keeps us on the right path. It is essential in our form of government that wrong actions be criticized. The world is full of valid criticism. Wise and mature Christians need to develop a critical spirit by which they test all things, and hold to that which is true. But we are looking at that negative critical spirit which makes us agents of evil and quenchers of the spirit. By a spirit of pride we easily think we are experts in all areas, and can make critical judgments of the works of others. The poet illustrates the point.

"That owl up there,  
Said the man in the chair,  
Is stuffed all wrong, I do declare.  
See the feet-wrong size!  
Wrong feathers, wrong eyes."  
And the barber kept on shaving,  
And, then when the man in the chair got through,  
The owl hopped off its perch and it flew,  
And the barber kept on shaving.

#### CRITICISM IS INEVITABLE.

The life of Jesus makes it clear that even perfection cannot escape the poisonous tongue of the critic. One author wrote, "Be thou chaste as the lily, be thou as pure as the unsullied snow, thou canst not escape criticism!" If the very Son of God, with perfect love and wisdom, doing only the will of God, which is always the best for man, and fully fulfilling the highest ideals of man, could be

called a devil, then let us not hope to do better, and get through life without criticism. We have so much to be justly criticized for, but Jesus did only good, and yet He was accused of being an agent of Satan. Because of ignorance, even his own family thought he was losing his mind, and they wanted to stop his ministry.

The criticism here is so vile and vulgar that it is unbelievable that the tongue of man could pronounce such blasphemy. The Pharisees said Jesus had power to cast out demons because He was possessed by the prince of demons. Beelzebub was the fly-god of the Philistines, also known as the dung-god, for flies and the dung heap would be naturally connected. This low and foul criticism was directed, not at the blood thirsty Romans who delighted in seeing Gladiators kill one another; not at the pious frauds who prayed on the street corner, but secretly devoured widows' houses by unjust maneuvers, but, rather, at the perfect and sinless Son of God. His life was pure and undefiled that the shedding of His blood washed away our sin, and made it possible for us to become white as snow.

What a lesson this teaches us about life. It shows us that any person who wants to succeed as a servant of God is going to have to learn how to cope with criticism. If criticism is a weapon that will stop you, then you can plan on not getting very far. John Henry Newman said, "Nothing would be done at all if a man waited till he could do it so well that no one could find fault with it." Those who do anything will be criticized. As soon as any person lifts his head above the level of mediocrity he will be shot at. Any person who insists on making his life useful will be open game for the critics.

When Sir John Simon held the unpopular post of Chancellor of the Exchequer in England, his wife embroidered this on the living room wall to keep him ever conscious of the price one must pay to escape criticism: "To escape criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing." This is bound to work, for no one kicks a dead dog. Be like a dead dog and you will have tranquility, but as soon as you come alive you will be criticized. Addison said, "There is no defense against criticism except obscurity." This does work marvelously, for we see it working even for Jesus. He really had it nice as an unknown carpenter. Had He continued in this obscure role He could have lived a tranquil life and died possibly without an enemy. All of His troubles began when He threw off the cover of obscurity, and launched out into public life.

Jesus dignified the common peaceful life, but He had more to do than cut another common rut. He had a job to do which called for plowing right across the ruts of society, and forcing men to stop and ask themselves where they are going, and if they are on the right road. Jesus began to teach with authority; to heal with great power, and to influence public opinion about life, God, and salvation. Jesus began to rock the boat, and those of the establishment who defended the status quo, and were satisfied with the old ruts, saw that it was either Him or them that had to go. There is always a crisis when the new challenges the old, for it is a duel unto death.

In the beginning the weapons of combat are words. If one can win by verbal attacks and drive the opposition into obscurity by undermining public confidence, then there will be no need for physical violence. This is exactly the strategy of the Pharisees in our text. If they can get the people to believe Jesus is so powerful because He is an agent of Satan, they will have saved their positions as the righteous leaders of Israel. They lost, however, on the level of words, and had to resort to nails to silence Jesus.

We know Jesus never could have allowed their bitter and malicious criticism to cause Him to forsake His mission. The salvation of the world depended on His fulfilling God's will regardless of the cost. We can not doubt, however, that it was a heavy burden for Christ to bear. Driving nails into His hands could not have wounded Him more than these vicious verbal darts thrown at Him, saying that His loving service was really only a trick of the devil. This had to hurt Jesus deeply, for it took people away from following Him. The ministry of Jesus was hurt by criticism. In His own town of Nazareth He could do no mighty works because of the critics who said that He could not be the Messiah, for He was only the Son of a carpenter. In the wrong hands criticism can even hinder the work of Christ.

History is filled with victims of the critics. Most great men of music and art have become so, not because of lack of critics, but in spite of them. Most good politicians serve their country well, not because they are allowed to go un-criticized, but in spite of their critics. Some have died of broken hearts, and others have bled with deep wounds. Thomas Jefferson, for example, said, "I find the pain of a little censure, even when it is unfounded, is more acute than the pleasure of much praise." In spite of His sensitivity to criticism, however, He took much slander and survived. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln were both slandered maliciously, and called everything from murderers to ape, yet they refused to be strangled into defeat. Lincoln said,

"If I were to try to read, much less answer all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out alright, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference."

Lincoln was too busy doing his best to be defeated by criticism. No one with a worthy goal can afford to forsake that goal because of critics. If politicians must face the sharp knife of criticism, and not draw back, but steadfastly march ahead, how much more should the Christian be willing to suffer the same for the name of Christ. Let the critics tongue lash and cut, it can never be as bad as what Jesus had to suffer for us. He gave up tranquility for hell that we might escape hell and gain eternal tranquility. God forbid that we should now be silent concerning our love for Him because we fear criticism. We need to have the attitude of Epictetus who said, "If you hear that someone is speaking ill of you, instead of trying to defend yourself you should say he obviously does not know me very well, since there are so many other faults he could have mentioned."

Another challenge for us in this study of criticism is to examine ourselves lest we slip in among the stranglers unaware. We must constantly examine our motives for criticism. Do we criticize because we hope to help the one we feel should be doing better, or is our criticism a mere running off at the mouth because we get pleasure in making life harder for those who are doing something in an area of life where we are doing nothing? The poet said,

When you hark to the voice of the knocker,  
As you list to his hammer fall,  
Remember the fact that the knocking act  
Requires no brains at all.



The dove flies over the landscape and sees all that is lovely and peaceful, but the buzzard and vulture flies over the same area and spots a loathsome carcass. The dead carcass is just as real as the flower, but the Christian is to be dovelike and look for the good and not the evil. It is a matter of focus. We are to be aware of the evil and the defects all about us, but still focus on what is good and virtuous, and make that our emphasis. A focus on the negative tends to make one negative. We do need to be aware of our own defects, however, so we do not become judgmental of others. Some humorous poet wrote,

Said the elephant to the giraffe  
"Your neck is too long by one half."  
He replied, "Since your nose  
Reaches down to your toes,  
At others you'd better not laugh.

Keith Miller in his book *Habitations of Dragons* tells of his critical spirit toward other Christian speakers, especially if they spoke to the same groups he did. He realized that he was threatened by those who had gifts that he did not have. He looked for weaknesses in others to assure himself that they were not better than him. So much criticism comes from our own insecurity. We want everyone to like us, and we feel if people like someone else they will not like us, and so we want to criticize others to keep ourselves on top and well liked. We forget that people can like many other people and not like us less because of it. We fear to lose the affection of others and so we criticize those who we feel are competitors for affection. This actually produces the very thing we fear, for nobody likes a criticizer. We need to see what we are doing and confess it to get rid of it.

It doesn't take much size to criticize. Christian criticism ought always to be constructive, for this takes brains, and we are commanded to love God with all our mind. What we haven't said could fill volumes, but what we have said can fill your life with Christlike determination and concern. We have said that criticism is inevitable if you do anything worthwhile, so never let it stop you, and as you move ahead make sure you are not holding others back by abusive criticism. God grant us the heart to take the cruelty of criticism, and the head to avoid handing it out.

## **18. RUIN WITHOUT REMEDY**

## **MARK 3:22-30**

A certain seer warned Caesar to be on guard against a great peril on the day of March which the Romans called Ides. When the day came and Caesar was on his way to the senate house he greeted the seer with a jest, and said, "Well, the Ides of March are come." "Aye," said the seer. "They are come, but they are not gone." In other words, the warning would not be proven false until the day ended, and as we know, the Ides of March prove to be the last of Caesar.

Jesus gave His critics a very serious warning; in fact, the danger was so great that there is nothing else to equal it. He warned them concerning the unforgivable sin. It is such a terrible thing to

consider that many prefer to ignore it, and others just dismiss it as a sin that could only be committed by people in the day of Christ, and it does not concern us now. They would dismiss the warning with a Caesar-like, "Well, that danger is past and gone." But the Sovereign Seer, our Savior, I fear would reply, "Aye, that danger is past, but it is not over. It is also present. It has come, but it has not gone."

It is unreasonable to think that Jesus would declare a sin to be unforgivable, and mean by it, it is only unforgivable if you do it now rather than later. If blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was unforgivable before the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, then by what logic can it be maintained that it is not now unforgivable since the Holy Spirit has more prominence than ever in God's plan? If Jesus meant to limit the danger just to those Pharisees who criticized Him that day; who said He was filled with the devil, He did not make it clear, and if this was the case, there would be some weight behind Bertrand Russell's criticism of Christ in giving this warning. Russell, the well known atheist writes in his book, *Why I Am Not A Christian*, concerning this passage:

"That text has caused an unspeakable amount of misery in the world for all sorts of people have imagined that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and thought it would not be forgiven them either in this life or in the world to come. I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindness in his nature would have put fears and terrors of that sort into the world."

The facts of history will back him up as to the misery this warning has caused. Doctors, psychiatrists, and preachers can testify to the fact that many people have gone insane over worry about this sin. D. L. Moody said in his wide experience, "We have not been in a place in this country-and I think we were not in more than one or two places while we were abroad-but we found some people who thought they had committed the unpardonable sin." We could quote from ancient history and modern days from men who find this same thing to be true. This means that if Jesus meant only to say that this sin applied just to those who criticized Him, and to no others, but did not make it clear, he would be guilty for all this history of unnecessary agony.

This leads us to the obvious conclusion that the warning was not just for them, but for all time. Men can blaspheme the Holy Spirit today just as they could then. This being so, it was not unkind for Jesus to give the warning as Russell charges, but was an act of marvelous mercy. Jesus could have let these cold-hearted cruel critics go on in their evil to a ruin without remedy, but as verse 23 makes clear, He called them aside purposely to show them their folly, and to warn them lest they go beyond the point of no return. Where can one find an act of kindness to match this? Warning men who have just maliciously slandered you by calling you an agent of the god of flies and dung, in the hope that they might stop short of a sin beyond hope. The vast majority of commentators agree that the Pharisees were not yet guilty of this sin, but would be if they persisted in their accusation after this warning.

We have established then that the unforgivable sin is still possible, and will be to the end of history. And also that to be warned of it was an act of kindness on the part of Christ, there being nothing kind about letting men plunge to their doom without warning because you didn't want to make them nervous by telling them the bridge was gone. Any sane person would prefer the kindness that warns over the kindness that leaves one blind.

The fact remains, however, that there are masses of people, and many of them Christians, who go through awful but unnecessary anguish because of this warning. The problem is not in the warning, but in the ignorance of people concerning the warning. The vast majority who fear they have committed this sin are dupes of the devil, and are unaware of the subtle tricks of Satan whereby he can bring even a believer to despair about his salvation. Many men of God have had to go through real battles over this sin. This can be avoided if we cease to be ignorant of Satan's devices. I trust that our approach to this subject will diminish our ignorance, and give light for our own walk as well as light to help others who are in the dark. First we want to consider what this sin is not, for this will help us clear away a great many cobwebs of misconception. Then we will be able to see the light concerning what this sin really is.

## I. WHAT THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN IS NOT.

It is not any sin that can be forgiven. This might sound simplistic, but a great deal of misunderstanding arises because this simple truth is missed. As you can imagine, there are a number of different ways men have interpreted the meaning of the unforgivable sin. There is usually so much truth in each of them that one gets confused as to which can be the right interpretation. By simply keeping in mind the fact that the unforgivable sin is not a sin that can be forgiven, you eliminate all the theories of men and narrow yourself down to the words of Christ. For example, could the unforgivable sin be a rejection of Jesus as the Son of God? Not a chance. Why? Because this sin is forgivable. No sin is more forgivable than the rejection of Christ, for when one repents of it and receives Christ, God and all the angels of heaven rejoice. Paul was a great Christ rejecter. He writes in I Tim. 1:13, "I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief." He even blasphemed Christ, but he was forgiven.

This gives us another clue. The unforgivable sin is not a sin you can stumble into accidentally, or perform in ignorance. You can blaspheme God and Christ in ignorance not knowing what you are doing, but the unforgivable sin is a sin done with clear and certain knowledge. It is a definite sin against light. Jesus said on the cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Men who do grave sin like the men who crucified Christ, and like Paul who blasphemed and persecuted Him, but do so in ignorance, are forgiven. Any sin of ignorance is forgivable, and so no person need fear they can ever stumble into this unforgivable sin unknowingly or against their will.

This is important to understand, for it is just at this point that Satan is able to make so many miserable. Here, for example, is part of a letter written to Dr. W. L. Northridge, a Christian doctor who deals with many Christians who are distressed about this sin.

"I hope you will forgive me writing to you, but I feel terribly distressed. I am worried about the unforgivable sin. My thoughts are bad even when praying. I confess to a Christian friend and gave her a fair idea of the bad words that come into my mind. They are about holy personages and things, and about the Savior Himself. I hope that these thoughts do not mean the unpardonable sin mentioned in the Gospels. They haunt me, and force themselves on me. Do tell me that I have not committed the unforgivable sin."

It was easy, of course, for him to assure her that she had not done any such thing. Her experience was a perfectly normal one which millions of Christians go through, but which can affect sensitive Christians even to the point of a breakdown, because they are ignorant of Satan's devices. One young married woman came to Dr. Northridge, of whom there was no doubt as to her genuine Christian experience, yet she was a nervous wreck because she was obsessed with the thought that ran through her mind about damming the Holy Spirit. Other Christians have sacrilegious and obscene thoughts about Christ and God. None of these involuntary obsessions are even sin, let alone the unforgivable sin. The wise Christian does not suppress them, but recognizes them to be a normal possibility for anyone thinking on holy things.

The mature Christian will not give Satan advantage to use these obsessions, but will immediately take them to the Lord who knows they are involuntary, and come into your mind against your will. He will give you assurance that you are not cut off from Him by such thoughts. The unforgivable sin, we repeat, is not any sin that can be forgiven, or any thought that is involuntary. We need to stress in the emphasis of Jesus that this sin is the great exception. All other sin is forgivable. Only this one is not. It is distinct and in a class by itself. Many by not paying attention to this build up elaborate explanations about hardening the heart until one cannot repent, as if this was the unforgivable sin. They complicate the issue by making this, not an act, but a whole way of life. This leads to a total neglect of the exceptional nature of this sin.

Many men harden their hearts by a life of crime and immorality, and they die without Christ unrepentant. If you call this condition the unforgivable sin, you ignore completely the teaching of Christ, plus you make all sin that is never forgiven, unforgivable. You eliminate any idea of a distinct exceptional sin as Jesus stresses. We must be careful to distinguish between a sin that is unforgivable, and one that is never forgiven. Any sin can be in the second category, but there is only one in the first category.

Any sin can go eternally unforgiven if it is not repented of, and this will be the case for millions of sins that are not the unforgivable sin. The vast majority of people who will be lost will never even think of committing the unforgivable sin. Masses will be lost who are living in all kinds of sin, but not one of which God would not gladly forgive if they repent. Many sins will send men to hell, but not because they are unforgivable, but simply because, though forgivable, they have never been repented of and forgiven. Now let's consider-

## II. WHAT IS THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN?

Jesus defines this sin very specifically as blasphemy which is directed against the Holy Spirit. It is not a matter of the hands that kill, the eyes that lust, or the feet that run to do evil. It is a very specific matter of the tongue. It is, of course, a matter of the heart as well, for the tongue draws its material from the heart, but the act itself can only be done by speech. The context gives us a very clear idea of what this speech is.

The Pharisees who were trying anything to undermine his popularity with the people said that the spirit of Christ, that is the origin and source of His power, was unclean. His spirit was the spirit of evil. It was of Beelzebub, the god of flies and dung, and the prince of demons. This is a very unique and exceptional charge, and if you are honest you will have to admit that you have not heard anyone

level such a criticism against Christ. D.L. Moody in all his contacts around the world wrote, "Now, I have met a good many atheists and skeptics, and deists and infidels, both in this country and aboard, but I never in my life met a man or a woman that ever said or ever thought that Jesus Christ was possessed of the devil." Many unbelievers in history have praised Jesus as a great and marvelous man.

The point is, that though this sin is still a danger, and can still be committed, it is rare that even a unbeliever will commit it, let alone a believer. D. L. Moody went on to say, "I don't believe any man or woman has a right to say they have committed the unpardonable sin unless they have maliciously and willfully and deliberately said that they believe that Jesus Christ had a devil in Him, and that He was under the power of the devil, and that He cast out devil's by the power of the devil." Moody did not complicate things as so many others do. He took the words of Scripture at face value, and saw the distinct and exceptional nature of this sin. Let us also be fully Scriptural in our attitude about this sin. Let us not be quick to suspect it, but give even the worse of sinners the benefit of the doubt.

John Chrysostom said many centuries ago, "It is notorious that men who imagine that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost invariably become Christians and live exemplary lives." Almost everything that men fear is unforgivable, the Lord stands waiting to forgive. The good news is that every sin but this rare exception is forgivable. There is more, however, to fear from common ordinary sin than from this rare exception, for it keeps only a very few, if any, out of heaven, but the great mass of the lost will be so because they never repented and asked Christ to forgive all their forgivable sins. More tragic than this ruin without remedy is the ruined lives that are never restored when the remedy is at their fingertips.

Dr. Curtis Hutson points out that technically all sin is unforgivable. If sin was forgivable, God was foolish to let Jesus die for our sin. But sin is not forgivable. It all has to be paid for. The sinner is forgiven and pardoned, but not the sin. God never says this sin is now okay and no problem. The sin remains out of His will, and never gets reconciled to His holy nature. All sin is repulsive and rejected by God, and never forgiven. But the one who commits the sin can be pardoned and forgiven if the penalty for sin is paid. It is sinners who are forgiven and not sins.

There is one exception just because God cannot forgive Satan, and so He cannot forgive a sinner who becomes so one with Satan that he calls good evil and white black. When one gets to this point one is satanic and part of the kingdom of darkness. Anyone who comes to the point of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is one with Satan. But why is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit worse than blasphemy of Jesus Christ? Since they are both members of the Godhead why should one be more serious than the other? It is because the sin of rejecting Christ was a sin of ignorance. Even Jesus said they did not know what they were doing. But the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is not done in ignorance. It is a deliberate calling of what is good and of God, evil, awful, and satanic. It is a hatred of holiness. To call the divine diabolical is a specific sin, and not just a persistent rejection of Christ.

Charles Woodbridge says, "God will never pardon the person who persistently, purposefully rejects until death the entire saving ministry of the Spirit: He is guilty of the unpardonable sin." The problem with this idea is that God will also never pardon the pleasant and lovable non-Christian who is very honest, ethical, and who lives by the Christian value system, even though he sins less than the average Christian. He is lost and has no Savior, and is forever unpardoned. But did he commit any

unforgivable sin? Not at all.

So what is the difference if one does, or does not, if all it means is that one is lost? Very good people are lost who have not committed this sin. It is interesting that both God and Jesus are frequently used for slang and cursing, but the Holy Spirit is never so used. Even evil men do not seek to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, even though they freely blaspheme the Father and the Son. This sin is clearly dealing with the Holy Spirit and not the Father and the Son. It is also clear that it cannot be done by an act. The Pharisees were close by calling Jesus of the devil, but they had not yet committed the sin, and so one act of blasphemy does not make one hopeless. It has to be a process whereby one becomes so hardened that one is of the same mind with the devil himself.

John P. Milton, the Lutheran author, had defined it like this: "The unpardonable sin is the willful rejection of the Holy Spirit when He calls you to repentance and faith, until by continued rejection you so harden your heart against Him as to be incapable of repentance." The one who loves darkness long enough will not be able to respond to the light, no matter how bright it gets.

We should note that not all sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable. We grieve the Holy Spirit, resist Him, and quench Him, but all of these are forgivable. The question that is often raised is, can this sin still be committed today? Some like Richard De Haan say, "No! Not at all! It could only occur while Christ was on earth and in actual physical contact with men." He goes on to write about a man's experience.

"Some time ago I read about a certain person who foolishly came to the conclusion that he had committed this great transgression. He believed that he had passed beyond the point of forgiveness. He went to his pastor and sought for some assurance that he might be mistaken. Unburdening his heart to the minister, he told him about his morbid fear that he had "crossed the line" and had committed the sin for which there is no forgiveness. The pastor responded by asking, "And just exactly what sin did you commit?" The troubled soul quickly answered, "I opposed the Word of God." "So did Paul," the pastor replied, "and he was saved." "Oh, but, I also denied Christ," the man blurted out. "So did Peter," said the minister, "and he became one of the greatest and most effective preachers of all time." "Yes, but I doubted the power of Christ even after I received strong evidence in His favor." "But," said the wise pastor, "so did Thomas. Wasn't he forgiven?" The man who had been tormented so long by fears and doubts finally saw the folly of his anxiety, and realized that this thing that he dreaded was a misunderstanding of Scripture. He saw that even if such a hopeless state were possible in this age, the very fact that he was so concerned about his spiritual condition proved that he could not have committed this great transgression. No, the "sin against the Holy Spirit" cannot be committed today."

Dr. Charles Stanley, a great Bible teacher and preacher, agrees with this view. He writes, "The term blasphemy may be defined "defiant irreverence." We would apply the term to such sins as cursing God or willfully degrading things considered holy. In this passage the term refers to the declaration of the Pharisees who had witnessed undeniable evidence that Christ was performing miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet they attributed the miracles to Satan. In the face of irrefutable evidence they ascribed the work of the Holy Spirit to that of Satan. I agree with a host of biblical scholars that this unique circumstance cannot be duplicated today. The Pharisees had seen proof of Christ's deity. But instead of acknowledging Jehovah God, they attributed the supernatural power to Satan instead of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is not in the world as He was then. Although the Holy Spirit still accomplishes supernatural things through His servants, they are merely representatives of the King. The circumstances of Matthew 12 make it impossible for this sin to take place today. This incident, I might add, is the only one in which a sin is declared unforgivable. The Bible states, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). No invitation to salvation carries with it an exception clause, "unless you have committed the unpardonable sin." No matter how evil our sins, there is pardon for them. God forgave David for his adultery, dishonesty, and murder (2 Sam. 12:13, Ps. 51). Simon Peter's denial of our Lord accompanied by profanity was forgiven (Matt. 26:74-75). The apostle Paul was forgiven of his preconversion merciless persecution of Christians (Acts 9:1). Just about every possible sin is listed somewhere in the New Testament. And every one of them falls into the category of forgivable.

Although there is no unpardonable sin today, there is an unpardonable state - the state of continued unbelief. There is no pardon for a person who dies in unbelief. The Bible refers to this in terms of having a hard heart. The hardening of the heart is not a one-time act. It is the result of a gradual progression in which sin and the conviction of the Holy Spirit are ignored. The hardened heart has no desire for the things of God. But if you have a desire in your heart for God, as expressed through concern that you have committed some sort of unpardonable sin, you do not have a hardened heart. Your concern confirms your innocence. God always welcomes those whose hearts are sensitive toward Him."

My problem with this view is this: Why would Jesus see to it that all three synoptic Gospels record this warning to be read for all of history if it only applied to those of His day? His life would soon end and this warning would be obsolete before it ever came into print. I think this view is commonly accepted because if it can still be committed it leads so many sensitive believers to have such fears. Dr. Samuel Cox, for example, the great Bible expositor, wrote, "I shall never forget the chill that stuck into my childish heart so often as I heard of this mysterious sin which carried men, and for ought I knew, might carry even me beyond all reach of pardon. And since then, I have again and again met with men and women of tender conscience and devout spirit who, by long brooding over these terrible words, had convinced themselves that they had fallen into this fatal sin, and whose reason had been unbalanced by a fearful anticipation of the doom they held themselves to have provoked." W.B. Riley, founder of Northwestern College wrote, "As a boy of 15, I greatly feared lest I had long since sinned away my day of grace." Such fears of believers have led to a number of theories as to what this sin is.

Many like to say it is the persistent rejection of Christ. This is the most common theory, because

it is true that if one rejects Christ for all his or her life they will be eternally unforgiven. If this was what Jesus meant, it means this is the most common sin in the world then, for it is the cause for most people to be lost. Instead of a rare sin, it is the most common of all. It is a false theory because at any time this sin can be forgiven if the person repents and seeks forgiveness. This sin is clearly distinct from rejection of Christ. This sin has to be rare, and the great exception, and not the most common sin of all.

I like the view that it cannot be committed today, but it seems that the possibility of it still needs to be kept alive, for even though it has to be extremely rare, and as far as we know has never been actually committed by any human being, because it is recorded as a warning, and no warning should be eliminated, for it has a purpose. It is still a warning that can keep men limited in their opposition to Christ and the things of the Spirit. Let us keep it as the great exception.

## **19. STILLING THE STORM**

## **MARK 4:35-41**

About 100 years ago an English clergyman named Whiting was sailing in the Mediterranean when a storm broke of unusual fury, and hurricane winds. The waves were like mountains, and they came crashing against the ship, and all on board felt doomed, for the life boats were useless in such a storm. Whiting continued in fervent prayer, and by the special providence of God the storm lost it's power, and they made it to port. Whiting wrote the hymn, "For Those In Peril On The Sea." It is also called, "Eternal Father Strong To Save." It became the most beloved hymn of American Naval men, and at one time every worship service in the Annapolis Naval Academy was concluded with the entire congregation kneeling and singing this hymn. The second stanza goes like this:

O Savior, whose almighty Word  
The winds and waves submissive heard,  
Who walked upon the foaming deep,  
And calm amidst its rage did sleep:  
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee  
For those in peril on the sea!

The wind and the sea are mighty forces, and they have taken many lives-so many that the Bible says when the dead are raised the sea also shall give up the dead in it. The sea of Galilee is especially treacherous, for it is low and cliffs around it have valley's going to the sea. This draws down cold air which can produce a storm in a matter of minutes. Even today, one can look upon it when it is smooth as glass, and ten minutes later there can be a raging storm. We want to look at the experience of the disciples as they are caught in one of these sudden storms. We want to see it in three pictures which deal with the three persons involved in this event.

### **I. THE PICTURE OF JESUS.**

Verse 35 says the same day, and this means the day that Jesus spoke to the multitudes, and was so concerned that His mother and brothers tried to restrain Him. This was the day that He debated with the Pharisees and warned them about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. This was the day that He



taught the parables as recorded in Matt. 13. It was after a busy day like this that He was exhausted, and verse 36 says He was so tired that He slept.

We see the humanity of Jesus. He lived for men before He died for them. He filled His days full with service to man. Sometimes He worked all day, and then prayed all night. He gave His life in service before He gave it in sacrifice. Why should He tire Himself to help and teach men? He was going to the cross in a few years, and He knew it, but it was not enough that He should die for their sin, and make salvation possible. Jesus said by His life of service that a full and satisfying human life consists in fellowship with God, and compassion for men in their sin, sickness, suffering, and sorrow. Meeting temporal needs was important to Jesus even though He came primarily to meet eternal needs.

Jesus lay exhausted in that boat because He could not stand to see the masses in ignorance of God's mercy and love. While He had breath He had to teach, heal, and preach. What sweet sleep have they who are exhausted in giving their lives in service. He was so exhausted that even a storm did not awaken Him. His very sleep rebukes us, for though He had greater wisdom and compassion, He had the same body as you and I. It hungered and thirsted and became weary, but He used it to its capacity. His body was a living sacrifice, and this sleeping Christ is the greatest example anywhere of presenting one's body as such a sacrifice.

In this sleep we see also the trust of His humanity. Jesus did not fear the storm, for He knew His life was in the Father's hands. I read of a group getting eagles eggs where they had to hang down over the cliff, and someone had to hold the rope. One boy said, "I will go down if my father holds the rope." You need to have trust in the one holding the rope when your life depends on it.

In verse 39 we see the deity of Christ. Only God can rebuke the wind and calm the sea. The only reason Bible writers could put such contrasting pictures of Jesus side by side is because they were true. He was truly man, and truly God. When He said to the winds, "Be still," the word He used means to be gagged or muzzled, as if it were a maniac to be bound and gagged. Some feel this indicates that the storm was an attempt to destroy Jesus. Whatever the case, it reveals that Jesus is the Lord of nature, and that the destructive forces of it are an evil in the world just as disease and demon possession. Many other miracles are explained away as mass hypnosis and other such nonsense, but there is no explanation for this one except that Jesus was God.

Romans tells us that the whole world is groaning for the day of redemption, for all of nature is cursed by man's fall. Tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes are God's permissive will, but He no more approves of them, nor is He responsible for the evil in nature, anymore than He is for the evil in man. He who calmed the storm here will calm it forever, but until then we must live in a fallen world where evil has great power. Nature would not need to be redeemed as Paul says, if it was not fallen and a perverted expression of what God intended.

Just as Jesus revealed He was the Lord of nature, for only He can calm its storms, so He revealed that only He can forgive sin and calm the storms that rage within man. As God, Jesus could do the impossible, and overcome evil power in nature and in man.

## II. THE PICTURE OF THE DISCIPLES.

In obedience to Jesus they found themselves in trouble. They were probably taken by surprise thinking that the Lord is with us, and so we certainly cannot run into danger. It was by His command that we are here. But it just is not true that there is no danger in obedience to Jesus, or no danger when He is present. There are many who not only risk their lives, but lose their lives in obedience to Christ.

A missionary was once asked if he liked what he was doing, and he replied, "No, we do not like to live in filth and with disease all around, but Jesus died for these people, and we dare not let them perish because of danger." Following Jesus is not always a stroll through the garden. If obedience was easy the great commission would have been fulfilled long ago.

The disciples could not understand when things got out of control. It had to be a terrible storm to frighten these old fishermen. They were filled with fear and unbelief, and they awoke Jesus accusing Him of not caring. It was as if to say, "We have been fighting this storm for our lives, and you just sleep as if you didn't care whether we sink or not." It is always hard for believers to see why they should suffer. If the disciples saw a boat full of Pharisees going down in the storm they would not question such a tragedy. It is when we suffer while living in obedience that we question the love and care of Christ. Many charge Jesus with not caring when tragedy strikes them. Fortunately many hold on to their faith and later beg for forgiveness when they see how God works in all things for their good.

Fear can do strange things to people. There are natural and God-given fears such as fear of pain which teaches a child not to touch fire. Everyone should fear to take foolish and unnecessary chances with their life. But there are many fears which arise in the mind, and over which we have no control, and they can make life miserable. Fears tend to produce the very thing feared. Fear of failure usually causes failure. The man with one talent was afraid to do something wrong, and so he did nothing, which was the worst thing he could do. Fear of the future spoils the present so that the future is not pleasant. Fear begins in the mind, but may effect the body. Satan delights to whisper in our ear and make us fearful that Jesus does not care. If we listen we can develop all kinds of problems.

In verse 40 Jesus tells us the cause for fear. It is a lack of faith. When faith fails fear flourishes. Fear paralyzes faith so that it cannot work. Fortunately, the disciples had nowhere else to turn, and so they came to Jesus. When Jesus reveals Himself as capable of handling even the forces of nature they are amazed. Here He was sleeping, and now He speaks and nature obeys His voice.

Verse 41 says they feared greatly. Did they go from bad to worse? No, the fear at first was *dolos* in the Greek, and it means cowardly fear, but this second fear is *fobos*, and it means great reverence, or filled with awe. They were awakened to the fact that a greater power than man knows anything about was just demonstrated. They were not able to grasp the reality that Jesus was in fact, God. The lesson was learned, and they stood in fear of the Lord, that fear which is the beginning of wisdom. It is that fear which drives out false fears. A proper fear of God will eliminate the fear of the world.

A story is told of two boys, and one is saying to the other, "Go ahead and take the apples off the tree. Your father will not hurt you." The other boy responded, "I know, but if I disobey I will hurt him." It is true faith when we fear, not just being hurt, but hurting our heavenly Father. This is a godly fear which arises out of faith and says, "I would rather perish in the storm with Jesus than be

safe on land without Him." The man who fears God need not fear anything else, for nothing in all creation can separate him from the love of God. This was an important experience in bringing the disciples to that point. This picture closes with them asking the question which all must ask and answer: What manner of man is this? His power demands that the answer be, He was the Son of God.

### III. THE PICTURE OF THE LITTLE SHIPS.

In verse 36 we see there were other ships in the storm. They no doubt contained some of the people he had been speaking to on shore. Jesus could not escape for people followed Him everywhere. Here they were as a very small part of the picture. They had nothing to do with what happened. So why would such a detail be included in the Word of God? There is a significant teaching here by implication. They profited by the experience of the disciples. They also were spared because of the calming of the storm. They may not have even known what happened, but it was a blessing to them. There are many blessings that Jesus gives to His church that are a blessing to society all around them, even though they do not recognize the giver of the blessing. This is typical with the work of Christ. When He blesses He does not stop with His own, but sends rain on the just and the unjust.

In America where we have so many freedoms and rights because of the Christian influence, masses do not even know why they have them, and that many of our blessings are the result of the teaching of Christ. His blessings overflow, and there is truly a wideness in God's mercy. When we trust in Christ and allow His power to still the storms in us, there should be an overflowing benefit to all those around us.

## **20. MADNESS MEETS ITS MASTER**

### **5:1-20**

## **MARK**

The hero in one of Bruce Marshalls novels is a Benedictine Monk who is shocked at the general disbelief in the supernatural. Even the local Anglican priest argued with him against it. He is so disturbed that he is determined that all shall see a miracle, and he prays that a nearby dancing establishment of ill repute be transferred to as rock out in the sea, and it happened. The building, dancing girls, neon lights and all rose into the air leaving a huge hole in the ground, and was noiselessly deposited on the island rock. The flight lasting exactly 17 minutes. What Christian has not dreamed of possessing such power? The monk is so excited that he cannot sleep all night for wondering how the church is going to cope with the mass conversions that will take place as a result of this marvelous miracle.

The next day the press gave the story front page publicity, but there was no stampede of people

into the church. In fact, the people thought this unusual event only proved that the clergy were not to be trusted. The policeman on the beat considered arresting him for wrongful removal of property, and the dance hall owner sued him for damages due to transfer of his business to a location less convenient to his patrons. The only positive note was that a film producer made him an offer to enter the movies. Of course, it's all fiction, and claims to be no more, but Bible students will recognize it to be based on the facts of the historical experiences of Christ. Miracles have had surprisingly little effect on the unbelieving world. If the church had to depend upon miracles for its growth and success, it would have died while it was being born in the ministry of Christ.

The leaders of Israel saw the power of Christ demonstrated time and time again, yet they did not believe, but sought to kill Him, and called Him an agent of the devil. When the rich man in hell wanted someone from the dead to warn his brothers Jesus said, "If they will not believe God's Word, they will not believe a man from the dead." Miracles will not convince an unbeliever, and we are deceived if we think we could convert the world through miracles. One of the temptations of Jesus was to jump off the temple and use the power of miracle to gain a following. Jesus refused to display His miracle power to draw crowds and satisfy curiosity. Jesus performed His miracles as signs of His Lordship to those who followed Him. They played a major role in His Christian education for His disciples. They were a part of His teaching technique.

We want to look at a day in the education of His disciples. This particular day was really unique for this band of roving seminarians. Chapter 4 of Mark shows Jesus teaching them and the multitudes for the good portion of the day, and then toward evening verse 35 says that they all got into a ship to head for the other side. Jesus was so exhausted that He fell asleep. A day of teaching is an exhaustive day. The disciples were at their wits end when a storm threatened to sink the ship, and Jesus continued to sleep. Finally in desperation they wake Him saying, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" Jesus arose and said, "Peace be still," and by His power He calmed the angry waves. They were overwhelmed with awe and fear at such superhuman power. Verse 41 says they feared exceedingly. They were in a state of shock. Dryden's poem describes the situation:

The clouds dispelled, the sky resumed her light,  
And nature stood recovered of her fright.  
But fear, the last of ills, remained behind,  
And horror heavy sat on every mind.

When they reached the other side, they no doubt felt they had had it, and were glad that day was over. Little did they realize they had some major learning yet to do before they slept that night. They stepped out of the ship and immediately must have had the wits scared out of them again, for out of the tomb on the hillside a raving maniac came charging at them, and he was shrieking at them like the madman he was. He was naked and mutilated with broken chains hanging from his wrists and ankles, for in spite of all the efforts to chain him down he escaped and lived among the tombs. If ever there was a haunted cemetery, this was it. Luke tells us that no one dare pass by that way. Of all the places for Jesus to bring His disciples after what they had been through, this was certainly the worst. What a test on the nervous system. By this time it was nearly dark, if not definitely dark, and here they are in a haunted cemetery facing a demon possessed madman. Never had Jesus led His disciples into such a spooky, gloomy, eerie, weird, and frightening situation.

There can be doubt that Jesus deliberately planned this whole day. What an impact it is to see the

day as a whole. In the morning he demonstrates His Lordship over Satan by His wisdom as He casts out ignorance by His teaching. In the late afternoon He demonstrates His Lordship over Satan and nature by calming the storm. Now, in the evening He is about to demonstrate His Lordship over the forces of Satan by casting out the legion of demons. He is Lord of the unseen realm as well as the seen. He is Lord over the supernatural as well as the natural. All of this Jesus taught by actions in one day to leave an impact on His disciples that could never be forgotten.

There are a number of important things we can learn from this unique closing lesson of that unique day. We learn that no case is too hopeless for Jesus. If ever a man was hell-bound and God-forsaken, and a total menace to society, it was this demoniac that Jesus restored to his right mind. Not only that, Jesus made him a missionary to his people, and being this was Gentile territory, this one time slave of Satan became the first missionary of Christ to the Gentiles. He was preparing the way for the Gospel which would soon be coming to them after the cross and resurrection. This madman turned missionary was an equivalent of a John the Baptist to the Gentiles preparing the way of the Lord.

When Jesus finished with this man, the people requested he leave. He did not hesitate, for He had fulfilled His mission. This demoniac is what brought Him over the sea, teaching us, not only that none are hopeless, but also that all are precious. If Jesus cared so much for such a man who was a curse to himself and society, and humanly hopeless, then who dares to point to any human creature however hellish and horrible, and say that Jesus does not care for such a person?

There are many other implications that grow out of this unique demonstration of Christ's Lordship, but the primary lesson concerns that Lordship itself. Jesus makes it as clear as possible that He has come to destroy the works of the devil. Here was one of the most Satan bound men of history set free to become a servant of Christ. When the disciples are taught to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one," they will know this will be no problem for their Lord. Not only did madness meet its master in Christ, but the author of madness, Satan himself, met his master in Christ, and suffered one defeat after another. Every time Jesus confronted one of Satan's victims He set them free. The sovereignty of Christ over all principalities and powers is the primary lesson of this strange and fearful experience. It is one of the primary themes of this whole Gospel.

The second major lesson this event teaches us concerns a subject of great mystery. This setting of the madman freed from his legion of demons commits Bible believers to the belief of the reality of demons. Men can rationalize other cases of demon possession, and say it is only what we call mental illness, epilepsy, or insanity today. This argument fails here, however, for the demons are actually sent into a herd of swine. They have to be objectively real, for a subjective illness cannot be transferred to such a herd. Belief in the objective world of spiritual creatures is not superstition, but a matter of revelation.

G. Campbell Morgan said, "Christians make a terrible mistake when they laugh at spiritism, and treat it as a fancy. It is a reality." When we call spiritism a false cult we do not mean that all they do and teach is false and nonsense, but that it is a false way to God, and a false way to be pleasing to God. Much of what is experienced by cults is true, but it leads to damnation rather than salvation. Drugs can give one an experience that is real, but it is not a reality that leads to God. No man is saved by how he feels, but by the death of Christ, and faith in Christ as one's Savior.

What I am saying is paradoxical. The false cults are not to be laughed at, because they are true. We say it is utter nonsense to worship the devil, and be a medium for demons. If we mean by nonsense that it is all a hoax, and that demons are non-existent, then we are denying an aspect of reality clearly revealed in the Bible. This is what the non-Christians means by calling spiritism and demon possession nonsense, but a Christian is compelled to believe in the reality of demons. This is a subject rarely thought of because it is embarrassing to the modern mind. It seems to be too directly connected with superstition and blind paganism.

There are pagan peoples who believe there are evil spirit in every bush and tree, and they live in constant fear of them. They devise all kinds of rituals to drive them away and keep them from causing them harm. The Christian does not want to be in the same category with these victims of ignorance, and so, for all practical purposes, he dismisses the whole idea of demons as irrelevant. Its the same old story of one extreme leading to a reaction to the opposite extreme. They over-believe in demons, and so we under-believe. We unconsciously follow the reasoning of the skeptic. Demonism is connected with fanatical ignorant unscientific paganism, therefore, as an educated enlightened man I cannot believe in demons. This is false reasoning.

If a man has extremely abnormal fear of germs so that he becomes a fanatic for washing and sterilizing everything continuously, would his unfounded fears prove that germs were really non-existent, and, therefore, nothing to worry about? It proves no such thing, nor does extreme fear and preoccupation with demons prove that such creatures are imaginary. Other skeptics object that if demons are real we would see today the same things we see the New Testament. The same objection could be made concerning the great plagues that swept Europe killing thousands of people. If that was true, why do we not see the same thing today? The answer is obvious. We have learned how to conquer this enemy. The same is true concerning demon possession. We do see it because where people are enlightened with the Gospel Satan cannot operate as effectively.

Demon possession is common on the mission field, and the records of it are extensive. Many are just like legion. They go naked and cut themselves, and shriek, and in the name of Christ they are cast out. This phenomenon of exorcism has a long history which goes back even before the time of Christ. Josephus traces it back to Solomon and writes, "God also enabled him (i.e. Solomon) to learn the skill which expels demons, which is a service useful and sanative to man. He composed such incantations also by which distempers are alleviated, and he left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return; and this method of cure is of great force unto this day."

The truth of this is confirmed by Jesus Himself when He responded to the accusation that He was casting out demons by the power of the devil himself, by saying, "By whom do your sons cast them out?" Even the unsaved can cast out demons, for Jesus said many will come before Him at judgment saying, "Did we not cast out demons in thy name, and do many mighty works in thy name?" Jesus will reply that He never knew them. In other words, though the reality of exorcism is Biblical, performing it is no proof that one is a child of God. There are many marvelous and mysterious things that take place in this world, but because they are true, it is no reason for Christians to pursue them. Our only interest in the mysterious realm of demons is to be an interest in keeping them, by the power of Christ, as close to non-existence as possible.

The exorcism of Jesus was not indirect and accomplished by means of ritual or incantation. He

spoke directly with authority, and the demons fled. In Mark 1:27, after his first exorcism, the people were amazed and said, "For with authority commanded he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him." Jesus gave the same power to His disciples. In Mark 3:14-15 we read, "And He appointed 12 to be with Him, and to be sent out to preach, and have authority to cast out demons." Again in Mark 6:7 we read, "And He called to Him the 12, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." In verses 12 and 13 we read, "So they went out and preached that men should repent, and they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.

When the 70 that Jesus sent out came back they were amazed at their power in His name. In Luke 10:17-19 we read the strongest passage in the New Testament of Christ's Lordship over the forces of Satan. "The 70 returned with joy saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!'" And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.'" Resist the devil and he will flee from you is the advice of James. In Christ we have the power to escape, and even to defeat the demons of hell. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church of Christ. We can say, "Get thee behind me Satan," and when said in the name of Christ it forces him to back off. The Lordship of Christ needs to be practiced as well as believed.

This first exorcism of an evil spirit was the beginning of a long history of the power of Christ through His church to cast out demons. Back in 150 A.D. Justin Martyr in his Apology wrote that large numbers of possessed people, who could not be helped by the magicians or herbalists, were being healed in the name of Christ. Tertullian a little later called the demons gods, and he said that when they were cast out they confessed that they were demon-gods. Cyprian in the third century said that all Christians had the power to cast out demons. Even women were equal to men in this way. It was a sign that the church represented the kingdom of God.

Through the middle ages there was a constant battle to distinguish between the demonical and the diseased. This was made harder by the fact that so many people tried to fake demonization. In 692 the Trullan Synod ordered that, "Those who pretend to be demonics shall have to undergo the same hardships and deprivation as those who are truly possessed." Confusion led the Catholic church to make exorcism an official duty limited to the priest. In 1614 The Rituale Romanum was formed which only the priests could use as a method of exorcism, and ever since the casting out of demons has been institutionalized in the Catholic church.

During the middle ages possessed Christians were a regular part of the Christian community. They were permitted to participate in all the services, and prayers were said for them. Debate was strong as to whether they should be permitted to be baptized. These possessed Christians would have periods of being completely normal, and then suddenly they would be attacked. When they were normal they were just like all the rest of the Christians. In 441 A.D. the Council of Orange made this rule: "Possessed who have been baptized and are under clerical care should be admitted to communion, so that they might be strengthened in their resistance to wicked enemies, or cleansed after such attacks." There were no clear distinctions between the mentally ill and the demonized at this point.

There was great debate over whether a possessed person should be ordained or not. Some said if he was delivered, it would be okay. Others were of the strong opinion that even the delivered should

not be ordained because of the danger of relapse. Demonized Christians in leadership was a big issue just as divorced Christians in leadership is today. St. Benedict made this his ruling: "Anyone who, after receiving holy ordination, suffers from possession, but is certain that he has overcome it, should be permitted by his superior to exercise the tasks for which he has been qualified by the previously received ordination." Clearly, if the clergy can become possessed, the church recognized that any Christian could become a demonized Christian.

As the centuries passed, however, exorcism became less and less of a priority. In the early centuries it was as significant in the life of the church as it was in the life of Christ. At the beginning of the third century Tertullian claimed that only Christians could expel demons, and he wrote to his pagan critics who wanted to suppress the Christian community, "Who would deliver you from these secret foes, ever busy both destroying your souls and ruining your health? Who would save you, I mean, from the attacks of these spirits of evil, which without reward or hire we exercise?" We do not have the time to pursue the whole history, but let it suffice to say there has been exorcism of demons all through history.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "He that knows what human nature is will be astonished at nothing evil that it produces. I do not mean human nature unrenewed by grace, but I mean that carnal nature which remains even in the disciple of Christ." Spurgeon is saying that the Christian is capable of any evil, and can still be a tool of Satan. We would like to believe that when godly men fall they were not really godly at all, but the fact is, true people of God can be deceived and come under the power of the demonic. Spiritual warfare is real, and even the good guys get hurt and killed in this war. It is time for us to take the conflict of the Savior and Satan seriously. We need to recognize that we live in a world of madness for which there is only one cure, and that is Christ. Ignorance, deception, and madness are just as real today as they were in the day of Christ. It is our responsibility to see that the victory over evil is just as real today as it was then. We need to be casting out the demonic in our lives and our culture in the name of Jesus, the Master over all madness.

## **21. MEDICAL MISSIONS**

## **MARK 5:1-20**

Everyone of us lives with a doctor, and to make it even better the doctor we live with can write prescriptions and get the medicine delivered immediately. If you think you don't take drugs, it is only because you do not know what your doctor is doing. Your doctor is your brain. I have had a lot of doctors in my life, but my most personal and faithful doctor is a real brain. He is my brain, and yours is your brain.

Richard Bergland of the Harvard University School of Medicine has presented evidence that the brain of man is a literal pharmacy. It is more than the center of consciousness. It is a gland which secretes a prolific number of drugs which keep the body healthy, or help it fight to get health back. The brain has the capacity to write out prescriptions in an almost infinite number of combinations to meet the body's varied needs.



Dr. Carmine Clemente of the UCLA Brain Research Institute has confirmed these studies, and says the number of the secretions the brain can produce are almost beyond calculation. The number of them he says can be activated by mere thought or emotion. If we just imagine a challenge or a danger the brain will produce a chemical that prepares the body for defense. The brain produces a whole family of substances called endorphins. The word means, "The morphine within." In other words, our brain has the power to produce its own narcotics to relieve the body of pain. We are all walking drug stores because of the marvelous medical organ God created for us in the brain.

But like all wonderful things it can be misused and lead to harmful rather than helpful effects. The brain was used by Satan to destroy the people of New Guinea. About 40 years ago a dreaded disease called KURU threatened to wipe out the Foie people there. 43% of the women and a lesser percent of the men all died of this mysterious illness. Dr. Carleton Gajdusek went as a medical missionary to these people. He discovered the disease was spread through the black art of sorcery. The brains of dead people were mixed into the food of unsuspecting victims, and this led to the disease. It was a dormant virus, however, and may not show up for several years, so nobody could see any connection.

There is no cure for the disease, but it can be easily prevented by avoiding sorcery. Missionaries began to teach the people the cause of the disease, and in those villages where people listened there were no more cases. They used their brain and stopped eating dead brains, and so they eliminated that disease that almost eliminated them. This true story from Wycliff Bible Translators illustrates how essential medical missions are to the task of fulfilling the Great Commission. People cannot hear the Gospel and read the Word of God if their bodies are being destroyed by demon designed diseases which rob them of life.

People have to be saved before they can be saved. That is, they have to be delivered from temporal death in order to be delivered from eternal death. One of Satan's most effective ways of insuring the doom of masses is to kill them by their own ignorance, and keep them in bondage to evil practices. We have no idea what caused the madman in our text to be mad, but one thing is for sure, he was not a likely prospect for the 4 spiritual laws, or the Romans road, or any other presentation of the Gospel. The man was in bondage to demon power, and the only way he could be of any value to himself, others, or the kingdom of God was to be released from that bondage. That is the essence of what medical missions is all about.

Under the heavy oppression of starving to death, or dying of a disease, people are not open to the Gospel. But if you can set them free from these temporal tyrants, they may be open to hear about what else they can receive in the name of Jesus. That is why medical missions have been a key factor in winning people from all cultures to Christ. What we want to focus on in this complex text is a couple of simple facts. The first thing this text reveals is that-

## I. JESUS WAS A MEDICAL MISSIONARY.

Jesus did not heal Jews only. He was open to healing any Gentile that came to Him. The Roman Centurian came to Him and He gladly healed his servant. The Syrophonecian woman came to Him and He healed her daughter. The feeding of the 4000 was in a Gentile area, but the feeding of the 5000 was in a Jewish area. Jesus healed any who came to Him, but this is the first text where Jesus went into Gentile territory to heal a person. Jesus is going across the Sea of Galilee to

the Gentile territory of the Gerasenes, or Gaderenes, as some manuscripts have it.

Jesus was an oversea missionary. You don't have to go overseas to be a missionary, but the fact is, you do have to cross some boundary for the idea to have any meaning. C. Everett Koop, the Surgeon General of the United States for many years, has been a leader in medical missions for decades, and he has provided us with this definition: "A missionary is a believer who penetrates a new area of life with the Christian Gospel by crossing a boundary which may be geographic, social, cultural, or a boundary in belief."

The key idea is the crossing of a boundary, for that is what makes you a missionary. As long as you stay in the comfort zone where everyone is just like you basically, you are a witness or evangelist, but when you cross over a boundary where people are different, then you become a missionary to them. Jesus was obviously in non-Jewish territory in our text, for there were 2000 pigs being cared for, and this would never be seen on the other side where the Jews live. Jesus was in foreign territory. He crossed the boundary to make it clear He cared about the Gentiles who were in bondage to Satan. Some were so enslaved they were like this mad man. Jesus came to heal this man and set him free, and this has been the motive of medical missions all through history. The motive is to set men free so that can be well and in their right mind give their lives to the kingdom of light.

The modern missionary movement began with medical missions. Dr. John Thomas was born in 1757. He grew up to become a ship's surgeon in the British Navy. At age 27 he became a Christian, and he wanted to become a preacher. A small Baptist church called him to be their pastor, but his friends discouraged it. Instead, he sailed for the second time to India, and near Calcutta he became a missionary. He learned the Bengali language and began to preach. In 1792 he went back to England to raise support.

William Carey, the father of modern missions, was just facing the Baptists Missionary Society. When they met John Thomas they were sold on him as the first missionary they wanted to support. So a doctor became the first Baptist missionary from England. Carey went with him to India and reported on the many lives he saved by his medical knowledge. His most famous patient was Krishna Pal, who became their first convert. This Hindu came to him for healing, and while Dr. Thomas set his dislocated shoulder Krishna Pal repented and asked Jesus to be his Savior. Like people all over the world, when he was healed he wanted to respond to the love that made that healing possible, and that was the love of Christ.

That one healed arm was the beginning of a whole arm of the church being formed in the land of India. A physical healing led to a multitude of spiritual healings. Don't ever discount the powerful effect that healing can have as the forerunner of evangelism. Most of the growth of the church on the mission field that has been radical had its origin in healing. Healing is the number one phenomenon for breaking down walls in all cultures, and making it easy for people to come to Christ.

William Carey had to carry on the medical work when Dr. Thomas died, and even though he was not trained he learned plenty from watching the doctor. He went on practicing medicine for healing was a key factor in opening people up to listen to the Gospel. If you study the origin of missions all over the world, you will discover that most of the fields were opened up by medical missions. There

is almost no nation on earth that will say no to somebody who says I want to heal your body. Bodily healing is universal need, and everybody loves those who have answers for healing.

Jesus gave dignity to the body, for not only did He take on a body as the Son of God, but He healed the body and thereby said it is worthy of divine energy. It is worth a great price to restore the body to health. That is why Christian missions has always been promoters of healing. Christian brains have been the key to healing through most of history. Nestorius was the Patriarch of Constantinople, but he could not go along with the church doctrine of Theotokos which means declaring Mary to be the mother of God. In 431 A.D. the Council of Ephesus denounced the Nestorians as heretics, and they were compelled to flee. They went to Mesopotamia and took up the study of medicine in the town of Edessa. They established a school of medicine and two hospitals, and became the center of medical knowledge in the world.

Keep in mind it was the dark ages, and all the medical wisdom of man from the ancient world had been rejected by the church. Superstition had replaced the science of Hippocrates and Galen. Intolerance of this revival of Greek learning and medicine forced the Nestorians to get out of Christian territory altogether, and seek refuge in Persia where the Shah was opened to medical learning. He became fanatical and ordered Plato and Aristotle and all the Greek works to be translated into Arabic.

The paradox is that the Moslem world became the center of International medicine because of the Christian Nestorians. They not only established hospitals, they gave the Moslem world all of the wisdom of the Greeks. There were no scientific books in Arabic. The Moslem world became so hungry for this knowledge that the world was ransacked for ancient manuscripts, and they were taken by caravan to the Nestorians who translated all of the Greek wisdom into Arabic. The brains of Christians led to a revival of learning in the Moslem world. That led to hospitals being built all over the Islamic world so that Moslem capitals like Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, and Cordova all became medical centers. The Khalifs began a new tradition by building a school and hospital attached to every mosque.

This Arab revival of learning did finally touch Europe and became a foundation for their revival called the Renaissance. The point of this amazing history is that it was Christian brains that kept medical knowledge alive, and preserved it for the modern world. This pattern has continued so that medical knowledge all over the pagan world, which has healed millions, has come largely through Christian minds and their medical missions.

Medical historians recognize that if someone had not preserved the Greek wisdom, modern medicine would not have existed. It was Christian minds which established that the scientific method of the ancient Greeks was of God. Thomas Sydenham, the prince of practical physics, who laid the foundation of modern clinical medicine by reinstating the Hippocratic method, was a dedicated Christian. In his first book in the 17th century he wrote, "Whatever skill or knowledge he (the physician) may, by divine favour, become possessed of, should be devoted above all things to the glory of God and the welfare of the human race. Moreover, let him remember that it is not any base or despicable creature of which he has undertaken the care. For the only begotten Son of God, by becoming man, recognized the value of the human race, and ennobled by His own dignity the nature He assumed."

The second simple fact that we want to see from this amazing and complex healing miracle is that it reveals-

## II. THE MOTIVE OF MEDICAL MISSIONS.

You will notice that when the healed demoniac begged to go with Jesus and be with Him, Jesus refused. It seems cruel in a way, but Jesus did not go the Gentile land to get another disciple to follow Him. He said to Him that he should go home and tell his family how much the Lord has done for him. The motive of Jesus in healing him and restoring him to his right mind is that he might have a witness in that land to share the good news of God's mercy. The man obeyed and became one of, if not the very first, Gentile missionary to his own people. People were amazed at his story, and that is what Jesus wanted. He wanted people to be aware that the kingdom of God had come into the world, and now there is a power on earth greater than the power of evil. That is the motive behind this miracle and the history of the church reveals just why this is so important to the fulfillment of the great commission.

In Acts 3 Peter healed the lame man, and the people in Jerusalem were amazed.

In Acts 8 when Philip healed many and cripples began to walk, the people of Samaria were overwhelmed with joy.

In Acts 28 Paul had the same response when he healed the father of Publius on Malta, and all the sick on the island flocked to him.

It is all very simple: when people see that the power which accompanies the Gospel is more powerful than the evil which oppresses them, they gladly respond to the Gospel. This is called power evangelism, and is the most effective type of evangelism. The motive for all healing, be it medical or faith healing, is to bring people to Christ, and lead them to trust Him as Savior. Healing is a means to evangelism, and a very effective one because it appeals to all people of all classes in all cultures.

In 1954 two missionaries came to Round Lake, Ontario, Canada. The natives there had the Bible, and they asked them how do we know you are not the wolves who are to come in the last days to deceive us? The missionaries said, "By our fruits you will know us." The natives responded, "Our Bible says you will be able to put oil on people and they will be healed." The missionaries had never done this and they had no oil, but it was either try or be rejected as false prophets. They had some shell aviation oil, and since the Bible was not specific as to what was kosher, they used it and anointed two children who had been sick for a long time. They then went to bed and the next morning woke up to a village full of excitement. The two children were well and eating breakfast. The people were convinced and turned to Christ. The church there became the largest in that whole area. Healing was the key to open their skeptical minds to see that the Gospel was authentic.

John Wimber in his course on Signs And Wonders at Fuller Theological Seminary has compiled a record of how the healing ministry has been the key to church growth all around the world. William Harris was a liberian who received the gift of healing and went to the Ivory Coast in the 1920's. He learned that the wife of the chief was sick and dying. He went to her and said, "Touch this cross and get up and walk." She did just that, and the entire village was converted to Christ. This story has been repeated over and over.

Donald McGavran, a leading authority on church growth in the world, tells of an Indian community in South Africa that was opposed to Christian missions. The only way that tribe was penetrated was by a series of healing campaigns. This led to tens of thousands of people coming to Christ. In Chile, the largest Protestant denomination grew from 0% to 35% of the 12 million population in 80 years by the power of signs and wonders.

Medical or miraculous healing have one primary purpose, and that is to convince people that the power of Christ is greater than the power they now serve. When people see the love that heals their bodies they develop a rapid faith and hope, and are ready to revolt against the kingdom that has enslaved them and blinded them, and surrender to a new Master-the Lord Jesus.

That is why Mission Aviation Fellowship is flying doctors and medicine all over the world to reach people in remote places. The only way these people will respond to the Gospel is to see the power of Christian love demonstrated in their bodies. Healing is the great persuader, for it crosses all boundaries. People of every tribe, tongue, and language, with all the cultural differences, know when they have been healed. It may take years to get the Bible into their language, and years more to help them grasp Christian theology, but healing can happen in a moment, and when it does they are open to listen and respond.

One of the paradoxes of history is that the reason there are so many non-Christians in the world is due in great measure to Christian medical missions. Epidemics wiped out pagans by the millions until Christian missionaries came to them with medicine to save them. The pagan religions of the world were basically indifferent to the care of the body. It was Christian missionaries who brought modern Western medicine to the rest of the world. In most parts of the world the first hospital, the first school, the first asylum for the blind and mentally ill, the first medical book, and the first organization concerned for healing of any kind, was brought by the missionaries.

Dr. William Wanless opened the first hospital in Bombay, India in the 19th century. It was nothing but a glorified chicken coop, but today is the beautiful modern Miraj Hospital covering 12 areas. In the late 1800's a medical missionary James Fanstone accepted the challenge to leave England to go to Brazil. Today the son of this pioneer heads a hospital which has its own airport because people come from all over Brazil to receive its healing ministry. They started the first school of nursing in Brazil, and today there are graduates are snapped up as fast as they can produce them. The three largest hospitals in Brazil have their graduates as their head nurse.

The point is, you can go around the world and discover that the healing ministry of the church has been one of the key means of fulfilling the great commission.

## 22. FEAR OR FAITH

## MARK 5:21-24, 35-43

The Golden Gate Bridge in California got way behind schedule when it was being built. There were so many casualties, and the men were afraid of falling off. A huge safety net was placed beneath the area of operations, but for a time this made no difference. Then a man fell off into the net. When he came up smiling the men knew they were safe, and from that moment the project leaped ahead.

When fear rules men are cowards. When faith reigns men are courageous. Carlyle said that the ultimate question every man has to face and answer for himself is this: "Wilt thou be a hero or a coward?" This was the decision Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, had to make in the crisis he faced when his daughter was dying, and even pronounced dead. He was caught in a bind, for the facts seem to support fear, and yet Jesus in verse 36 said, "Be not afraid, only believe." Jesus was saying that faith is the only soil in which the seed of hope will grow. If you forsake faith, the plant will wither, and you will be a victim of fear. Don't do it Jesus said. Don't give in to fear even when all the evidence supports it, for faith is not limited by the evidence.

Faith not only can change the future, it can altar the past. Faith not only rises above the knowledge of man, it sometimes must choose to go even contrary to knowledge. The unknown can stimulate either fear or faith, courage or cowardice. By the authority of Jesus the Christian is to choose faith, even in the face of negative evidence.

Faith, mighty faith, promise sees,  
And looks to God alone;  
Laughs at impossibilities  
And cries, it shall be done!

But sometimes it doesn't get done. Sometimes the impossibilities laugh back. The fearful forces of evil win the battle. The storm does sink the ship. The sick child does die. The maniac is not cured and the disease is not healed. There is much evidence to support those who chose the way of fear rather than faith.

If Jesus meant to teach by His series of miracles in Mark 4 and 5, in which He conquered danger, demons, disease, and death, that the Christian need never worry about these, since he would be miraculously spared from them all, then we have great reason to be disappointed. The fact is that Christians do suffer from all of these afflictions, and none yet have escaped death. The purpose of Jesus in all of these miracles is to convey to us that we need not fear any evil when it strikes, and succeeds in doing its worst, for as Lord of all He is superior to all the forces that produce fear.

The demons had succeeded in making the man a slave. The sickness of the woman in verses 25-34 had succeeded in making her life miserable for 12 years. Death had succeeded in taking the life of this 12 year old child. Jesus does not pretend that all of these evils are just fictions. They are real, but He makes it clear that they are only temporal. Therefore, fear ought not to be our motivation in life, but faith ought to be, for faith leads to the ultimate, and is assured of eternal victory over all fearful foes. All of this show of miraculous power, however, would not have been necessary if fear was not a powerful foe, so let's consider for a while-

## I. THE POWER OF FEAR.

In January of 1966 a federal court jury decided that fear, and fear alone, is an injury sufficient to cause death. This was in connection with the death of 47 year old Ralph Thompson. He was a third mate on a vessel driven into the center of Valdez, Alaska by the title wave in 1964. He suffered no visible injury, but fear caused such a psychic injury that he died. It is a fact that fear can kill you. You can be scared to death. It can also make living extremely miserable. Lloyd C. Douglas said, "If a man harbors any sort of fear, it percolates through all his thinking, damages his

personality, makes him landlord to a ghost."

Poor King Herod did not want to kill John the Baptist at the request of a dancing girl, but fear of ridicule drove him to an evil shocking to his own mind. Fear of being mocked and laughed at, or rejected, leads millions of people into doing acts of folly or evil they despise. They are victims of the power of fear. They are landlords to a ghost. Most of the foolish things teenagers do, they do out of fear of being laughed at or rejected by their peers.

Modern psychiatry has demonstrated that fear has been able to draft a large army of slaves by its power. It can produce every illness from the common cold to crippling arthritis. Masses of people are nervous, depressed, irritable, sleepless, and just generally tired all because they are victims of fear. Fear is a power to be reckoned with. It challenges faith by performing wonders. It can take a normal healthy person, and like magic turn them into an invalid. We think faith is marvelous when it turns the invalid into a normal healthy person. Why not give fear credit for its power to do the negative and opposite wonder?

F. D. Roosevelt knew what he was talking about when he said in 1933, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." It was not original with him, however, for men have known this all along. Thoreau wrote, "Nothing is so much to be feared as fear." The Duke of Wellington said, "The only thing I am afraid of is fear." Montaigne said, "The thing of which I have most fear is fear." It is the power that keeps the world in turmoil continuously. Centuries ago Epictetus said, "It is not death or hardship that is a fearful thing, but the fear of hardship and death." Once a person is captured by fear there does not have to be any real danger to make him a slave. The person obsessed with fear soon finds all of life a threat. Wordsworth wrote,

My apprehensions came in crowds;  
I dread the rustling of the grass;  
The very shadows of the clouds  
Have power to shake me as they pass;  
I question things and do not find  
One that will answer to my mind,  
And all the world appears unkind.

This is the kind of fear that evil forces delight in. Natural fear is a benefit to people, and is a God given instinct for self-protection and preservation, but this neurotic fear makes us slaves rather than free men. The natural fear of snakes while walking through the jungle is able to keep a man cautious and alive. The neurotic fear of snakes keeps a man dead to life while he lives. Dictators make good use of this power of neurotic fear. Hitler said he could achieve everything with systematic terror.

Otto Dibelius, bishop of the Evangelical Church of Berlin/ Brandenburg, suffered under the tyranny of Nazism and Communism, and he wrote, "Every totalitarian state proclaims night and day: "Enemies all around! If we don't employ our ultimate strength in our defense, we shall be lost the day after tomorrow." The state must use this fear, for in their cowardice people will do everything the state demands. They will make every sacrifice, intensify their labors-everything for the deity of the state whose power they regard as their only protection." Fear is the means by which the majority of the world are made slaves and puppets by a powerful minority. None can doubt the

great power of fear in our world. Even the so called free people of the world are slaves of a thousand and one fears. The evidence is strong that fear is sovereign in our day just as it was in the day of Christ, but Jesus says, "Be not afraid, only believe." Jesus recognizes the power of fear, but He recognizes faith to be more powerful, and urges us to forsake fear and fly to faith. Now let us consider-

## II. THE POWER OF FAITH.

Many of the great men of history were cowards until God persuaded them to chose faith over fear. Moses wanted to be counted out in the great plan of God to deliver the Jews from the Egyptians. He said he was not eloquent and just could not do it. Gideon took the same line when God wanted him to lead his people to victory. His excuse was that he was from such a poor home, and was just a nobody. So many of God's chosen men were like Saul hiding behind the luggage like fearful cowards when God was looking for faithful heroes. But when these men chose faith rather than fear they became the very heroes they were sure they could never be. What fear says is impossible faith brings to pass.

A woman who was no longer young, and who was yet unmarried was fearful that she might miss out on this sublime human experience. So she went to her pastor for advice. The pastor hid behind a pious platitude and said, "Well the Lord has a plan, one woman for every man, and one man for every woman. You can't improve on that." She said, "I don't want to improve on it, I just want to get in on it." Most of us feel this way about the power of faith over fear. It is wonderful, and we don't want to improve on it, we just want to get in on it. Who of us does not long to bid our fears to flee before the power of faith? Who of us does not want to respond in obedience to Jesus when He says to believe and not be afraid? Who of us does not desire to say with David, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Certainly the greatest security in life would be in a faith powerful enough to conquer all fears.

Faith is a risk. Jesus says, dare to trust me. He does not give you proof, but like the airlines He says, trust me and try me. The airlines depend upon faith for their existence. They cannot prove to you that their mechanics made no mistakes, and that their pilots are beyond error. Dare to trust us is all they can say. Faith is a choice you must make before the evidence is all in. Afterward, there is no need for faith. When the girl is well you don't need any faith for it is a fact, and you need only to acknowledge it then. The restaurant says, dare to trust us, our food will not hurt you. The doctor says, dare to trust me, I will not fail you. The druggist says, dare to trust me, I will give you only what will help and not harm. Life would come to a screeching halt if we did not live by faith.

Helen Keller in her book, *Let Us Have Faith*, makes it clear that faith is the source of her amazing life of victories in spite of blindness. "In my doubly shadowed world faith gives me reason for trying to draw harmony out of a marred instrument. Faith is not a cushion for me to fall back upon, it is my working energy."

In 1809 Dr. Ephraim McDowell had to make an agonizing decision. Mr. Thomas Crawford had traveled 60 miles to see if he could save his life. The only hope was an abdominal operation that had never been performed. This backwards doctor knew the chances were slim, and so did everyone else. A mob gathered and threw a rope over a tree. They were ready to hang the doctor for murder



if the patient died. He took the risk and the patient lived. Every operation for appendicitis since then goes back to that act of faith over fear. It happened on a Christmas morning. By faith he gave life where death was certain, without this act of faith. Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote,

Not truth, but faith, it is  
That keeps the world alive. If all at once  
Faith were to slacken-that unconscious faith  
Which must, I know, yet be the cornerstone  
Of all believing-birds now flying fearless  
Across would drop in terror to the earth;  
Fishes would drown; and the all-governing reins  
Would tangle in the frantic hands of God  
And the world's gallop headlong to destruction.

Catherine Marshall said she had this foolish concept of faith for years, that faith was a matter of feeling. She knew it would be silly to go to the train station and board the first car she saw, and then sit down and try to feel whether or not that was the right train to get her where she wanted to go. But in the spiritual realm she practiced that, and tried to feel forgiven, for example, instead of trusting God at His word, that if she confessed it, He would forgive. Faith is so surprisingly simple that it took her a while to realize it was just a matter of trusting God enough to act on His word. She said, "Were we to use the muscles of our legs as little as we do the muscles of our faith, most of us would be unable to stand."

The first thing we need to do is to recognize that faith is a matter of the inner man. You cannot change the world and all of its real dangers. They are here and here to stay as long as time shall be. How one responds to what is, is determined by his inner nature. Sometimes a herd of cattle can be stampeded by the snap of a finger, while other times a rifle shot will not send them on a rampage. The difference depends upon their inner condition. Modern psychology tells us that man is the same. There is an implosion before an explosion. That is, he goes to pieces within, and is shattered inside before he explodes on the outside.

It is faith that keeps the inner man unified and secure so that externals do not fill him with fear and anxiety. When Jesus said to Jairus, "Do not be afraid, only believe," He was urging him to maintain his trust in Him, and not let externals overthrow it. What was he to believe? Was it the doctrine of the trinity, the virgin birth, the atonement? No, there is no content to basic faith other than simple trust in the person of Christ. A few weeks ago, with my fear of heights, I found myself looking down on Pittsburgh from thousands of feet above. I never once thought of all the papers I wrote on theology. I never once considered any theological position for assurance. My faith consisted solely in a trust in the person of Christ. This is faith reduced to its essence-a personal trust in one who is Lord, and who alone gives ultimate meaning to life.

Every conceivable danger can happen to a Christian, but a Christian knows that with his personal trust in Christ, as ultimate victory over all evil, he cannot lose whatever the externals bring, for even death will usher him into the presence of Christ. Our faith in Christ is not based on fantasy, but on fact. This was the purpose of His miracles, that each of us in fearful circumstances might be able to hear and heed His counsel, "be not afraid, only believe."

## 23. THE POWER OF TOUCH

## MARK 5:25-34

One of the great stories of Greek Mythology is that of Antaeus and Hercules. Antaeus, like Hercules, was of gigantic stature and marvelous strength. His parents were Neptune and Terra-ocean and earth. When he and Hercules engaged in mortal combat, Hercules proved to be the strongest, but every time he had Antaeus exhausted and point of defeat his flesh would touch Mother Earth, and his strength was mysteriously renewed, and he resumed the conflict with fresh vigor. Hercules finally slew the mighty Antaeus by performing the titanic feat of lifting him into the air where he was out of touch with the earth. The Greeks were saying by this legend that there is great power in touch. The earth was the source of life for Antaeus, and when he could not keep in touch with his source of life he lost his power, and, therefore, lost his life.

Though it is a myth, the truth it teaches is a fact. Direct contact with the source of life, with the palpitating heart of things, revitalizes you and rejuvenates the flow of energy. The people who are really enthused and alive on any issue are those who are in touch with the heart of the issue. On the other hand, if you are out of touch and have no contact, but are on the fringe of things, you are like a branch cut off the vine, and you will wither and waste away.

All of nature is a witness to the power of touch. If the plant world is not kept in touch with mother earth, no life can exist. It is the tree whose hungry mouth is pressed against the earth's sweet flowing breast that cause the poet to say, "Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree." God makes a tree and all the fruits of trees through the power of touch.

Jesus used this fact of nature to illustrate the necessity for contact in the Christian life. In John 15:4-5 he said, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me you can do nothing." Jesus is clearly saying, out of touch is out of power. The power of life is found only by maintaining contact with the source of power. Get out of touch with Christ, and you are like Antaeus up in the air cut off from mother earth; weak and helpless and doomed to defeat.

The truth we are dealing with here is not an isolated incidental fact of life. It is a universal truth with infinite significance. The power of touch must be taken seriously in all realms of life. Science is all based on the principle of the necessity of touch. How many times have you wondered why your tape recorder, or some other electrical appliance, has stopped working, only to discover that the problem was a loose connection somewhere? Something was not touching and there was no contact being made, and all electric power depends upon contact. Break the current of contact and you lose your power. It is just a fact of life in the realm of science as well as in nature. No touch means no power.

History also bears witness to the power of touch. When the church began it was in constant contact with the common people. The common people heard Jesus gladly, and when the Apostles took over the leadership they were always among the masses. For several centuries the church was active in the market place. It kept its finger on the heart beat of people's lives where they were

living, and the result of this keeping in touch with people was power and growth.

Then came the age of the monastery. The church withdrew from the world. It isolated itself behind walls, and broke contact with the masses. The result was a thousand years of sitting in the dark. It is called the dark ages because the power of the light house was gone. It was gone for the same reason your house goes dark if you take your fuses out and pack them away in a box in the attic. They must be put in contact with the flow of energy to bring light to your house. So the church had to be in touch with the world if it was going to be the light of the world.

The circuit must be complete. Jesus could only reconcile God and man, and be the mediator between God and man, because He was equally in touch with both God and man. The church cannot be an agent of reconciliation unless it is in touch with both God and man. History proves that being out of touch is being out of power. In our individual lives we will degenerate, vegetate, and stagnate if we lose touch with people. Lukewarm leftovers are dishes in which the devil delights, and they will be the menu we offer a starving world if we do not keep in touch with our Lord, the source of our life and power, and the world which desperately needs the fruit that His power can provide.

Our text is just one of many Biblical examples of the power of touch. I chose it because it is recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels, and the word touched is used in this account more than anywhere in the New Testament. 11 out of the 32 uses in the New Testament are found in the three recordings of this healing miracle. As we examine the power of touch in the life of this one woman we will see how essential it is for all of our lives. The first thing we see is-

## I. A TOUCH REVIVED HER HOPE.

The context shows that this woman interrupted Jesus as He was on His way to restore to life the daughter of Jairus. Verse 42 tells us the girl was 12 years old. From the time of that girl's birth to the moment Jesus headed to restore her this woman had been plagued with a flow of blood. For 12 long years she had endured the shame of her problem. For the same 12 years that Jairus enjoyed the sunshine of a healthy little girl, she endured the gloom of her illness. Such a flow of blood would exclude her from the women's court in the temple, and from the synagogue. She was not much better off than a leper, for she would be ostracized, and if she was married she would likely have been divorced and sent away on her own.

Persons in such predicaments as her are willing to try anything for a cure, and so according to Mark she spent everything she had on the doctors of her day. Dr. Luke does not tell us this interesting detail, and I suppose for good reason, for it would have been unethical for him to write of his fellow physicians in this negative way. It is understandable, and so no one can complain if doctors do not have a cure for your problem, but when they make your problem worse by using you as a guinea pig, there is room for complaint. That is what happened to this woman. Christian tradition calls her Bernice. In verse 26 Mark calls her broke. If she was broke but better she would be a happy woman, but she was broke and worse than she was before she went to the doctors.

In the Catholic Bible there is the book of Tobit, and in 2:10 we read of a similar problem he had with the doctors of Biblical days. He writes, "I use to go to the physicians to be healed, and the more they anointed me with their medicines, the more my eyes were blinded by the films, until they were

totally blinded." I don't know if Bernice had the same doctor as Tobit, but their treatment had the same effect, for it made the patient worse instead of better. With her health gone, and now her wealth, she was at the end of her rope. Where could she turn now, for she had nothing to pay even if she found someone with a cure.

She must have been in a pit of hopelessness, but then all is changed, for verse 27 says she heard the reports about Jesus. What reports? Why the reports that He could heal with a touch. He didn't use any medicine or costly herbs. A touch from the Great Physician is all it took to heal. She had heard that His touch even healed the hopeless, and He would bid them to come to Him.

When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

This was the cry of her heart as she heard these reports, and the possibility of being healed by a touch revived her hope. She was so convinced of the power of touch that she says to herself in verse 28, "If I can touch even the hem of His garment I shall be made well." What a powerful conviction for a woman who has spent 12 years fighting a losing battle. Now she has the hope of being made well by a mere touch. As we read on we see that, not only did a touch revive her hope, but secondly,

## II. A TOUCH RESTORED HER HEALTH.

Verse 29 says, "And immediately the hemorrhage ceased and she felt healed." 12 years of futile treatment, and now it is all over by the power of a touch. Touching Christ, or being touched by Christ, is like making contact with a live wire. There is an immediate effect. It is like hitting a switch and having immediate light in place of darkness. In Matt. 8 we read of a leper who came to Jesus for help, and verse 3 says, "And He stretched out His hand and touched him." Then does it go on to say how 5 months later he got well, or 5 weeks, or 5 days, or 5 minutes? No! It was not even 5 seconds. It says, "Immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

In this same chapter the mother-in-law of Peter is sick with a fever, and verse 15 says, "He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and served Him." She didn't recover the next morning and fix them breakfast, she got up immediately and fixed them lunch. In Matt. 20 there were two blind men who cried out to Jesus as He passed through Jericho. Verse 34 says, "And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they received their sight and followed Him."

There are more examples of how Jesus touched and healed, and how He touched children, and how He touched His disciples to calm them when they were fearful. Over and over again we see the power of touch to restore to health and to balance. The fascinating thing to notice as you study the passages on touch is how it doesn't make any difference if Jesus reaches out to the person, or if the person reaches out to Jesus. As long as touch takes place and contact is made in faith there is healing power in touch. Bernice was not basing her hope on her own imagination. The reports she heard about Jesus told of how many were healed by touching Him. Back in Mark 3 a great crowd pressed around Jesus, and verse 10 says, "for He had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon Him to touch Him." Bernice was not alone in wanting to touch the hem of His garment. In Matt. 14:35-36 we read of many who did the same thing. "And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent round to all that region and besought Him that they might only

touch the fringe of His garment, and as many as touched it were made well."

On the monument of Oliver Goldsmith these words are inscribed: "He touched nothing that he did not adorn." This was certainly true of Jesus. He touched water and the water became wine. He touched the lepers ugly form, or the darkened eyes of the blind, and there came forth beauty and the light of sight. Everything that sin had deformed Jesus could reform or transform by the power of His touch.

The healing of His seamless dress  
Is by our beds of pain.  
We touch Him in life's throng and press,  
And we are whole again.

The healing power of touch has a fascinating history. English kings for centuries healed people by the kings touch. It was thought to be a gift God gave to kings, and many practiced it. Edward I in the 13th century touched over a 1000 sufferers a year. In the 17th century over a period of 19 years Charles II touched almost 91 thousand people for healing. Even King James, after whom the Bible is named, practiced it, but he did not like it. In 1686 on Easter day king Louis XIV of France laid his hand on 1600 people repeating each time, "The king touches thee, may God cure thee." Many did experience healing, and theologians debated the issue, as we debate about faith healing today. The point is, healing has, ever since Jesus entered history, been connected with touch. There is just no escaping the power of touch.

Modern studies are revealing that touching is essential to both physical and mental health. Many babies have died in their first year due to marasmus. This is a wasting away caused by a lack of loving touch. Life will not survive without the touch of love. The same is true for animals. They must be licked when they are new born in order to survive. Mother animals do not lick their young just to keep them clean, but to keep them alive and healthy. The very power of life is in the touch. Experiments on rats have revealed that when they are gently handled and cuddled they can survive operations that kill those who are not calmed by loving touch. Rats that are touched and petted learn faster and develop a higher anti-body rate. Touch restores to health and maintains health. It is a principle God has built into His creation.

It applies to people as well as rats. Dr. Smiley Blanton wrote, "As a psychiatrist I have good reason to know how often human problems are caused by the simple failure of people to make contact with other people." Not keeping in touch as a family can ruin the health of the family. Touching always restores health. When the father of the prodigal saw his son returning, he did not prepare a quick lecture, or wait and greet him with a stiff and reluctant handshake. Instead, he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. There was more power for reconciliation in that act of touching love than in an encyclopedia of words. Dr. Paul Tournier said, "I'm convinced that 9 out of 10 people seeing a psychiatrist don't need one. They need somebody who will love them with God's love, and take time with them and believe for them, and they will get well."

In so many ways we all possess the power of healing in our hands. Dr. Blanton said, "I have great faith in "touchingness" as a remedy for sick souls because I know what it can do. Love is the climate in which all living things flourish, and sometimes a single touch can evoke the atmosphere. A father ruffles his son's hair lightly and in that casual gesture expresses infinite pride and joy. A

husband, helping his wife on with her coat, rest his hands for a moment on her shoulders, and thus says "I love you" as clearly as if he had written the words in letters of fire." The power of love is linked directly to the power of touch.

Bernice had her long lost health restored to her through a touch, and millions of others have experienced the health giving power of the touch. As the body of Christ we as Christians are to be sensitive to this power we possess. He wants us to continue to do what He did in the flesh, and give the world a hand. The poet spoke wisdom:

Tis the human touch in this world that counts.  
The touch of your hand and mine,  
Mean far more to the fainting soul,  
Than shelter or bread or wine.  
For shelter is gone when the night is o'er,  
And bread lasts only a day,  
But the touch of a hand and the sound of a voice  
Sing in the soul away.

This was certainly the case with this woman who touched Jesus. We cannot know until eternity what other lasting results came of that touch. We know she would have loved to sing the popular song, He Touched Me. We want to look briefly at a third point, for a touch not only revived her hope, and restored her health, but-

### III. A TOUCH RENEWED HER HISTORY.

After Jesus found her and heard her story He says in verse 34, "Go in peace and be healed of your disease." For 12 years she had known no peace, but now her life begins anew. History is filled with new potential now, for as a healed woman she is free again to enter the temple and synagogue, and to associate with people everywhere. Her whole history is radically renewed by this touch.

Helen Keller was blind, deaf, and dumb from her 19th month, but when she was 7 her teacher opened up to her the power of touch, and a new history began for her. It was almost like a conversion experience. She writes of it in her book My Key Of Life. "This was an adventure full of enchantment. From the darkness to light, from silence to language and harmony...., from dumbness to speech....O wondrous the change! I loved everything my fingers touched. The world seemed to me to overflow with goodness, justice and love." With all her handicaps she might have been a tragic vegetable of a person of little value to herself or the world, but the power of touch changed her whole history, and made her one of the great flowers of all time with a powerful impact on numerous lives.

Anyone of us yielded to the Spirit of Christ can by our touch give hope and help toward a new history to those whose present history leads only to darkness. Frederick Buechner compared humanity to a spider web and said, "As we move around this world and as we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference or with hostility toward the people we meet, we are setting the great spider web a tremble. The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops, or in what far place my touch will be felt." Bernice only touched the hem of Christ's garment, but that touch has set the whole spider web of

history a tremble. Here we are 19 centuries from that touch, and still being affected by it. Her touch gave her a place in history from which she has touched the lives of millions. Jesus wants to do this very thing in all of our lives. He wants to touch us that through us He might touch others.

She only touched the hem of His garment  
As to His side she stole,  
Amid the crowd that gathered around Him,  
And straightway she was whole.  
Oh, touch the hem of His garment,  
And thou, too, shalt be free!  
His saving power this very hour  
Shall give new life to thee.  
Author unknown

By faith we need to reach out to Jesus recognizing that He is reaching out to us to heal and renew by the power of touch.

## **24. MIRACLES AND THE MIND**

## **MARK 7:31-37**

Variety is not only the spice of life it is the very essence of life. Consider the bacteria that is all about us and within us. There are about 1500 different basic forms or species of these tiny one celled creatures. If you took 400 trillion of these creatures they would weigh only about 1 pound. Most of these bacteria have gotten bad press, and we think of them in negative terms. We are not even aware that many of them are essential to our lives. Only a small percentage cause disease. According to Issac Asimov they are far fewer than the percentage of human beings who commit crimes.

Bacteria carry out chemical reactions that are essential to digestion, and bacteria in our intestines form some of the vitamins that we cannot make for ourselves. Molecular biologists are working hard to figure out how to use these tiny creatures as more efficient servants in fighting disease. So they are primarily friends of man and not foes. Man has already designed a bacteria that manufactures human insulin so diabetics can live normal lives. The hope is that bacteria will help man produce vaccines for his most potent disease agent-the viruses. When you get into the world of scientific healing the one characteristic that stands out is the infinite variety.

There is no end to the means and methods by which man fights off his foes to maintain his health, or to regain it when it has been taken captive. What is fascinating in studying the healing miracles of Christ is that Jesus also used a variety of means and methods to bring about healing. You would think that if all Jesus had to do was to say, "Be healed," that He would have a standardized method, and one healing would be just like another. It would be monotonous and boring, but it would be so simple and easy. But Jesus deals with people as individuals. He recognizes that each person is unique, and is in need of treatment that is unique to their problem and personality. No where do we see this more clearly than in Healing of the deaf-mute in our text.

This is a healing that strays from the norm. Jesus is giving this man a specialized treatment. First of all, He takes him aside to deal with him privately. Usually Jesus just heals people in the midst of the crowd. But here He departs from the crowd to a place of privacy. Jesus did often touch the patient, but here He puts His fingers into the man's ears. Jesus does something that seems rather gross. He spit on His finger and touched the man's tongue with the spittle. There are a lot of strange things that happen in the world of healing, but fortunately this one never caught on. You will have a fruitless search trying to find any healer who follows Jesus on this one, and practices spit healing.

What Jesus is teaching us here is not a particular technique, but rather, the importance of variety in the methods and means of healing. Not all miracles are alike anymore than all medicine is alike. Miracles do not come in a can, and mass produced so that one is identical to the other. Each miracle is adapted to fit the individual who needs it. Miracles come in custom made packages with a lot of variety. Understanding this is a key factor in trying to figure out the puzzling mysteries of miracles and healing. Healings are not mass produced like bottles of aspirin. Each one is custom made to fit the nature of the person, the disease, and the circumstances.

Jesus may heal in the crowd, or in private. Sometimes He heals by the spoken word alone. At other times He adds touch, and as here, He adds special personal touches of His finger and spittle. On another occasion He used clay. He may heal at a distance, or right where He is present. Usually He heals instantly, but He also healed by process and stages. Some patients were required to do nothing, and others were asked to cooperate in their healing. One was asked to go and wash in the pool of Siloam, for example.

Richard Trench in his classic *The Miracles Of Our Lord* wrote, "There must lie a deep meaning in all the variations which mark the different healings of different sick and afflicted. A wisdom of God ordering all the circumstances of each particular case." When he wrote that book in the 1800's, he did not have a clue as to what that deep meaning might be. But today with the rapid advance of medical knowledge, we do know why His variety of treatment was of great value. Modern medicine has discovered what the Great Physician always knew, and now it has become a principle of health and healing. The principle is this:

## I. THE MIND OF THE PATIENT IS THE DOOR BY WHICH HEALING POWER ENTERS THE BODY.

You might think this should have nothing to do with miracles. What difference does it make if the mind is open or not? We are talking about God's power, and He certainly does not get stopped at the door just because the mind of man is closed, does He? It all depends on whether you are going by the popular idea of miracles, or the Biblical record. The popular idea is that God can do anything, and generally does. It is all a matter of His choices, and man has little or nothing to do with it. His puny mind is as irrelevant as bacteria is to the movement of a tank. But what does the Bible say? If you go back to Mark 6:5-6, you will read the shocking words that make the popular idea as false as a four dollar bill. It says, "He could not do any miracles there, except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them, and He was amazed at their lack of faith."

Miracles may not be man produced, but they can be man prevented. Yes, man can stop a miracle by a closed mind of unbelief. If the mind of a man is not open to the possibility of a miracle, then a miracle will not happen. Miracles are like electric power; they do not flow in where there is no



outflow. There has to be a complete circuit, and if the mind of a man is shut, the switch is off, and the energy will not flow. Man can resist the Holy Spirit, and quench the power of healing by a closed mind.

So what are the implications for healing? It simply means that almost all healing is psycho-somatic, and that to get to the body you have to go through the mind. To do this you have to appeal to each person in a way that opens their mind to be healed. The mind is the door to the body, and if you can't get through the mind, you will not be able to heal the body. Doctors need the patients cooperation to be successful.

This particular man that Jesus is dealing with in our text is obviously a reluctant patient. Some people have brought him to Jesus to be healed. He was not like the paralytic who was brought by his friends, for this man could walk. Yet, he had to be brought, and that means he did not choose to come, but is there under some social pressure. He is likely somewhat skeptical and not convinced Jesus can heal him. Jesus recognized this reluctance, and so He gives the man special treatment that will have the psycho-somatic effect of opening his mind. Jesus is practicing psycho-somatic medicine. He is using what is very popular today because it works like a charm-the placebo effect.

The spit of Jesus had no power to cure a deaf-mute, but it had the power to open his mind to receive the healing power of Christ. It kindled in him a sense that he was loved as an individual, and this gave him faith and hope. Once that blockage was away from the door of his mind, the door could be opened, and the flow of healing power could enter his body. The healing power was not in Christ's finger or His spittle. This was the means by which to get the man's mind open so it could receive the healing power of Christ. Whatever opens the mind to receive healing energy is a powerful medicine for that particular person. That is why there are so many different methods and means of healing.

What appeals to one mind leaves another unimpressed. The minds of men are so varied that there is no end to the means by which they can be impressed and opened. Pills can be the open sesame to many minds, and that is why placebos can be effective. The minds of many are ready to accept that any pill will work. So when they are given a mere sugar pill they have a powerful effect on the body because the mind has been opened to receive healing power. The spit of Jesus did this for this man. It had the placebo effect that modern man has learned has power to heal. C. S. Lovett in his book *Jesus Wants You Well* gives some amazing illustrations of the power of the placebo effect, or suggestive therapy.

A young woman had a paralyzed tongue and could not speak. She had all kinds of medical treatment, but to no benefit. Her doctor had to get her mind on his side. The mind was his biggest obstacle, and he knew if he could just get past the closed door of her mind, he may be able to cure her. So he told her he was going to try a new device that would loosen her tongue and enable her to speak again. He wanted her to relax and close her eyes, and he would then give her tongue special therapy with this new instrument. He took an ordinary thermometer and began to touch various spots on her tongue. Then he told her she could now begin to speak. She immediately began to say a few words, and in two weeks she was back to normal speaking fluently.

There was no more healing power in that thermometer than there was in the spit of Jesus, but

both served the purpose of unlocking the closed mind so healing could get through to the body. The mind can make us sick and keep us sick, and the mind, when it is won over to the side of the healer, becomes the key to being restored to health. It's all in your mind is a cliché, but it is a powerful truth. Faith healing and love healing, and forgiveness healing, and dozens of other methods of healing all depend upon the mind for their effectiveness. "Behold I stand at the door and knock," says the Great Physician, and so does every healer and every method of healing, and only when the door is open from the inside can any method work.

Why else would Jesus bother to take this man aside privately and go through all this business with the finger in the ear and the spit on the tongue, unless it was to break through the barrier of a skeptical mind, and persuade it to open up by the power of suggestion? If the man's mind was already open and ready to receive a miracle, he could have just said be healed, and he would have been healed. What this means then is there is a type of healing miracle that can only happen when the patient's mind is cooperating with the healer. They are not purely divine events, but are a product of the divine and human working in cooperation. Not all miracles fall into this category. There are what are called command miracles. These are miracles which Jesus did by sheer divine power, and which, by their very nature, could not depend on human cooperation. When Jesus cried out, "Lazarus come forth," Lazarus was dead and could not cooperate with mental agreement and belief. Any resurrection of the dead calls for a command miracle.

In the miracles Jesus performed He most often called for cooperation, and He used the power of suggestion by the use of means. It is not that Jesus could not heal by command, but that would not be of much value for the rest of Christian history. But by using means Jesus made it clear that all Christians can enter into the healing of others by the use of means which wins the cooperation of the mind. Only a few can use command healing because they have the gift of healing or miracles, but all of us can get into healing on the psycho-somatic level.

George Washington had a mind so cooperative with the will of God he handled pressure that would have killed other men. He lost battles, lost men, lost his crops, and lost loved ones, but listen to his mental attitude. He wrote in May of 1794, "At disappointments and losses which are the effects of Providential acts, I never repine, because I am sure the all wise Disposer of events knows better than we do what is best for us, or what we deserve." He suffered plenty, but he did not carry half the burden of it that others did, because he had a mind submissive to Christ, and open to healing at all times.

Dr. Walter B. Cannon, a famous Harvard Medical School physiologist, documented the taboo system of the Maori aborigines of New Zealand. He told of a young aborigine who while traveling stopped in the home of an older friend. For breakfast the friend prepared a meal consisting of wild hen. This was a food strictly forbidden for the immature. The young man demanded to know if there was wild hen in the meal, and his host said no. He ate and departed. Several years later they met and the older friend asked him if he would now eat wild hen. He said he never would, for it was taboo. The older man laughed and told him how he had tricked him into eating this forbidden food long ago. The young man became extremely frightened, and within 24 hours he was dead. No disease, no germs or virus, just his mind which was convinced that he had to die. Such is the power of the psycho-somatic. The second principle that grows out of this unique healing is-

## II. MEANS TO WIN OVER THE MIND ARE A LEGITIMATE PART OF CHRISTIAN

## HEALING.

This ought to be obvious, but many Christians have been deceived into thinking that a use of means or medicine, or therapy is somehow a denial of faith, and, therefore, not legitimate for the Christian. Somehow the idea has become quite popular among some Christians that true faith is in God alone, and that trust in any physical means to bring about healing is not legitimate. The result is that many Christians have felt their use of medicine was a lack of faith, and they have stopped taking it, or thrown it away. This has lead some Christian parents to be tried for murder when they caused the death of their children by rejecting all means such as medicine.

Such faith is presumption, for it is a clear rejection of Christ's own healing ministry where He used means to achieve healing. The whole point of laying on of hands, of anointing with oil, and any other use of means in healing is to move the mind to cooperate in the healing process. This is the power of suggestion. It simply means the body will often do and feel what the mind says it should do and feel. Why do you think Jesus used spittle? It was because this was the in thing in His day. People believed in the curative power of spit. It has been thought by various tribes through history to have medical value, and I remember as a child being taught that dog saliva had curative value, and that is why a dog could lick its wounds and heal so fast. Jesus was not teaching the curative power of spit, but by use of it He was teaching the power of suggestion.

Norman Cousin in his book *The Healing Heart* tells of the football game where several people became suddenly ill. A public announcement was made that no more soft drinks from the beverage machines were to be consumed until the cause of the sickness was determined. The immediate effect was that people all over the stadium became ill, and 191 people had to be hospitalized. Local ambulances and private cars were hauling people to the 5 local hospitals. No one knows how many people went to their own doctor.

Laboratory analysis showed nothing wrong with the water or syrup, and when this was announced there was a sudden healing of all who became ill. Their minds made them sick. This is just one episode of a long series of historical incidents which reveal how the mind can make people sick. Mass hysteria all through history has made people ill. We tend to think that if it is all in the mind it is not serious. This is not so. A sickness that is caused by the mind alone is just as real and just as harmful as one caused by invaders from the outside. Voodoo and magic spells of all kinds really cause people to get sick and die even though they are just psycho-somatic.

Why do you suppose Jesus asked the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda if he wanted to get well? It seems like a strange question, but the fact is, Jesus knew the power of the mind in healing, and He knew that this man could not be healed unless he was willing. Seneca said, "To wish to be well is a part of becoming well." The healing methods of Jesus make it clear that for healing to take place there usually has to be the use of means to win the mind over to a role of cooperation. It may be physical, mental, or spiritual means, but whatever is needed is a legitimate part of the healing ministry for the Christian. It is superficial and being hyper-spiritual, and advocating a faith that goes beyond Biblical faith to reject means as a part of healing.

If spit moves the mind to belief, then spit is a legitimate means for healing. If I tell my grandson to eat his string beans and he will feel better, that is using means. It is the means of suggestion. It is to get him to eat well, and to get his mind on the side of health. It is not only legitimate, but it is

basic wisdom. We tell our children that a kiss will make the hurt all better, and the fact is, it works, and crying kids in pain go away with a smile after the therapy of a kiss. The kiss has no power to heal, but the mind does, and the power of suggestion wins the mind over to a position of cooperation.

Dr. Bernie Siegal, a cancer specialist, wrote a book *Love, Medicine And Miracles*. He would agree that spit cannot only heal a deaf mute, but it can even heal cancer. He is absolutely convinced that all means have the potential of healing cancer. He says that he is sure if he recommended eating three peanut butter sandwiches a day some people would do it and get well from incurable cancer. The reason is not because of peanut butter, spit, diet, chemotherapy, or anything else, but because the mind can by any means be convinced and lead to healing. That is why there are 1001 ideas about how to cure cancer. There is somebody who has been healed by every strange means because they believed it. Their mind and body got together and won the battle.

Pastor Lloyd Ogilvie had a healing ministry for years, and he saw people healed every Sunday morning. In comments on the paralytic Jesus asked, "Wilt thou be made whole?" He wrote, "Intense desire for the Master's help in any area of our lives is a vital, necessary prerequisite for receiving his healing." Those who are really into healing agree that the emotions have to be kindled, and people have to have an active mental and emotional role in their healing.

The passive patient who says, "Go ahead Lord and heal me, I will not refuse it," is not likely to be healed. It is the aggressive seeker that is most likely to be healed. The Christian whose mind is full of hope and expectation so that he or she aggressively believes and acts on that belief, is the Christian who will likely experience healing. The reason this is true is because there is a direct connection between miracles and the mind.

## **25. A FOCUS ON FOOD**

## **MARK 8:1-10**

Many years ago when Rudyard Kipling was a popular writer it was reported that he was getting 10 shillings for every word he wrote. Some students at Oxford University, who were not impressed with Kipling, sent him 10 shillings with a request that he send them one of his very best words. He cabled back one word-thanks!

This is certainly one of the very best words in any persons vocabulary. I became curious about what use Jesus made of this word thanks, and to my surprise I discovered that Jesus used the word more often for food than all other uses put together. He is not revealed as thanking God for nature, for people, or for the temple in which to worship, but over and over again Jesus is portrayed as giving thanks for ordinary, everyday, commonplace food. The main New Testament word for thanks is *eucharisteo*. Out of the 9 times it is on the lips of Jesus 8 of them are in reference to food. Now, lest you think this is a Greek word somehow related to food, let me assure you this is not the case. The primary use of this word in the New Testament is from the pen of Paul, and he hardly ever used it for food. In all of the letters of Paul he is always giving thanks for people.

The evidence overwhelmed me because Jesus is the only person in the Bible who is so thankful

for food that it becomes a prominent part of His life's story. Here in the record of His feeding of the 4000 Jesus is recorded as giving thanks 2 times in two verses. First He thanks God for the 7 loaves in verse 6, and then He takes the few small fish in verse 7 and gives thanks again. The second time He uses a synonym that can also mean praise. He thanked God for the bread and praised God for the fish. This is the only miracles Jesus performed where He expresses His thanks twice for the same meal.

In the feeding of the 5000 He only gave thanks once. The only other place we see this double thanksgiving is also connected with food, but it is not a miracle meal. It was the Last Supper, and Jesus in Luke 22 first took the cup and gave thanks, and then He took the bread and gave thanks. Jesus was a thankful person, and even though in His deity He was the creator of all food, in His humanity He was thankful for food. The dinner table is a frequent piece of furniture in the life of our Lord. A focus on the role of food in His life will magnify the reality of His humanity.

Mark's Gospel is a food-filled Gospel. The only miracles that all four of the Gospels record is the miracle of feeding the 5000. Mark goes beyond the others and records the feeding of the 4000 which Luke and John do not record. He tells of the eating and drinking and feasting and banquets of Jesus. Jesus ate with just about everybody. There was the tax collectors, the sinners, and even the Pharisees. Meals were such a major matter that the disciples of Jesus were suspected of not being as spiritual as John's disciples and Pharisees, for they fasted, but the disciples of Jesus did not. In Mark 2:19 Jesus defends their non-stop feasting by pointing out that you do not fast at a wedding, and that was the atmosphere of His ministry. He was the bridegroom, and they were the guests, and so feasting was always in order.

The Pharisees did not like the crowd that He ate with, nor the frequency of His eating. It just did not seem very spiritual to them, but to Jesus it was very spiritual, and it was that for which He had so much gratitude. We know the Pharisees made a big issue about Jesus healing on the Sabbath, but they also made a big issue about His Sabbath eating habits. His disciples would pick off some grain as they walked through the grain field on the Sabbath. The Pharisees charged them with breaking the law. Jesus defended them and said in Mark 2:25-26, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat, and he also gave some to his companions."

Jesus plays the role of the lawyer, and in defending his disciples he appeals to precedent as any good lawyer would. Meeting the need of hunger is so basic that it has priority over legalistic and ceremonial laws, and He sums up His argument in verses 27 and 28: "The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." When it came to eating on the Sabbath Jesus is 100% in favor of it, and in Mark 1 He even healed Peter's mother-in-law on the Sabbath, and she got out of bed and made them a Sabbath meal.

Eating was not only a basic part of the social life of Jesus and His disciples, it was a part of His healing ministry. When He raised the little 12 year old girl from the dead, the first thing He said in Mark 5:43 was, "Give her something to eat." Today you are given an IV with nourishment going into your body because they know this is important in the prevention of shock. It is vital part of the healing process, and Jesus knew this long before science did.

We could go on through many references showing how food played a major role in the ministry of Jesus, but we want to just look at the conclusion of His ministry at the Last Supper. A large portion of the Gospels revolve around this last meal. The Gospel is perpetuated through this meal, for Jesus left us with the command to remember Him by eating bread and drinking a cup. Meal symbolism is the means by which the Master makes His atoning death a perpetual part of our memory. All of this introduction is a foundation for the point I am making which is-

## I. THANKSGIVING FOR FOOD IS A CHRISTLIKE FOCUS.

The reason I think this is an important issue is that Christians often feel more like the Pharisees than the Lord. We feel like too much focus on the body and its pleasure in eating is not spiritual. At Thanksgiving we often feel like gluttonous pagans when we spend so much time planning, buying, preparing, and then devouring food. It all seems so secular and unspiritual that if someone told us they only had a hamburger and fries at Thanksgiving we would tend to feel they should be nominated for sainthood. We have an uneasy feeling about our love for food. To add to the mixed feelings we know that much food is a major cause of health problems. So as American Christians we are caught in some ambiguous feelings about the spirituality of our Thanksgiving celebration. Eating disorders are a problem, and on the other hand millions are starving, so the more we think about food the more mixed our feelings get.

To take food, and plenty of it, away from Thanksgiving is like taking gifts away from Christmas, eggs away from Easter, and fireworks away from the 4th of July. Food is the very essence of Thanksgiving. My point is, we do not need to feel that this is some sort of compromise with our culture, for the spirit of Thanksgiving for good and abundant food goes way back before our culture even existed, and is the foundation for why it is a part of our culture.

The American spirit came from the Christian spirit, and not the other way around. The people who gave us Thanksgiving were Christian people. The background for the first Thanksgiving in America is quite similar to the feeding of the 4000 in our text. The people had been following Jesus for 3 days, and whatever provisions they had were now depleted. Jesus knew if He dismissed them to go home some of them would faint for lack of food. Jesus had compassion on these hungry people, and that was the motivation for this massive meal by miracle. His own disciples only had 7 loaves and a few small fish. This was scarcely enough food for them to have a meal, but Jesus multiplied it to feed the multitude.

The first Thanksgiving in America had this same desperate setting. The Pilgrims in 1623 found themselves facing a crisis. A great drought had left them with no rain on their crops from May to the middle of July. The people down South in Virginia wondered why the Pilgrims did not just give up and come down to God's country where food was abundant. I am sure there were people who thought the 4000 following Jesus were fools to be off in the barren desert listening to Him when they could be on the coast catching an abundance of fish. The Pilgrims trusted God to deliver them, and so they set aside a day of fervent prayer. Governor William Bradford kept a journal of these trying times, and so we have an eye witness account of the events that lead to Thanksgiving.

Bradford describes the day of prayer, and I will break into his account and share a portion: "...for all the morning and greatest part of the day, it was clear weather and very hot, and not a cloud or any sign of rain to be seen; yet toward evening it began to overcast and shortly after to rain with

such sweet and gentle showers as gave them cause of rejoicing and blessing God....It came without either wind or thunder or any violence, and by degrees in that abundance as that the earth was thoroughly soaked therewith. Which did so apparently revive and quicken the decayed corn and other fruits, as was wonderful to see, and made the Indians astonished to behold. And afterwards the Lord sent them such seasonable showers, with interchange of fair warm weather and through His blessing caused a fruitful and liberal harvest...for which mercy, in time convenient, they also set apart a day of Thanksgiving."

Jesus fed the 4000 by miraculous provision of food. He fed the Pilgrims by a natural provision of food, but the end result was the same: people filled with gratitude for food. The focus on food was the very heart of the American Thanksgiving because God's people were grateful for His provisions. Feasting with lots of food is symbolic of God's blessing. Famine and lack of food is symbolic of God's judgment, and being in a state which is out of His will. Jesus had His longest encounter with Satan when He had gone without food for 40 days. Lack of food and spiritual warfare were linked just as abundance of food and thanksgiving to God are linked.

When Jesus endured His greatest darkness on the cross, and felt forsaken by God, He was a very hungry man. He had last eaten on Thursday evening. He had since been through the energy consuming struggle in the garden of Gethsemane, and the all night illegal trial. He was hurried to the cross without breakfast and hung there through the lunch hour, and at mid-afternoon in His state of horrible hunger He felt God forsaken. He died a hungry man, but when He rose from the dead He ate with His disciples again, and promised He would eat with them forever. Lack of food and lack of God's presence go hand in hand. The most cursed times in the history of Israel were times of terrible famine. In famine they were God forsaken. They suffered horrible starvation under God's judgment, but when they lived in obedience they feasted on great abundance.

Food was always a focus of thanksgiving. In the great 23rd Psalm the very essence of being led by the Good Shepherd is abundance of food. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." The lying down in green pastures and being lead beside still waters is enjoying abundance of eating and drinking. How revealing is the picture of the Good Shepherd in Rev. 7 where He leads His people who have been through great tribulation to springs of living water, and verse 16 says, "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst." The very essence of heaven is food and drink in abundance with hunger and thirst banished along with all other evils.

No wonder Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Every meal we enjoy is a little taste of heaven. It is a reminder that God is good, and that we have a basis for perpetual thanksgiving. Not only is it not unspiritual to focus on food for Thanksgiving, it is the very essence of spirituality to be thankful for food. Where do we begin our training of our children to be thankful to God? We begin at the table with such prayers as, "God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food." Or, "Come Lord Jesus be our guest, let this daily food be blest."

Why do we begin with food? Because food is the primary symbol of God's goodness. If you are not thankful for food, you are not a thankful person. If you do not have food, nothing else matters. It is a level where the smallest child can begin to grasp gratitude, and it rises to the level of the most profound theology where Jesus says in John 6:51, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." How is a man saved? It is by what he eats. You are what you eat, and Jesus

says you can only have eternal life if you eat right. Here is food exalted to the level of the key to eternity. Jesus goes on in John 6:53-56, and stresses over and over that the key to eternal life is in eating the proper diet. Your diet determines your destiny. Jesus says,

"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

If you have been thinking that all this focus on food is much ado about nothing, and trifling with trivialities, now you will have to change your mind, for Jesus has lifted this subject to the highest conceivable level of theology. This subject is too vast to cover in one message. It takes us through the whole Old Testament sacrificial system where after the sacrifice was offered to God the priests and the people ate the sacrifice in a feast of thanksgiving. Jesus was our sacrifice. He was the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. He was the best sacrificial Lamb ever offered to God. All the other lambs were eaten and enjoyed with thanksgiving. What is to be done with the best offering ever? Jesus says that He too is to be food for a feast of thanksgiving. He is our manna from heaven. He is our sacrificial meat which we are to enjoy perpetually as we thank God for this provision that guarantees we will never hunger again. In Christ we consume that food and drink that feeds the eternal nature and gives it life abundant.

Taking Christ into your life is taking nourishment that feeds the soul. The Christian life from salvation to eternity has a food focus. Jesus said to the church, "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he with me." Eating together with Christ is where the Christian life begins. The new birth is a birthday party. It is a feast for the soul, and the final result of this meal with the Master will be the marriage supper of the Lamb that begins eternity. That first feast with Jesus leads to feasting with Him forever. The Christian life is to be a feast oriented life of enjoying food on all levels. There is food for the body, for the mind, and for the soul.

To try and get away from the focus on food for thanksgiving is to quench the Spirit. You have to cut out a vast chunk of the Bible if you are going to judge a food focus to be secular and unspiritual. You have to reject the symbolism of Christ and a large portion of Scripture. Focusing on food does not make you spiritual, for everybody does that. The most depraved and ungodly will feast on thanksgiving. They will stuff themselves with no thought of God. The response to this thoughtless and thankless feasting, however, is not fasting, nor guilt, for our feasting. We are to feast with a thankful heart for the goodness of God that allows us to enjoy the abundance and pleasure of food. Jesus loved to feed people, and He died that we might have access again to the tree of life for all eternity, and be able to eat forever the wonderful fruits of God's creation.

In a sense, we are saved to eat. That is a slogan I have never seen in print, but the facts of the Bible support it as a legitimate Christian slogan. We are not born to lose, we are born to eat. We are born to enjoy what God has made to give life on every level, for body, mind, and soul. Jesus is



the total caterer, for He provides food for the total man. To eat on the highest level is to feed on the Word. We are to taste and see that the Lord is good. The Christian is to enjoy feasting for the total man. Christians are not to be gluttons, but they are to be people who enjoy physical food as well as the mental and spiritual.

When we don't feel good we do not enjoy food. This is not a good state to be in, but one which is negative, and one which does not produce the fruit of the Spirit. We are most loving, joyful, peaceful, and in harmony with God and man when we are cable of enjoying a good meal. The physical and the spiritual are linked. All that hinders the enjoyment of food is of the kingdom of evil. Sickness, depression, grief: you can put together a whole list of things that make us not enjoy eating, and they are all negative, and things that the devil uses to rob us of abundant life. In contrast, all that leads to feasting and enjoyment of food are things like health, joy, love, friendship, and victory over the forces of evil.

There is no escaping the facts, the focus on food is inescapable for the thoughtful person. Everything that God gives is food for the body, mind, or spirit. He feeds the total man, and the more we recognize this, the more we will see all of life as a feast of one sort or another, for which to be thankful. God is the great Provider. He provides the manna for His people in every wilderness. In the feeding of the 4000 Christ is the Cosmic Caterer doing in a more visible way what He has always done and will always do, feed His sheep. Israel in the wilderness came to see God as their daily host. The manna fell in abundance, but they could not use doggie bags. They could only take enough for the day. They had to depend on God everyday and not save up so they could forget Him for a day or so. It is dangerous to be independent of God, for we too easily slip into thinking we can provide for ourselves, for we are not charity cases.

That is our great sin as Americans. We are so affluent that we forget our dependence on God. Give us this day our daily bread is not relevant to us. We buy groceries for a week or two, and we know we are always set for better than a day. We lose this sense of dependence on God, and thus, we lose a sense of gratitude for daily provision. We do not see God as our daily deliverer supplying our need for food. Our problem is not that we are too focused on food, but that we are not focused enough on thankfulness for our food. We try to minimize food, and in so doing we eliminate a basic element for the building up of a spirit of gratitude.

Meals just do not last. Even this miraculous meal did not last long. By the time these 4000 men got home they were, no doubt, extremely hungry again. This miracle was no cure-all for hunger. It was just a stop gap measure to help these people get back to their normal world where they provided for their own daily needs. So this miracle lunch was old news by supper time. Miracles do not last, and to depend on miracles is to make a major mistake. If you are only thankful for miracles, you are not a very thankful person. We need to see that God's primary way of meeting our needs is through natural means, and this is to be the basis for most of our thanksgiving.

There is no hint that these people gathered in the wilderness each year to celebrate this great event of mass feeding. It was done and gone, and life went on. They had to go fishing for fish, and they had to farm for bread the rest of their lives in order to eat. Jesus did not tell them to forsake their farms and boats and follow Him, and He would feed them by miracles. He sent them back home to labor for their meals. The miracles solved no problem, but only met the need for this one meal. If you have never been fed by a miracle, do not feel bad. Just be thankful you have the

natural means by which to meet your need for food. Your gratitude can never depend on miracles. This is true in the spiritual realm as well. We need to be thankful for the commonplace everyday provisions of food for the total man.

We become victims of our culture when we cannot be thankful on this level, but demand more and more things in order to feel gratitude. This has always been a danger for Christians, and Paul warned about it in his day. He wrote in I Tim. 6:6-9, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction."

Lloyd Ogilvie says that many Christians are never satisfied. They have everything yet they are driven by ambition and lust for more. They want power and control, and are ever in the quest for the kingdom of thingdom. There are Christian people of fame and fortune, but are they super spiritual? Not at all. They have forgotten to be thankful for the simple and basic values of life. But we also need to recognize that it is not more spiritual to give up the good things of life that God has made it possible for us to enjoy. We need to learn to enjoy whatever God provides with a spirit of thankfulness. Paul wrote in Col. 2:16, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink..." He called them worldly rules that we are to reject by those who would treat the body harshly and say, as he does in verse 21, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch."

Paul called them hypocritical liars who order people to obtain from certain foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving. In I Tim. 4:4 he writes, "Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." All through history there has been a tendency to think fasting is more spiritual than feasting, and that to indulge in banquets where food is the focus is to be less spiritual. This is a rejection of the life of our Lord who was no ascetic, but a lover of good food, and all the fun that it provides for fellowship with family and friends.

John Calvin, whom we may think of as a stern theologian, saw the folly of asceticism, and he wrote, "If anyone raises the objection that a frugal use of food and drink is sufficient for the nourishment of the body, I answer, although food is a proper provision of our bodily need, yet the legitimate use of it goes beyond mere sustenance. For good flavors were not added to food without a purpose, but because our Heavenly Father wishes to give us pleasure with the delicacies He provides." Wise Christians will learn to enjoy the good food God has given. We are not to become indulgent pleasure loving fanatics, and forget moderation, but simply to enjoy the pleasure of what God has provided through food. God wants you to enjoy and be thankful for all He has provided. Don't take it for granted, take it with gratitude.

History is filled with true stories of how men lost at sea will catch a seagull and devour it with more gratitude than many have with prime rib before them. We have such an account in Acts 27 where Paul and other prisoners are being carried by a vicious storm. Paul urges them all to eat. He says in Acts 27:33, "For the last 14 days you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food-you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head. After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves."

All 276 men were saved. Paul implied they would not have survived without the food to give them strength for their swim to safety when the ship broke up. Food was a key factor in this story of physical salvation. Paul was thankful for food that made their salvation possible, for if you don't save people bodies, you can never save their souls. Who knows how many of these 276 men will be in heaven because they were eager to hear of Christ the Heavenly Bread after being saved by means of His servant Paul, and through earthly bread? Salvation, sanctification, and many other aspects of the Christian life often revolve around a focus on food.

## **26. LOVED BUT LOST**

## **MARK 10:17-22**

This is the story of the rich young ruler who, unlike the rich old ruler, Nicodemus, did not come to Jesus by night, but came to Him publicly in the daytime. All three of the synoptic Gospels tell the story, and each add something extra to the total picture. Matthew tells us he was young. Luke tells us that he was a ruler, and all three tell us that he was rich. Riches are stressed because it was not his youth or his position, but his possessions that played the major role in his great refusal. We want to look at his experience in three stages.

### **I. THE SEEKERS DESIRE. v.17.**

Jesus was about to set out on His last journey to Jerusalem, and almost as if He knew this night would be His last chance, a young man ran up to Jesus, knelt before Him and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life? Now that is a significant question for anybody to ask, but it is even more significant in the light of the fact that this young man was a ruler in the synagogue, and was very rich. He had power, position, popularity, and possessions, plus a pure life, and was no doubt a perfect picture of spiritual success according to all the standards of contemporary Judaism. Yet, we see him running to Jesus before He gets away, and asking what he must do to have eternal life.

Where could we find greater evidence of the truth that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified? This young man had heard Jesus speak of the life he came to give, and he was honest enough to admit that he had a desire for such life, and an empty spot in his life that nothing else had been able to fill. The degree of his desire is not only revealed in the fact that he ran, but in the fact that he came to Jesus openly when the Pharisees had threatened to excommunicate from the synagogue all who followed Christ.

Jesus knew there was a deep desire in this young man, but He knew also that he had a deep delusion as to his own capacities of goodness. He calls Jesus good master, and then asks what he must do, just as if to say, "you just tell me what has to be done to please God and be saved, and I'll do it." The first thing Jesus did was to shatter this whole false concept which was so common because of the self-righteousness of the Pharisees of that day. We know he was either a Pharisee or greatly influenced by them, for Sadducees did not believe in eternal life as the Pharisees did.

Jesus says, "Why call me good, no one but God alone is good." In other words, let's not start on

this subject as if the source has no significance. God is the source of all goodness, and anything we do that is worthy of being called good is not due to our selves, but to the grace of God. Jesus refused to let religion become a mere matter of ethics where if you do more good than bad God rewards you with a home in heaven. People tend to do this, and forget that God is not only the omega, but also the alpha. He is the beginning and the end, and if we are to talk sensible about goodness, we must start with God, and see Him clearly as the source. This will eliminate self-righteousness from the start.

Jesus was not denying that He was good, but simply indicating that if the young man saw goodness in Him, it was because he was from God, the source of all goodness. Nor was Jesus denying that the young man was good in the sense of moral and ethical purity. Jesus did not teach that man could not be good, on the contrary, He says in Luke 6:45, "The good man out of the good treasure of His heart brings forth good..." We make a mistake if we think all men outside of Christ are equally sinful. The Scripture says they are equally lost, but not equally evil.

Total depravity does not mean man is as bad as he can be. It means that in no way is he as good as he ought to be, or must be to be pleasing to God. Jesus just wanted to help this young man to unlearn his shallow concept of goodness, and cause him to see he was using the term too loosely without due recognition that all true goodness is only a participation in the goodness of God. But Jesus recognized the sincere and honest desire of his heart, and so he went on to give answer to his request, and so we see next:

## II. THE SAVIOR'S DEMAND. vv. 19-21.

Jesus knew that as a ruler in the synagogue He knew the law of Moses well, and so He just repeated the last six of the ten commandments dealing with moral conduct, and He said, "Certainly you know these." The young man said, "Yes, I know them. I have kept them since I was a boy. I have been trained in the Jewish faith well, and I live up to my best knowledge of it." But he implies that he is not satisfied, and that he has no assurance of this abundant and eternal life which Jesus speaks about. He wants Jesus to tell him what more he needs.

You might say that all of this is not in the text. That is true, but it is clearly implied, for Jesus looked on him and loved him. This shows us that this ruler was not a self-satisfied Pharisee trying to trick Jesus. He was a true seeker, and a very good man. Jesus said there is one thing you lack, and when Jesus sees only one thing lacking we can be sure that he was really just about as good as he thought he was. Jesus, however, went on to make a demand of this young man that revealed a lack that was spiritually fatal. He told him to go sell his possessions and give the income to the poor, and then he would have treasure in heaven, and then he could come and follow Jesus.

The first thing to notice about this demand is that it is an exceptional case, and is, therefore, not to be taken as a pattern for everyone, for it was not what Jesus demanded of others. This was a very unusual thing for Jesus to do. Ordinarily He welcomed people to come to Him, and though many ceased to follow Him because His demands were too great, we do not see Jesus asking men to give up all their possessions to follow Him. Jesus accepted the plan of Zaccheaus to give half of his goods to the poor. Why then did He make it so hard on this eager young ruler? Jesus, as the Great Physician, does not deal with His patients in a stereotype manner. He has no cut and dried

procedure. He prescribes the medicine to fit the disease. He does not give cough syrup for cancer, nor penicillin for pimples. If a problem is mild he prescribes a mild remedy, and if serious, he uses powerful medication, or even radical surgery.

This almost perfect moral young man appeared to be as spiritually healthy as one could possibly be, but Jesus saw something in him that called for radical surgery if he was to ever find eternal life. I am sure the Bible records the fact that Jesus loved this young man just because his demand would seem to be so cruel as to make us wonder. I am sure a doctor takes no delight in discovering cancer in one of his patients, but once he does he has no choice but to do all he can to save his patient. No matter how radical and painful the procedures might be he has to move ahead. This is exactly the case here when Jesus looked into the heart of this earnest seeker and saw the cancer of covetousness. Outwardly he was dedicated to God, but inwardly he was devoted to gold, and it may well be that he did not even know it until Jesus touched his inner idol and asked him to give it up.

The one thing he lacked was a total commitment of his total being to God. He had one area of his life reserved for self, and that was his possessions. His possessions possessed him. It was only one area of his life that was not yielded to God, but it made all else worthless for eternal life, for it was an idol that took the place of God as the ultimate value in his life. One thing of this magnitude is all it takes to rob you of God's best. F.B Meyer tells about when the power plant at Niagra was finished it would not work. Scientists and engineers failed to solve the problem. They sent to Scotland for Lord Kelvin. When he arrived he spent ten minutes and found the problem. Everything was perfect and ready to go but one thing was lacking, but that one thing made all that was right of no value until the one thing was fixed.

So it is in the spiritual realm. We do not say that there are not good people who live pure and honest lives apart from a dedication to Christ, but we must say, if the Gospel is to have any meaning at all, all of man's goodness without Christ lacks the one thing needful to make it of any eternal value. All but one is as good as none when that one is Jesus Christ.

Jesus had to be radical in his demand on the rich young ruler because he was so utterly deceived by the power of possessions. He kept all the commands dealing with conduct, but was unaware that he was breaking those more spiritual ones dealing with our loving God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Love of wealth had subtly infiltrated his inner man and had gone so far that when it came to showdown as to who was to be his God-the Lord or mammon-he chose the last, and thereby became an idolater.

Jesus eased the tension as much as possible by appealing to the fact that he would have reward in heaven, but the sacrifice was too great and he couldn't surrender and submit to the Lordship of Christ. It was too great a risk. The cost was too high, and he was not sure he wanted to gamble with the good life he now had. Some men are in the street widening business. They try to make the straight and narrow way a super highway, and open it up to all, but Jesus makes it clear that under no circumstances will God share His throne with any false God. Jesus had no convenient plan by which you raise your hand, come forward, and receive eternal life, and then ignore Christ and the church the rest of your life, and go on serving your petty idols with the hope that heaven will offer you even more of what you love most in time. What must I do was the question of the seeker, and the answer was to renounce your idol, but the price wasn't right, and so we see thirdly-

### III. THE SEEKERS DESPAIR. v. 22

He came seeking and went sorrowing. He came with hungry desire, but went with heavy despair. No one ever goes from Christ and is glad about it. There is no substitute for the Savior. It is either sacrifice your idol and surrender to His lordship, or go your way in sorrow. You can decide to go, but you can't decide to be happy about it. You would think that if it made him sad to chose the way he did, he would realize the folly of his choice. This is the hope that many have for this young ruler. Certainly, they say, he must have come back to Christ at a later time after he thought over his decision. Many others, however, feel that if that was the case we would have a record of it, and so it is likely that he was lost even though loved by Christ.

There are good arguments on both sides, and there is no way of knowing which one is true. One's theology does not determine one's view, for Calvin thought he was lost, and Spurgeon, a strong Calvinist, felt he was saved. All we have in the record is that he chose gold over God and silver over the Savior. The value of the whole account for us is that it teaches a very serious and solemn truth. To try and give God only second place in your life is to give Him no place at all, for He will not share His throne. He is either Lord of all, or not Lord at all.

## 27. SURRENDER TO WIN

## MARK 10:17-23

There was only one general that threw fear into the mighty warriors of the Roman Army, and that man was Hannibal of Carthage. Carthage was in North Africa, and was the rival of Rome. It was the only power great enough to keep Rome from ruling the world. For over 60 years they fought a desperate struggle, and Rome was winning. Then in 218 B. C. Hannibal took command of the armies of Carthage, and for 16 years he out-fought and outwitted the Romans. One of his key weapons was a herd of 80 trained war elephants that would charge the enemy lines and soften them up for defeat.

Rome could not believe the success of Hannibal. He captured a good part of Italy, and began to plan the taking of Rome itself. All of history would have been changed had a Roman general Scipio not gotten a good idea. When Hannibal's elephants charged in the battle of Zama, which could decide the fate of the world, he had loud trumpets blown that scared the elephants and sent most of them back into Hannibal's lines disrupting them and giving the Romans a chance to attack. Hannibal lost that decisive battle, and Rome went on to conquer the world. Hannibal never did surrender, but went on trying to fight Rome the rest of his life, but he never regained enough power to make a difference. He is one of the heroes of history because he never gave up.

It is legitimate to never surrender even if you cannot win, when the battle is against evil. There are some battles that are perpetual and cannot be won. The battle with sin and forces of evil is never over in this life, therefore, it is a perpetual battle. We are not to surrender and give up, but like Paul, press on fighting a good fight to the end. Many a scientist and doctor has fought against disease, and died before they found the answer, but they did not surrender, and those who came after them built on their foundation and won the victory. Thank God for those who never surrender.

On the other hand, it is folly not to surrender when you are fighting with God. The first man, Adam, ran from God when he had sinned, and tried to escape from admitting his sin, and surrendering to God. This has become the pattern ever since, and we see it so clearly in the life of the rich young ruler. He was basically a good guy, and from his youth he had been religious, and tried his hardest to please God. Jesus said only one thing he lacked. Wouldn't that be great to lack just one thing? That would be easy to solve, and you would be in. Except, the one thing he lacked was the ability to surrender. For him the problem was his wealth. He clung to it, and depended on it. It was his idol, and he just could not surrender and yield to Christ as his Lord, and give his all to him. It doesn't make any difference if you are an up-and-outer; a down-and-outer, or middle-and-outer. The real battle of life is in deciding, can I surrender to Christ or not?

This is the kind of battle where the only winners are those who surrender. Life has two kinds of battles. The kind where, when you surrender you lose, and the kind where, when you surrender you win. The first step to sobriety in AA is to acknowledge your life is unmanageable and in our own power you cannot stop drinking. In other words, the first step to victory is surrender. You have to give up on yourself, and say I can't win, for as long as you think you can, and keep fighting in your own self-sufficient strength, you will keep on losing. But when you surrender, and yield yourself to God's power, then you begin the journey to victory.

Some men can stop drinking on their own, but no man can be saved on his own. The only way to be saved in your own strength is to never have sinned, and that is not possible, for as the Bible says, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It is always too late to save yourself, because you are always a sinner, and no one has the power to not be what he is. To go on fighting trying to save yourself, and make a meaningful life in your own power is to fight as foolish a battle as those Japanese soldiers who kept fighting for an island many years after the war was over. It is doomed to failure.

The only way to win in this war is to surrender. But man is by nature stubborn, and that is why man is his own worse enemy. If you kick the man in the seat of his pants who gives you the most trouble, you wouldn't be able to sit down for a week. Most men just can't let go and let God. They are proud and feel they must save themselves. They are like the man shipwrecked in the ocean. A rescue boat found him and they threw him a lifeline. But he says, "I have been swimming from my youth, and have done exercises every day. I'll swim to shore and save myself." But they shout at him, "one thing you lack, the humility to recognize that you need a Savior. You need to give up depending on your own strength, and surrender to the power of our rescue boat." But he, in his stubbornness, refuses the life line, and they must go on to find others, knowing he will never make it.

Jesus was sad when this young man did not respond. It is always sad when people refuse to be saved, but even God cannot make you chose to surrender. It is sad when men will not surrender in a war that cannot be won without surrender. Jesus felt bad when this young ruler went away refusing to surrender. Jesus had the power to force him to stop being stupid, and to trust him, but He does not use His power that way, for then it would not be surrender. God does not crush us into submission. He gives us a choice, and we can choose to fight, or we can choose to surrender, but it has to be our choice.

The rich young ruler went away sorrowful. He wanted to be saved his way, and would not choose Christ's way, and the result was that he went away sad. You can count on it, he remained sad

as long as he refused to reverse this decision. History is full of examples of men and nations who refused to surrender to Christ, and they always go away sad. Many are like the preacher's son who rebelled, and later wrote home to his father saying, "I'm trying to be an atheist, and I'm having a devil of a time of it." He was trying to get help at a psychiatrist at 40 dollars a crack, but he would not surrender, and so he was going his way in sorrow. When you spit against the wind you spit in your own face. History is also full of stories of surrender, however, which have led to victory.

Sometimes surrender leads to immediate change because the folly of a person is a matter of a rebel will, and as soon as the rebellion ceases the foolish behavior ceases. That is why you have real stories like the one I read of a man in a sanitarium for alcoholism. He said to the doctor concerning another patient, "He is really in a bad way isn't he?" "Yes," said the doctor, "but in a year he will be well and you never will." The shock of that caused him to go into the night and look up at the sky. He realized he was just a hard hearted rebel, and he looked up and prayed, "Make me clean." He felt the chains drop off and he was free. He never took another drink, and his body was changed from a tavern to a temple by the simple act of surrender.

E. Stanley Jones tells of a big businessman who tried to deal with his guilt by self-punishment. He made himself suffer to atone for his sin in trying to be his own Savior. Many do this, and they get drunk, and they make their life miserable, because they hate themselves for the evil they have done. They try to pay for their sin by suffering and ruining their own life. When Jones told this man he could receive forgiveness for his sin, he said, "that is too cheap". "Not at all" Jones told him, "for it cost Jesus the agony of the cross. It cost God the giving of His Son to be crucified. They were perfect and innocent yet they paid the infinite cost beyond what all men could ever pay. It was the most costly price ever paid for anything. But it is free to you if you will surrender to Christ and receive His free gift of forgiveness." He did just that and won the war. No longer did he have to punish himself and suffer. He was free to enjoy life under the Lordship of Christ.

It is happening somewhere everyday. People are hearing the good news of the Savior, and they are saying to themselves, what folly to go on fighting an unwinnable war. I will surrender and be at peace with God and myself. These do not go away sorrowful, but they go away rejoicing, for by surrender they gain the victory.

Jesus recognizes that people are all different. People are like a deck of cards. You cannot have all kings and queens; you have to have a variety to have a deck, and so there are tens, nines, eights, and so on, down to deuces. Jesus knows people are all different, and so He does not ask of all what He asked of this rich young ruler. The one thing He asks of all, however, is that they surrender; that they take up the cross and follow Him. Taking up the cross is dying to self and surrendering your pride and determination to do it your way. It is letting Him be Lord of your life. There is no way to win without this kind of surrender.

A psychiatrist in Porto Rico read E. Stanley Jones's book Victory Through Surrender, and realized he needed to do just that. He gave His life to Christ, and it changed him completely. He began to give many hours of free counseling to alcoholics and drug addicts. He set up 12 rehabilitation centers in San Juan which took in 500 patients a day. He put half a million of his own money into them. They trained these people for carpentry and masonry etc. Five thousand are on the waiting list because 65 % of those who get in are cured. He was a miserable rich man, but when he surrendered to Christ, and let Christ use what he had, he became the happiest rich man in Porto



Rico, and one of the most useful and helpful in the world. He did not go away sad but happy because he surrendered. It is the same, be you rich or poor, black or white, educated or uneducated. It is the same for everybody. Surrender to Christ and you win life's greatest war.

### HOW DO YOU SURRENDER?

1. ADMIT you are a sinner and lost without a Savior. As long as you cling to your own self-sufficiency you will be a rebel.
2. SUBMIT. Humble yourself before Christ, and yield to His Lordship. This means you cease to direct your own life, and seek His will and guidance.
3. COMMIT. You say to Christ, "Here am I Lord use me." You surrender your life as an instrument to be used for His purpose. You switch armies, for you no longer fight for your own cause, or the cause of the world, you become a soldier of the cross and fight for Christ, which is a battle to bring others to the point of surrender.

### FEARS OF SURRENDER

People fear to surrender because they are not sure they can keep surrendered. They know they are sinners, and they have tried to stop bad habits, and just cannot do it. They know the facts of life, in their own weakness, and so they are afraid to surrender, because they know they will rebel again, and get drunk or sin in other deliberate ways. They just don't want to be hypocrites so they don't surrender. It almost sounds noble to be so honest about their own weakness, but the fact is, it is still folly not to surrender.

You can't surrender now for tomorrow, or next week, or next year. All you can do is surrender the present moment. All God asks is what is in your present moment to choose. There will be plenty of other moments of choice to come, but the only one that matters now is the one you have now. Unless our rebel spirit comes to that point where it will surrender to Christ in some moment, there is never a beginning of the process of salvation. It begins with surrender, but it must continue as we fight with the old nature to bring it into submission. Surrender is an act, but it is also a process that is ongoing, and calls for daily submission.

## **28. A ROYAL REDEEMER**

## **MARK 11:1-11**

We live in a world deeply influenced by kings. We do not have one as the head of our government, but they are a part of our environment. "The time is come the walrus said to speak of many things, of shoes and ships of sealing wax, of cabbages and kings." In the children's world of our culture the king is often mentioned. There is Old King Cole, the merry old soul. There is the Cannibal King with the brass nose ring. All the kings horses and all the kings men could not put Humpty together again. There is King Arthur and the Knights of the round table. There is the dainty dish of the black birds set before the king. There is Old King Wenceslaus, and numerous stories of kings and their sons and daughters. Most all of the folklore and literature on kings comes from our connection to England, the land of royalty. Their history is a part of our history, as is the history of Israel with its many Old Testament kings, and great ones like David and Solomon.

About 3 centuries ago the Spaniards were besieging the little town of St. Quentin on the frontier

of France. The walls of the city were battered; fever and famine raged within destroying the defenders. There was good reason for pessimism and discouragement. One day the Spaniards sent a shower of arrows over the wall with parchment notes attached promising that if they would surrender and submit their lives and property they would be spared. Gaspard de Caligni, the great Huguenot governor of the town, wrote a reply on parchment; tied it to a javelin, and hurled it back into the enemy camp. His reply consisted of only two words, Regem Habemus, which being translated is "We have a king." They were not interested in submission, for they had a king already, and they would remain loyal to him under all circumstances.

This is the central theme of Palm Sunday, for this was the great fact revealed on this day-Jesus is king. It is not recorded in all four Gospels so that we might learn some trivial truths about Palm leaves, Eastern donkey's, or fickle crowds. There is a message of majesty here, for this was the day on which Jesus purposely made it perfectly and publicly clear that He was the promised Messiah, the Son of David, the King of Israel. As the fourth of July is the day our national forefather's declared themselves independent of the king of England, so Palm Sunday is the day on which our spiritual forefather's declared themselves dependent on the King of Israel. Palm Sunday is the King's Sunday. It is the only place in the Bible where we see Jesus surrounded by subjects who hail Him as their King.

If this event had not been recorded, we would not be able to clearly see that Jesus was prophet, priest, and king, fully fulfilling all that the Messiah was to be. Palm Sunday reveals that Jesus did not go to the cross as a carpenter, but as a King, and, therefore, He was in reality a Royal Redeemer. As we examine the record of that first Palm Sunday it is the kingly aspects of it that we want to emphasize. The first thing we want to consider is,

## I. CHRIST'S ROYAL RESOLUTION.

We need to see here that this proclamation of Christ as King was not the result of a popular uprising, but was the result of Christ's own determined and deliberate planning. The people had sought to make Him King before, but He resolved not to be taken, but now He resolves to court their allegiance and openly appeal for their loyalty. He stirs them up to make a public demonstration. This is in contrast to His attitude all through His ministry of shunning publicity. This was all ignited from the top. The King Himself has chosen the time and place for this public revelation. This is all the outworking premeditated plan of Christ. Jesus came to Jerusalem determined to bring things to a climax, and force the hand of His enemies. When He sent His two disciples to get the colt He knew perfectly what the consequences were going to be. He knows His public proclamation will result in rebellion, for the Jewish leaders will cry out, "We will not have this King to reign over us."

This was really not a triumphal entry, for this implies that one has just defeated his enemies, and gained a victory. Lazarus had just been raised, and the people were stirred up about Christ's victory over death, and so it is possible to consider this event from that angle. But, paradoxically as it seems, we can see this event from just the opposite point of view as well. We can see that Jesus was riding into a trap. He was playing into the hands of those who would kill Him. He did so with His eyes wide open, however. He was not blind at all to the consequences of His act. He had been saying for days that He was heading to Jerusalem to be killed, and this was a major step in His strategy to become a Royal Redeemer.

Jesus was resolved to ascend to that throne from which He would draw all men to Himself, which was the cross. He could not just walk up to the leaders of Israel and say, I am the Lamb of God sent as the suffering Savior to be sacrificed for the sins of men. If you will crucify me I will atone for the sins of the world, and become the King of Kings. This whole idea was a stumbling block to the Jews. They look for a king of power to set them free from oppression. They were not concerned about the sin problem. They only wanted a king who could redeem them from Rome. They would not hear of a Messiah king who came to redeem from sin, and establish a spiritual kingdom. Jesus could not attain His objective by reason and persuasion. He had to attain His goal by action, and Palm Sunday marks the day on which He set the wheels in motion which He knew would take Him to the cross.

We get a picture in all of this that can be illustrated by a checker player who has resolved to get a king in spite of the fact that there are no openings. He deliberately moves into the path of his opponent knowing he will lose a checker, but also knowing that this sacrifice forces the opponent to open up a path by which he can move in to be crowned. The same principle applies to Palm Sunday. Jesus is a master strategist. He is the one in full authority determining what is taking place. If ever evil was used to bring forth good, we see it here in the hands of the Royal Redeemer.

If we see that all was the working out of Christ's own plan, we eliminate all the nonsense that pictures this event as a total flop. It appears that Jesus made a bid for power and failed, but not so. When we see what His objective was, it was a complete success. If He was aiming for the throne of Caesar, He certainly was a poor shot. But if He was aiming for the throne of the cross, He was a master marksman, and we know that the cross was His target all along. When Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden became the champion of Protestants, his enemies called him the snow king because they said he would melt when spring arrived in Germany. But they were wrong, and he did not melt, but remained solid. They are also wrong who look at Jesus riding into Jerusalem as a king, and say it was a failure. He was a snow king who melted in the heat of the opposition. We avoid this error which reduces Palm Sunday to a trivial event by recognizing it to be the result of Christ's royal resolution to be exalted to the cross. Next we see,

## II. CHRIST'S ROYAL REQUISITION.

Jesus sent two of His disciples to get Him a colt to ride, for Zach. 9:9 prophesied that the Messiah King would ride into Jerusalem on a colt. He was deliberately fulfilling this prophecy and proclaiming Himself King of Israel. He is using kingly authority in obtaining the colt. Our government sends out a requisition for so many men to be drafted from each state to serve in the armed forces. Kings have done this same thing for centuries. They make a requisition on the people for servants and soldiers, and often for so many horses. Jesus is here doing just that. He sends His representatives to fill His requisition for a colt on which to ride. The owner of the colt was likely a loyal subject, for Jesus says if there are any questions, just say the Lord has need of him. If it had been some stranger, it is not likely he would be impressed with such an excuse for what appeared to be just plain stealing.

It is highly probable that Jesus had this all prearranged. He does add, however, that they are to assure the man that the colt would be brought back quickly. It sounds almost as if this meant the owner will quickly let them take the colt, but, as all the modern versions show, it is a promise that Christ will get it back to him quickly. In other words, Jesus is just borrowing it for an immediate

need. He knew this was the first and last kingly entrance He would ever make into the royal city, and would only need the use of the colt for a brief time.

Many authors are impressed by the paradox of Christ's royal requisition here. He is Lord and King, and yet He has to humbly make requests for the use of a colt. Never has a king been so lacking in the facilities needed to manifest His royalty. He had arrived at the point where He was going to reveal Himself as the king of Israel, and He is no further ahead than when He was born in a stable. From then to now He has been a dependent king. He has always been dependent upon loyal and generous subjects, from the gifts of the three wise men at birth to the gift of the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea at his death.

All of this is a revelation of just what kind of a king Jesus is. He is not a tyrant, but a king of kindness and courtesy, whose love and character command respect. Those who are under His reign gladly comply with His requests, for it is the greatest joy of His subjects to cooperate with Him. Joneson wrote,

Kings by their example, more do sway  
Than by their power, and men do more obey,  
When they are led, than when they are compelled.

Jesus is that kind of king. If only we could all say, we are examples of the kind of subjects this unknown colt owner was. Say the Lord needs it, and that will settle the matter. Are we willing to submit to such a requisition? The Lord daily depends on you, for He has need of your life, tongue, hands, house, car, money, and time for the extension of His kingdom. Being the kind of king He is, He will not take it by force. But on the other hand, being the kind of king He is, we who have been redeemed by His royal blood ought to jump at the chance to fill His royal requisition.

What a strange combination of words to say, "The Lord has need." What kind of king has to borrow a donkey? The same king who had to borrow a boat to speak from; who had to depend upon friends for a place to sleep, and who had to depend on a wealthy follower for a grave site. What a king! He made all that is, and all that man has is by His grace, but He had to borrow a donkey. It is amazing but true that our Royal Redeemer has need of us. We must choose to cooperate with Jesus to see the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven. Without the cooperation of the colt owner Jesus could not have fulfilled prophecy and carried out His plan. The next thing we want to see is-

### III. CHRIST'S ROYAL RECEPTION.

We see here that Jesus was not always despised and rejected of men. He was not always a man of sorrows. That was just one phase of His life. Just as real is the phase we see here. He was a man of royal stature who kindled hope, joy, and enthusiasm in the hearts of many, and they in turn honor and praise Him with all their energy. Jesus knew what it was to experience the reception of a hero. He did not disapprove of their enthusiasm, and their shouts of hosanna. He even encouraged it. But you say it didn't last. Neither did His sorrow, but His praises will go on forever. Jesus gave full approval to their belief that He was the Messiah King who had come to establish the promise kingdom of David. He gave this approval because that is what He did. The Pharisees asked Him to rebuke them, but Jesus replied in Luke's Gospel, "I tell you if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." This truth was so essential that Jesus was really the king of Israel, that if all men

failed to see it, it would have been proclaimed by a miracle of having the very stones shout it out.

Jesus literally fulfilled the role of Royal Redeemer, but not to the satisfaction of the Jewish leaders. All this business of garments and palm leaves was nonsense to them. This foolishness will do no good. What we need is a Royal Messiah riding on a white stallion with sword drawn, and the men of Israel following prepared for battle. The only kind of redemption they could think of was redemption from Rome. Jesus was concerned about a greater bondage. He came, not to make captives of the Romans, but to set all men free from the bondage of sin; Jews and Gentiles alike.

Conquering kings their titles take  
From the foes they captive make.  
Jesus by a nobler deed,  
From the thousands He has freed.

Jesus came to ransom as well as reign. Those who do not see this think of Palm Sunday as a failure. Robert Eisler called Jesus the king who did not reign, but this is a failure to see the kind of king He was, and the kind of throne He sought. If we look at the sign above the cross in three languages, so all could read, we see it clearly stated: Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews. He was reigning from the tree, and from there would draw all men to Himself as the Royal Redeemer. His royal reception on Palm Sunday was not a failure, but a crowning success that led quickly to His coronation on the cross.

At the coronation of his majesty George III, after the anointing in the Abbey, the crown was put on his head with great shouting. The two archbishops came to lead him from the throne to receive communion. He said he would not go the Lord's Supper and partake of that ordinance with his crown on, for he looked upon himself, when appearing before the King of Kings, as only a humble Christian. As we come to the table of remembrance, let us also approach in the awareness that we are in the presence of the King, and let our hearts be lifted in praise and thanksgiving to Him who is our Royal Redeemer.

## **29. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

## **MARK 12:18-24**

The Jews loved to tell stories about the importance of choices. Nathan Ausubel tells one of the wealthy Jewish merchant who took his slave on a long journey leaving his only son behind. On the journey the merchant became very ill, and at the point of death he made a will leaving all this wealth to his slave. To his son he left only the right to choose one thing among all his possessions. It seems like a cold and cruel thing to do to his son, but the father counted on his son to be wise in his choice. When the slave returned with all his master's wealth, he and the son appeared before the judge to fulfill the terms of the will. The son made his choice. He chose of all his father's possessions, his father's slave. In possessing him he retained possession of all his father's wealth. A foolish choice would have lost him his inheritance, but a wise choice kept it all.

Wisdom is the ability to make right choices in life. Folly is the making of wrong choices. The goal of education in both the secular and sacred realm is to give to people the knowledge and

awareness they need to make wise choices. Ignorance leads to making wrong choices, whereas, knowledge leads to making wise, creative, and helpful choices that lead to success. If you fail to bake a good cake, get your driver's license, win the ball game, pass your test, get the second date, or come up with an appropriate Bible verse to fit the situation, you can count on it, somewhere along the line you made a poor choice. You probably did so because you did not know the better way that would lead to success. Education is the process of learning the better way.

The Pharisees were not interested in the better way, but only in obscuring the way. The result is, they did not come to Jesus to learn, but to muddy the waters with complex but trivial questions. They tried to trick him into a corner with a complex example of a wife with 7 husbands all of whom died. The question is, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Jesus, of course, has an answer, and informs them that the eternal relationship of persons will not be sexual as in time, but rather, like the relationship of the angels. Jesus rebuked them for their ignorance of the Scripture that led to wrong understanding of the plan and power of God.

One of the Scribes came forward and asked another question. He asked, which commandment is first of all? After Jesus answered him, and he gave a positive response, Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Here was a man who pleased Jesus, for he truly sought for light and truth. The Pharisees aggravated Him because they only asked questions in order to make things complicated, and not in order to learn. We see from this passage that education begins with asking the right questions. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Can a moron ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are there in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask-half of our great theological and metaphysical problems are like that."

One of the major problems all through history is that men keep asking the wrong questions. The result is, no matter how much they learn they never really get educated in a Biblical sense, for they never learn how to make the choices in life that really matter. The Scribe asked the right question, and in so doing he opened the door to the answer of Jesus, and that becomes the foundation of all Christian education. We want to focus our attention on one aspect of the first commandment about loving God with all of our mind. This is the alpha and omega of Christian education. There is no wiser choice in life than the choice to love God with all your mind.

No Christian can be anti-intellectual, for God is the Creator of the mind, and the Author of all truth. To believe anything false, or anything built on prejudice or superstition is inconsistent with loving God with all your mind. One can be brilliant and learned, as were the Pharisees, and yet be stupid because the mind and all of its knowledge is not devoted to loving God, but to self-centered purposes.

Hitler's companions in crime were educated men. Some of them were brilliant and had a well developed taste for high quality in culture. But with all of their education and brilliance they made the choice to be more cruel and brutal than the beasts, and they became tools of darkness rather than agents of light. They illustrate clearly that no amount of education, and no quantity of knowledge can make a man wise when the mind is not devoted to God. Only when men love God with their minds will they use the knowledge of their minds to make wise choices that are pleasing to God and beneficial to man.

Harold Bell Wright said, "I would rather receive a great, vital, and living truth from an illiterate backwoodsman who violates every rule of grammar than have a university president to lie to me in perfect English." Because the university president can lie to us in perfect English, and like the Pharisees use the brilliant mind to deceive and lead us astray, Christians have had mixed emotions about education. Some became anti-intellectual. They opposed education, for it only made bad people better able to be successfully bad. They were as skeptical as the little girl who said to her father, "I don't think mommy knows how to raise children." "Why do you say that," he asked? "Because," she said, "She makes me to go bed when I'm not sleepy, and makes me get up when I am sleepy." Sometimes even the right way does not seem right, and we have to trust in those who are suppose to know best. The problem is that sometimes, as in the case of the Pharisees, they don't know best.

We need to be constantly reminded that the abuse and misuse of any of God's gifts is never a valid reason for rejecting or ignoring the proper use of them. God gave us His Word in a book, therefore, it is God's will that Christians be people who learn to read, think, and grow in knowledge and wisdom. Jesus spent a great deal of His short life in teaching, and He expected the church to continue for all time to teach people. In His Great Commission He said, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Christian education is not an elective, for the church it is required by both the first commandment to love God with all the mind, and by the second order of our Lord to be teachers.

People cannot make wise choices unless they know the truth God has given to man in His Word. That is why there is a strong emphasis on religious education all through the history of God's people. The Old Testament makes clear the importance of instruction, and that wisdom leads to all the values God wants us to experience in life. Josephus, the Jewish historian in the time of Christ wrote, "Our ground is good, and we work it to the utmost, but our chief ambition is for the education of our children. We take most pains of all with the instruction of children." The Jewish Talmud says, " So long as there are children in the schools, Israel's enemies cannot prevail against them."

This was the kind of culture in which Jesus grew up. Jesus grew in wisdom as a boy, and at age 12 we find Him debating with scholars in the temple. During His ministry He amazed people with His learning and wisdom, even though He never had the formal education of a Rabbi. Never did a man speak as He did was the comment that circulated, and He debated and outwitted the greatest minds of His day. Jesus set the example, and made it clear that growing in knowledge and wisdom is the wisest choice for the believer.

The Christians who came to America recognized that a Christian education was crucial to the survival of this free land. Many are not aware that most of the great schools of our land were founded by Christians. Thy Presbyterians founded Harvard, and in the 17th century 52% of its graduates went into full time Christian service. Yale, Princeton, Rutgers, Dartmoth, Brown, and many other schools were schools where Christian theology was a basic part of the curriculum. Up to 1850 25% of the students went into full time Christian service.

9 out of every 10 college and university presidents before the Civil War were theologians, and the majority of the teachers were clergyman. In 1851 the great evangelist Charles G. Finny became the president of Oberlin College, and it became the first college to admit women, and one of the first to admit blacks. The point is, Christian education thrived in our land at one time, and had such

powerful influence in our culture. In 1795 Bishop Asbury of the Methodist Church could say, "The president of a superior college has it in his power to do more harm or good than the president of the United States."

Times changed and the universities got so involved in politics that theology was pushed to the side, and secular interests dominated education. A little over a century ago Emerson and Thoreau were in Emerson's library. Thoreau had just graduated from Harvard, and the talk naturally turned to the school they both had attended. Emerson remarked that Harvard now taught all of the branches of learning. "Yes," said Thoreau, "all the branches but none of the roots." If America ceased to be a Christian nation, it was because it ceased to love God with all of its mind. The mind was devoted to other things which were good and valid, but which left God out. That is what secularism is. It is the good with the best left out. It is knowledge about everything that can lead to many values in life, but cannot lead to the best choices, because they are not made available as an alternative.

Christian education deals with all of the same things as secular education, but with this major difference: It gives the student the light from God's Word so that he can use all that he learns in a way that is consistent with the will and plan of God. This enables the student to make the best choices, for they are choices that enable them to love God with all their minds. This is why Sunday School is such a vital part of the ministry of the church. It is the teaching arm of the church, and it is the missionary arm of the church, for as Jesus said in His Great Commission, the goal of missions is to teach disciples to observe all He has commanded. Sunday School teachers are the missionaries of the local church, and what they do is just as much a fulfillment of our Lord's command as going into all the world.

In my case, Sunday School fulfilled the whole commission, for it was in a Sunday School started in the air base where I lived as a young boy that I came to know Christ. It was in Sunday School where I got excited about reading and memorizing the Bible. Without the influence of Sunday School in my life I know my education would have been a tool for evil rather than for the cause of Christ. I was anti-education most of my young life. I can identify with the boy who, when his father asked him how he liked school said, "closed." I disliked school and considered it a bore, and visualized the end of high school as the beginning of paradise. I could not conceive of how anybody could deliberately waste four years of their life by going off to college.

Then in my last year of high school everything changed radically, and it all revolved around loving God with all my mind. At the same time that I was being motivated by Sunday School to get into the Bible, I was being motivated by a high school teacher to read world literature. She made it so interesting that I developed a love for reading. Before this I seldom took a book home. I read only the basic requirements to get by. Now I was motivated to read and to see how all of history, like all of life, is related to God's Word. I fell in love with all learning because I could see how everything that can be known can illustrate the truth of Scripture.

It was in the midst of the process of coming to love God with all my mind that I sensed the call to the ministry. I could now tolerate the thought of 4 years of college. I went off to Bethel never dreaming I would be student there for the next 9 years. I spent 4 in college and 5 in the seminary. Christian education has dominated my life, and I am convinced that all Christians must be involved in Christian education in order to obey the first commandment, and to obey Christ's final orders to



the church.

When a Christian stops learning he stops loving God with all his mind, and, therefore, stops being what God wants him to be. There is no way to be a good Christian if you stop exposing your mind to new light from the Word of God. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Truth liberates but ignorance puts you in bondage. The only way to remain free is to keep growing in your knowledge of the truth. I already had a liberal arts education before I discovered what liberal meant in that context. It goes back to Aristotle who divided education into liberal and illiberal. If you teach a slave to pick cotton that is not liberal. It is illiberal education, for it makes him a better slave, and of more value to his master. But teach him to read and write, and about history and psychology, and you make him free to develop his own potential as a person. This is liberal education, for it liberates and makes a man free to be more of what he is capable of becoming.

This is the goal of the Sunday School as well. It is the purpose of all Christian education to help Christians see how the Bible relates to all the issues of life so they can make choices that are truly Christian. We need to see ourselves as children of God, and see ourselves like we see our own children and grandchildren. The one thing we all want for them is that they add new territory to their empire of experience and knowledge. We want them to walk and talk, and keep learning all they can as soon as they can. We want them to learn to take risks so they can grow. Nobody wants a child to live the life of a one year old over and over, for life is full of too many possibilities to be content with that, or any other level of limitation.

A couple of weeks ago we were swimming at a pool, and I was trying to get my granddaughter Sarah to take the plunge of faith and try to swim to me. She was full of fear and trembling, for it was new territory for her, and it seemed risky. But I had a strong desire for her to discover she could do what she had not done before. She had potential that could become actual, and she could learn something new. So my theme song was, let go and let grandpa-have faith-trust me-it won't hurt-and you won't drown-I'll be there to lift you up. It was a thrill to her and me when she took the leap of faith and launched out into a new adventure. This is what Christian education is all about. It is to entice us to let go and let God. Take the leap of faith and believe you can be more and do more than you ever have.

In Christ, this process of education never ends for the finite can never become infinite. There is endless potential for growth. We can be always pressing on to a higher level. To decide you no longer have to decide is to decide to die on the vine, for when you chose to stop making choices, you chose to end the life process which is choosing. That is what it is to be alive. It is to be free to make choices, and when we cease to seek more light to make wise choices, we cease to live the life of a believer, because we cease to love God with all our mind. Paul said Christians are to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good. Sunday School is designed to give you the opportunity to do just that. To learn is to love.

## **30. THE LOVE TRIANGLE**

## **MARK 12:28-34**

One of the great tragic plays of all time is Shakespeare's Othello. Othello was a general in the Venetian army. He secretly married Desdemona the daughter of a Venetian senator. Desdemona was the most lovely of all Shakespeare's characters. She was a beautiful and ideal wife. Othello was less than the ideal husband, however, for he killed her. There was no reason for this senseless act of violence, but he was convinced there was a just cause. This is how it happened.

Othello had promoted Cassio to higher rank, but bypassed Iago, and Iago was deeply offended. So much so that he plotted revenge. His method was to hint and imply to Othello that his wife Desdemona was involved with Cassio. He arranged that a handkerchief that Othello had given to his wife be found in the possession of Cassio. By crafty words and clever circumstantial evidence he succeeded in weaving a pattern of suspicion that put Othello in a jealous rage. In that evil stage of mind he smothered Desdemona in her bed.

In spite of the fact that Iago killed several people, including his own wife, to keep his evil scheme hidden, he was found out and sentenced to torture. But Othello, thunderstruck by his senseless jealousy, kills himself with his own sword crying, "The pity of it. O the pity of it." Indeed, a tragic story that illustrates the danger of the love triangle. Here was a case where there was no real triangle, but just the false suspicion, and that was enough to bring many to ruin. When David turned the love relationship of Uriah and Bathsheba into a love triangle, it could be said that the end result was a wreck-tangle, for it led to wrecked and tangled lives, and the tragic murder of the innocent, as was the case in Shakespeare's tragedy. The Bible, literature, and history, all agree that the love triangle is a plot that leads to tragedy.

In spite of this great danger of the triangle in the realm of romantic love, Jesus makes it clear that in realm of redemptive love the triangle is not tragic, but tremendous. The love triangle is not only permissible, but it is promoted as the only love that is complete. Any love that does not go upward to God, outward to others, and inward to self is as incomplete as a one or two legged tripod. Augustine said, "Where there is love there is trinity: A lover, a beloved, and a spirit of love."

It makes sense that Jesus would teach the necessity of a triune love. If God is love, and God is triune, then it follows that love must be triune if it is truly a Godlike love. Any love that lacks the triune nature tends to become a perversion. But what about romantic love? We just reviewed the well known fact that the love triangle on that level leads to tragedy. The problem there is a false picture we have in our minds. The triune nature of romantic love is also beautiful and complete. It is God, the husband, and the wife who make up the three of the true trinity on that level. It is when a fourth breaks into the triangle that there is a problem. Four is the number of earth, and three the number of heaven. Three is the number of heavenly balance even on earth. When Adam and Eve and God were the only three on the stage of history, all was beautiful. When the fourth, which was Satan, came on the stage, then came the seed of tragedy.

The point I am making is that love and trinity go together, and anything more or less is not complete love. On every level, if we rightly understand it, the love triangle is beautiful and complete. If you eliminate any of the three points on the triangle of love that Jesus portrays as the fulfillment of the whole law, you will destroy love. If you love God only, and not self or neighbor, you turn religion into a thing of horror. Men have committed every crime known for the glory of God, like Saul before he became the complete and loving Paul. He persecuted, tortured, and killed Christians for the glory of God. He loved God, but proved that without love for man love for God

can turn you into a monster. History is filled with tyrants who claimed love for God while they crushed their fellow man. John rightly asks, "How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your brother whom you do see?" John is saying what Jesus is saying, that love that does not have a triangle shape is not true love.

If one loves himself but not God and others he is not to be admired, for his love is pure selfishness. He is the Pharisee who thanks God he is not as other men. He is the center of his universe, and those who are wrapped up in themselves make a mighty small package. The Bible will not honor that sort of thing with the name of love. If you love your neighbor only, you may be a great humanitarian, and a helpful guy to have around, but you are shallow and superficial, and have no ultimate values and goals to give life meaning. You may be the best liked of the three, who have only a one or two pointed love, but you still fall far short of complete Biblical love. The point is, there is no point in a one point or two point love. Love must be triune or it does not exist.

Samuel Shoemaker, the great American preacher, said, "In the triangle of love between ourselves, God and other people, is found the secret of existence, and the best foretaste, I suspect, that we can have on earth of what heaven will probably be like." Now abides faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love." Why is love the greatest, and why is love the first fruit of the spirit? Because love is eternal, if it is complete. This triune love is the key ingredient of heaven. If one fails to develop this three fold love, he has failed to become fit for heaven. Hell is the destiny men chose when they fail to form the love triangle in their lives. It is never God's will that any man lack this triangle. It is God's whole purpose in history to bring men to the point where this three fold love dominates their lives.

Jesus made it clear that the whole Old Testament of God's revelation is summed up in these two great commandments that cover this three fold love. In the New Testament we have in Jesus the final and ultimate demonstration of the love triangle that makes it possible for men to fulfill these commands. Man on his own can never love God, his neighbor, and himself as God demands. His fallen nature will pervert love on every level. The only hope to be what God wants us to be is to surrender to the Lord of love who fulfilled these commands in Himself, and who can fulfill them in you if you let His love invade your life.

To be saved, or to be born again, is simply to let the love of Christ fill you so you can fulfill the purpose of God for your life by entering into the love triangle. All men have a triangle shaped vacuum within, and only as it is filled with love can man fulfill his purpose in God's plan. Jesus is the only person who ever fully embodied this love triangle. He only, loved God supremely with His whole being. He only, could love himself without doubt or defect, because He only, had a perfect and ideal character. He only, loved His neighbor as himself, for He alone gave His life that all men might be reconciled to God. No one but Jesus ever completely kept these commandments. There is no way for any man to become what God wants him to be apart from the love of Christ. To be Christlike is to embody the love triangle. We want to look at each of these three essential points:

## I. THE SUPREME LOVE.

The high point in the love triangle is our love for God. It is to be our supreme love. Our total being is to put God first in its value system so that nothing, or no one, is superior. To love God is to love what God loves. Love for God is demonstrated by the goals we strive for, and the purposes we

live for. It is being one with God in our judgment of values. This locks us into the triangle of love, for no one can truly love God who does not love his neighbor and himself, for God loves the neighbor and the self, and so not to do so is to reject God's value system.

Love for God leads to love for self and others, and so it is the number one love, for it carries in it all other loves. Without love for God there is no true love, for God is love, and the source of all love. Weakness in any area of your love life can be traced back to your love for God. Here is the mainspring that keeps all the other wheels of love turning. Keep your love for God in good working condition, and you will have no trouble forming the complete triangle of love.

Everything we do in any relationship reflects love to God, or lack of it. David, after his great sin with Bathsheba, said to God in Psa. 51:4, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." He saw that his primary problem was not just lust, but his lack of love for God. Had he loved God with his whole being he would have known that his action could only lead to tragedy. All sin is against God because all sin, like the first sin of Eve, begins with a doubt that God's way is best. The only way to avoid sin is to love God supremely. If David had loved God supremely, he would know that God's way would be best for his neighbor and himself.

Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, "In as much as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." Jesus is saying, all evil actions toward others are really directed toward Him. Every act of our life is saying, either I love God, or I do not love Him supremely. When Paul said we are to do all things to the glory of God, he was saying we are to live our lives so that every deed will be saying to God, "I love you." Everything we do and say has a cosmic significance, for every emotion of the heart, every action of the body, every thought of the mind, registers in the sensitive mind of God as love, or the lack of it.

This is both frightening and enlightening. It makes us fearful, for we know we fall so far short, and we fail to love God as we ought. Yet, it is enlightening and exciting because it makes all of life meaningful. There is no such thing as the insignificant in the Christian life. We can do all for the glory of God. A word, a smile, a trivial act of kindness, everything we do in our routine daily life can be an expression of love to God, and have infinite value. Love for God is what makes all of life meaningful, and that is why it is the supreme love. This exciting truth must be pursued further at another time, but for now we want to look at the other two points in the love triangle. The triangle has one point going up. It is the high point of the triangle, and represents love for God. The other points are on the same level, and they are equal. Jesus put it, "You are to love your neighbor as yourself." Equality is the emphasis. Love for God is the supreme love, and these other two are secondary loves. Let's look at the second point in the love triangle.

## II. THE SELF LOVE.

You will notice that self love is not a command but an assumption. We are commanded to love others as ourselves. Love for self is assumed, for God has made it natural and normal that we will love ourselves. Not to love yourself is to be in a state of malfunctioning. The persons who does not love themselves are like knives that won't cut, pliers that won't grip, a flashlight that won't turn on. They are like anything that exists for a purpose, but which cannot fulfill that purpose. Those who do not love themselves lose the sense of meaning to life. Loss of self-love is the primary cause of suicide. Without self-love there will be no motivation to love God or neighbor, for there will be no

motivation to gain heaven or escape hell. Self-hatred chooses hell. The lost sinner who lives without love for God is living in a state of self-hatred, and is choosing hell as his destiny.

The appeal of the Gospel to the sinner is not only that he should love God, but that he should love himself. If a man truly loves himself, he will repent of his sin and receive the gift of God which is eternal life in Jesus Christ. No man surrenders to Christ and receives life abundant until he loves himself. He may come to that love by being made to fear the loss of his soul, or he may come to it by seeing the price Jesus paid for his soul on the cross, and be stabbed into awareness of his infinite value, but one way or another salvation begins with self-love. It begins with a recognition of self-worth to God.

We who have entered the kingdom by receiving Christ must be ever growing in self-love in order to fulfill the purpose of God for our lives. If God's first command and primary purpose is that we love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind, then we must face up to the high value that God puts on each of our lives. How can I not love myself if God's main concern for me is that I love Him. I must really be somebody and of infinite value to God if He wants me to love Him supremely. Barber wrote, "You know always in your heart that you need God more than everything; but do you know too that God needs you...in the fullness of His eternity needs you?" If God did not need our love, He would not demand it, and if He did not need our love, life would have no meaning or goal. But because God does need and want our love, all of life takes on value and meaning. This second point in the triangle is so linked with the first that they both lead to the same end. The third point of the triangle is-

### III. THE SEEKING LOVE.

The love of your neighbor is a seeking love. It is the supreme love and the self-love seeking an outlet into the world. Love of God and self can be quite private, but love is not complete until it reaches out and becomes public. The triangle is not complete until love seeks expression in the public arena. That is why Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. The cross is the symbol of God's seeking love. It is the symbol of the price He was willing to pay to love others as Himself. The third point of the love triangle cannot be complete without a cross. There is always a price to pay to love others as yourself. G. Campbell Morgan said, "Loving your neighbor is not singing hymns about your neighbor, or merely hoping that some day your neighbor will go through the pearly gates into heaven. Loving your neighbor is to pour out your life in sacrificial attempt to heal his wounds, rest his weariness, and lift him to the level on which God would have him dwell."

Just as love for self is the passionate desire to be what God wants you to be, so love for neighbor is to have an equally passionate desire for them to be what God wants them to be. This means that true love for neighbor can include rebuke as well as positive guidance. We can't begin to cover all that is involved in seeking love, so I will focus on just one aspect. One of the main goals we strive for in self-love is happiness. We all want to be cheerful and encouraged. Love of neighbor is seeking to be a cheerleader in the game of life. It is a seeking to give encouragement by word and deed to those around us who also crave the same happiness we do.

The Pharisees had an apparent love for God, and a prideful love for self, but whatever good was in their love was lost because they broke off this third point of the triangle. They made religion a burden to be borne rather than a blessing to bear others up. Their idea of religion was to keep 618

different laws until life was just a daily pain. They forced this system upon the people, and that is why Jesus condemned them, and shattered their legalistic system. Jesus came that men might have life and life abundant. He came to love and give encouragement to men. To love your neighbor is to see that your neighbor receives the encouragement they need to move toward the goal of abundant life.

In the novel *Up The Down Staircase*, Sylvia is a teacher of slow learners in a New York school. One of the boys in her class felt he was a worthless nobody. He did not even sign his name to his papers, but just put me on them. Sylvia loved and cared for her students enough so that when she left this boy wrote to her and said, "I, for one, will never forget you as long as I live. You've made me feel I'm real." When your love can do that for a person it is a vital part of the love triangle. Anything you can do that helps others get into the love triangle is loving your neighbor as yourself.

Some need to learn to love themselves before they can love God. Others need to love God to escape a perverted self-love. Still others need to love their neighbor to balance out an inadequate love. Since all men need help at one or more of these three points of the love triangle, loving your neighbor involves anything you can do to encourage them to strengthen that point at which they are weak. It is seeking love because you must care enough about others to seek to know what they need, and where they need the encouragement.

It is not easy to keep all three levels of love in balance, but that is the goal of the Christian life, for no love is complete and adequate until it is triune, and a part of what God has designed as The Love Triangle.

## **31. OPTIMISTIC PESSIMISM**

## **MARK 13:1-2**

A man stood before the judge and told him this story. One day when my rheumatism was bad, and my daughter had just eloped with a good for nothing scalawag, and fire had destroyed my barn, and my best hog had up and died of the cholera, and they had foreclosed the mortgage on me, and the sheriff was looking for me with a warrant, I told my troubles to one these here optimists and he said, "Cheer up, old man, the worst is yet to come." So I shot him.

Nobody, let alone a troubled person, likes to hear that the worst is yet to come, but sometimes it happens to be the truth and it needs to be faced. Jesus had to do this in Mark 13. He makes it unmistakably clear to His disciples that the clouds of doom hang over the future, and darkness rather than sunshine covers the horizon.

Jesus is not being a pessimist here, however, in spite of the gloomy nature of His prophecy. He is being a realist with an optimistic foundation. You can afford to face the worst when you know the best will finally triumph, and that is why Jesus taught His disciples about the trials ahead. Jesus was optimistic about the ability of His followers to stand in the storm of testing and bear a fruitful witness. Therefore, He opens up the scroll of the future and reveals the dreadful consequences that will befall them as well as unbelieving Israel. He had some pessimistic facts to share, but in an

optimistic attitude, and so Jesus was revealing an attitude of optimistic pessimism.

The greatest tragedy ever to befall the Jewish nation was not the threshold of history. The hand of mercy had been knocking at the door of Judaism, but they would not open the door. Instead, they nailed that hand of mercy to a cross. Jesus knew this was going to be their response, and that the next response would be God's hand of wrath which would not knock at the door, but demolish the door. The Jews had been captives in Egypt for 400 years. They had been captives in Babylon for 70 years, and they had had their share of troubles ever since, and were now under the domination of Rome. In this chapter Jesus says in effect, "Cheer up, the worst is yet to come."

In 70 A.D. the Jews would suffer the most shattering defeat in their history. The temple would be destroyed and all the records and genealogies would be destroyed, and the whole ceremonial and sacrificial system of Judaism would be demolished. Since then Judaism has not been the same for 1900 years. Nothing of such catastrophic proportions had ever happened before, and unless we believe history will go on for several thousand more years, nothing like it can ever happen again. The killing of millions of Jews by Hitler did not change the essence of Judaism at all, nor has any other tragedy, as did the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

This being the greatest calamity ever to hit Judaism made it the ideal type for the greatest calamity to ever hit the world—namely, the end of the world—the second coming, and the judgment. God's judgment on Israel has many parallels with God's judgment on the world at the end of history. Jesus is actually speaking of both of these events in this passage, and this has led to confusion. The chapter is impossible to unscramble unless you see he has both the immediate and the far off judgment in mind. He talks of wars and earthquakes, and says don't be alarmed, the end is not yet. He says in verse 10 that the Gospel has to go into all the world before the end, so there is a long period of history ahead. Yet in verse 30 He says all this will happen before this generation passes away. It is common sense to recognize that the same event cannot be around the corner and far in the distance at the same time. But it is clear that around the corner was judgment on Israel, and far off was the judgment on the world. The fact that Jesus put the two together indicates that the first is a type of the second, or at least that they are similar.

Men disagree a great deal in trying to determine what parts of this chapter apply to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and what verses apply to the second coming. The variations of scholars are so numerous that it is a waste of time to try to set up a system before hand. We have to take a verse at a time, and from within that verse look in both directions, and see how far, or how near the perspective is. The expert will breeze through this chapter with a clear cut outline, and make it seem as simple as a nursery rhyme as he fits it neatly into his pre-conceived system. This is the easy way and eliminates the need for thinking, and asking questions. However, for the person who is really more interested in what Jesus is saying than in what men say He is saying, there is the need to move slow and think seriously about the implications of each verse.

G. Campbell Morgan after of years of study in God's Word said of this chapter, "None of these things, which I confess I am less able to explain today than yesterday, for the puzzle and the wonder grow—were unknown to my Lord." The deeper he went the less of an expert he became, and so he had to be content with mystery, but assured that Christ knowing was sufficient. Strange as it may seem, it is a great growth in knowledge just to learn that you do not know, for none are so ignorant as those who have eliminated all the mystery of God's revelation, and especially the prophetic

portions as we have here. It is, therefore, with an attitude of optimistic pessimism that we begin the study of this chapter, for in spite of all the conflict and confusion, there is still much truth to be gained by this study. You don't have to exhaust a mine to enjoy its riches when there are gems right on the surface.

Let's begin by reading the first verse from the New English Bible. "As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples exclaimed, look Master, what huge stones! What fine buildings!" This verse gives us the setting and the reason why Jesus began teaching about the destruction of the temple. Jesus was coming out of the temple for the last time, and it was symbolic of the departure of the divine presence from the temple. The Jewish hierarchy had rejected him. God had literally descended and come to His temple in His Son, but they who kept the temple would not accept Him. With the departure of Christ the true glory of the temple also departed, and Jesus knew it.

That is why Jesus did not share the same awe and appreciation with the disciple who said what a marvelous place this is. Many think the disciple was Peter, and that he was being his impetuous self and was just expressing his sense of amazement at the beauty of the temple. The Rabbi said of it that whoever had not seen it had not seen the perfection of architectural beauty. It had huge stones 20 feet long and 7 feet high and 10 feet thick, and there were great Corinthian pillars 37 and a half feet high cut out of solid marble. Josephus, an eye witness, wrote, "The temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for as to those parts of it which were not gilt, they were exceeding white." No one can doubt the magnificence of the temple, and certainly Jesus had an aesthetic nature, and love beauty, but this time he did not respond positively to the beauty being pointed out.

Instead, in verse 2, he as much as says, it may look like something now, but before long it will be just a pile of rubble. Not a stone will be left upon another he said. Jesus was not much impressed with an external beauty when the heart and soul were gone. The inner glory of the temple was gone, and so when God came to the temple again it would be in judgment. What good is a beautiful shell if the egg is rotten inside? What good is a beautifully wrapped package if the precious gift that is to be inside has been removed? The disciple was still impressed with the huge stones and the external inspiring appearance of the temple, but Jesus who looked beyond the externals was no longer inspired by the temple.

There is a worth while lesson conveyed in these first two verses, and it is this: Where there is true worship and obedience to God, and where the Spirit of God is not quenched but yielded to, no amount of external beauty and magnificence is great enough to symbolize the values that are there. On the other hand, where the word and will of God are despised, and where the Spirit is denied, all external beauty is sham and blasphemy. The point is, the inner life of a person or church must be beautiful before externals are legitimate. External symbols that imply internal character are disgraceful when the internal character they imply is missing. When a very foolish or wicked person wears a cross, it gives you an idea of how Jesus must have felt as He looked at the beauty of the temple.

Externals are only beautiful to Christ when they are true expressions of what is within. The beauty of the temple was a sham, and only deceived people by its beauty into thinking it represented a living and dynamic faith. It was dead and would soon be buried. As huge as its stones were it was no match for the Rock of Ages, and when his blow came it was to be thorough. Josephus confirms



the prophecy of Christ and writes about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. "It was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those who dug it up to the foundation that there was nothing left to make those who came hither believe it had ever been inhabited."

Jesus was not being a pessimist, He was being a prophet. You are not being negative when you tell what you know, even if the facts are negative. The facts were that Judaism was but an empty shell after it rejected and crucified Christ. The sacrifices and atonement and the holy of holies were all meaningless after Jesus made atonement for all sin, and opened up the holy of holies to all men. The destruction of the temple, and the whole sacrificial system was necessary as a concrete demonstration that in God's eyes it was obsolete and no longer acceptable. 70 A. D. was an historical witness to the effectiveness of Christ's atonement. From that point on Christianity represented the true God and the true message of salvation. God was no longer centralized, but could be worshiped everywhere in spirit and in truth. This is old news to us, but to the disciples it was the most fantastic and revolutionary prophecy imaginable.

## **32. A WARNING ABOUT WARNINGS**

### **13:3f**

## **MARK**

Jesus loved Israel, for the Jews were God's people. He was their King, and He was as patriotic as any of Israel's leaders or kings. We cannot doubt that Jesus loved the Jews more than either Moses or Paul, both of whom were ready to perish for the sake of Israel. Nevertheless, Jesus did not try and deceive Himself or His disciples. Love, devotion, and patriotism could not alter the truth that judgment was ahead because Judaism was dead. The prophets highest loyalty is to truth, and to God who is the author of truth. The prophets loved their people and nation, yet they denounced the evils of Israel, and warned of judgment. The false prophets were silent, or spoke soft words of false comfort. It is good for us to keep this Biblical role of the prophets in mind as we evaluate men and attitudes in our own day. The critic of the evils of our nation is the true lover of America, if his motive is to bring us to a change for the better. The man who cries out against the evils and corruption is more likely to be the spokesman for God than the man who seeks to whitewash over the evils.

Just as it is the parent who most opposes the folly of their children who love them most, so it is the critics of national evil who are the nations best friends. In this context Jesus was sure of the judgment ahead, and, therefore, was not warning in the hope of diverting the judgment. He had already failed and knew that He was to be crucified. This kind of certainty is not known about the future of any other nation. We do not know if we will proceed into inevitable judgment, or repent as a nation and be restored to a place of even greater leadership in world evangelization. All we know for sure from Christ's attitude in this passage is that the church must escape from the rut that is leading us to the same dead institutionalism that characterized Judaism. We as Christians must escape from the influence of materialism that makes us think of the church in terms of buildings and rituals.

By His teaching and action Jesus made it clear that the essence of man's relationship to God is personal and spiritual, and not material. Jesus made no plans for a super structure in which to worship, for each believer was to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave the power of the Holy Spirit to the common people, and it was that people-empowered body that replaced the huge stones of the temple of Judaism. People with God's power: That is the church, and no matter how much marble, wood, steel, and stained glass you have put together, without people with God's power you don't have a church. Man is constantly trying to rebuild the temple that God destroyed thinking that is the secret of spiritual success. It's the age old spirit of those who built the tower of Babel. William Barclay wrote,

Pride of man and earthly glory  
Sword and crown betray his trust;  
With what care and toil he buildeth,  
Tower and temple, fall to dust.  
But God's power,  
Hour by hour,  
Is my temple and my tower.

A return to a personal encounter and dependence upon God rather than the impersonal, mechanical, and materialistic forms of worship is essential if the church is to escape the fate of the temple of Judaism. The power to witness, and the power to live a Christlike life, will not come through ceremony, but through surrender; not through ritual, but through revival of a dynamic personal response of believers to a living God. This is a clear conclusion that can be drawn from the very attitude that Christ reveals in this chapter. Men must learn from the destruction of the temple that aesthetics, and the beauty of art and architecture can never be a substitute for the beauty of holiness. The disciples came to this conclusion as time went on, but now they were interested when this event of the destruction of the temple would be.

Jesus had just wetted their appetite. He made this boldly shocking statement about the ruin of the temple, and then walked off to the Mt. of Olives. He, no doubt, expected them to follow Him with curiosity churning in their minds, and He was right, for when He sat down verse 3 tells us He was approached by the inner circle for a private conference on this matter. Andrew is for the first time included, and so we have two sets of brothers, and the first four that Jesus called to be His disciples. They, like most everyone, were interested in the future, and prophecy fascinated them. They were eager for more details, and verse 4 shows us that their first interest was in knowing when. We all love to nail things down and have an accurate time-table of events. Date setting is almost a compulsive urge for those interested in prophecy. What a thrill to be able to determine the date of future events.

All scholars want to be the first to discover truth so they can inform those who are still in the dark. To know is power, and so the disciples were no different than the non-believing Jews when it came to an interest in signs. They wanted a warning system so they could know when judgment was at hand. Who would not appreciate the security of such knowledge. The Jews of that day were fanatical in their speculation about the end, and many had to suffer the consequences of listening to some of these self-appointed prophets. Josephus in Wars Of The Jews tells of a tragic instance of false calculation of the end. Six thousand men, women, and children were burned alive by the Roman soldiers in the outer court of the temple. He writes, "A false prophet was the occasion of

these people's destruction, who had made a public proclamation in the city that very day. That God commanded them to get up upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance." This prophecy rested on an interpretation of the 70 weeks of Daniel whereby the end was to fall in 70 A. D., a common calculation.

Before Jesus gives them the information they seek, He first gives them a warning about something that will be relevant to them long before the signs, and He also gives them a list of things that are not signs so they will not get alarmed before hand. In other words, He gives them a warning about warnings that are not authentic warnings. In verse 5 He warns them that their first concern is to avoid being deceived and led astray. Now keep in mind, He is not talking here to children, or to some recent disciples who just began to follow Him. He is speaking to the inner circle, the very foundation of His church; the most mature followers that He has at this point. If He needed to warn them about being led astray, we have better face it: Christians can be led astray by false prophets.

In the next verse Jesus states it as a fact that many will be led astray. There is no area in the Christian life where it is easier to get off the track than in the area of prophecy. Whenever a man wants to rob the saints He knows the quickest way to do it is to become a prophetic preacher, for people who won't pay a dime, or cross the street, for sound training in practical Christian living, will go for miles and sacrifice to be deceived by a false prophet. Jesus said it would be so, and those who are fulfilling His prophecy by being so foolish do so as a direct result of ignoring His warning to be cautious. Anyone who is careless and indifferent about accuracy and sound evidence in the area of Biblical prophecy has covered their ears to the voice of Christ. Their punishment will be that they will be led astray.

The warning of Christ gives us a warrant to be skeptical about all prophetic schemes of men. It gives us the authority to question and probe into the foundations and premises of all men's teachings, including our own. It gives us basis for withholding judgment until we are satisfied that a message is in harmony with the whole revelation of God. If these disciples had to be cautious, or be led astray, then there is no authority on earth that can ask us for unquestioning submission. We are duty bound to Christ to carefully evaluate the claims of every man who assumes the authority of teacher.

I may seem overly cautious, but I know from experience that what Jesus warned of is a fact which disrupts and weakens the witness of the entire church. I take this warning seriously because it is obvious that Jesus recognized it to be a serious matter. History has demonstrated that those who did not heed His warning, but instead rushed headlong into following one prophet or another, ended up making fools of themselves, and brought a bad name upon the cause of Christ. Men do not lose their salvation by going astray on matters dealing with the Second Coming, and the end of the world, but they can cause enough confusion through fanaticism to block others from approaching the Savior. No error is too minor to be a stumbling block to some, so let us not take it lightly as if it really didn't matter what we believe.

Our attitude ought to be, let us learn all we can for sure, and be willing to remain silent and uncommitted where we are ignorant. If this is our attitude, no one can lead us astray. In verse 6 Jesus says the false prophets will come in His name. This immediately throws many Christians off the track, for as soon as they hear that a man speaks in the name of Christ they let down their guard, and assume he is inspired if not infallible. We need to learn that a man can speak as a Christian and still be a false prophet. We often assume that anyone who can say praise the Lord must be a genuine

prophet.

Barclay said, "The human mind has an infinite capacity for wishful thinking." We easily fall for anything we like to hear because we want it to be true. The false prophet just has to discover what appeals to people and then give it to them. In this verse Jesus gets very specific about their claims. He says that many will say they are Him. There will be many false messiahs. This seems irrelevant to us, for we do not know of anyone claiming to be Christ, nor does it seem to us we could be fooled if anyone made the claim. It was very relevant to the early church, however, and as Jesus said, many were led astray. Alexander says there has been 50 false messiahs from the fall of Jerusalem to the 17th century. No doubt, the invention of printing and wide distribution of Scripture eliminated the likelihood of such deception in the modern world.

We are not likely to be deceived by such a claim today, but we can be deceived by other forms of alarmism. Someone is always giving warning that the end is near, and they quote statistics about the increase of wars, famine, earthquakes, and all kinds of natural calamities. Jesus says to beware of such warnings. They can get you excited and unstable, and make you unprepared to do the will of God. Jesus says that all of these things are not signs of the end. Whenever anyone uses these things as signs of the end, he is contradicting Jesus who clearly tells His disciples that they are not. Jesus warns us about heeding false warnings. He says in verse 8 that all these things are but the beginning of sufferings. Let us, therefore, be calm and not alarmed by a world in turmoil. This is when the Christian has to be at his best in applying Christian principles. We cannot afford to throw up our hands and wait for the rapture, for as Jesus said, these are not signs of the end. Let us keep busy in meeting the needs of a suffering world, and not be led astray by those who give false warnings.

### **33. ADVANCE THROUGH ARREST 13:9-13**

**Mark**

There is a difference between sin and error. If I say  $2+2=5$  I am in error, but I am not sinning. That is, if my motive is to come to a right answer I am not sinning. If my human fallibility leads me to a wrong answer it is not sin. If I say  $2+2=5$  in order to confuse a young person so that they will make a mistake and get a problem wrong then it becomes a sin, for it is a deliberate attempt to deceive. It is no longer an error but a lie, and, therefore, a sin. The motive determines the difference between a sin and an error.

When it comes to matters of Biblical doctrine we find the same distinction. If I had believed that Jesus was to come in 1988, I have been proven wrong. I was in error to believe that, but I was not sinning in believing that. That was an error in calculation and interpretation. Christians have been wrong about a good many things because they did not properly understand God's Word. This is not sin, but the natural result of the inadequacy of human knowledge. However, if my error is the direct result of disobeying, or of paying no heed to the clear words of Christ, then it becomes sin, for it is error due to willful negligence. Whenever we can avoid error easily and do not do so because of

laziness and indifference, it becomes a sin to be wrong. To be in error about the obscure or unrevealed is perfectly normal, but to be in error about the clearly revealed is to be guilty of sinful negligence.

Jesus predicted that error would be successful, and false prophets would lead many astray just because people will refuse to give heed to His warning. They will allow themselves to be frightened, and led into unstable emotionalism over the very things He clearly stated were no cause for alarm. G. Campbell Morgan wrote, "Observe...that in this prophecy we have the definite declaration that wars and rumors of wars are not the sign of the end of the age." Yet every crisis and international conflict will bring many false prophets out of the darkness to confuse and frighten.

Whenever you find Christians being alarmists and acting like chicken little scampering around the barnyard screaming that the sky is falling, you know they have missed the purpose of Christ's teaching on last things. His key word is watch. Do not be alarmed He urges. Don't go off half cocked. Don't lose control of your emotional stability. Be steady, be alert, be watchful. A few minutes of calm reflection upon the evidence would have saved chicken little from his emotional blunder and premature warning that caused so much chaos. So also a few moments of calm reflection on the clear teaching of Jesus will help us avoid confusing the end with the beginning. Jesus said that all these things are the beginning of sufferings. Let us not be guilty of willful error by saying these things are signs of the end.

In verse 9 Jesus goes on to tell the disciples some of the very specific forms of suffering they will have to endure. Let us keep in mind that Jesus answered their question primarily to give them understanding. The first application of His teaching is to the immediate future of the disciples, and not to the 20th century, or any other century. For example, Jesus says they will be beaten in synagogues, and taken before governors and kings. This is obviously a picture of law enforcement and persecution which fits what the Apostles faced, but would not apply after 70 A. D. After that the Jews no longer had the power or authority. It was not long before the picture was reversed completely and Christians were persecuting Jews and beating them.

The point is, Jesus is not describing what is going to happen all through history, though similar things have always happened. He is telling them what they must endure as the first proclaimers of the Gospel. Both Jews and the Romans would arrest them because of all the trouble Christianity would stir up. The Romans would have to intervene because of the dangerous tension between the old Israel and new Israel. It was a civil war within Judaism that the Gospel caused, and as verse 12 shows, it was a conflict unto death. The Romans had to step in to maintain order. You will notice that the beatings are to take place in the synagogue at the hands of the Jews, but the being brought before the governors and kings was for the purpose of bearing testimony. Of course, no beatings have been allowed in synagogues for many centuries, and so this passage obviously refers to the immediate future of the disciples.

Jesus indicates that one of the key ways of getting the Gospel spread would be through the courts. The persecution would lead to opportunities to defend the Gospel before high officials and leaders in high places. This would give the Gospel a world wide sounding board. Just as today an obscure matter known only to a few people can become the talk of the nation if it comes before the Supreme Court. Some people break a law on purpose just to get the matter before the courts, and to get their voice heard. This is what was going to happen in the early church. Old Israel was dying, but it was

going to take down the new Israel with it, but their very efforts to destroy it were the cause for its becoming a world wide movement. God makes even the wrath of man to praise Him.

So crucial was this in the plan of God that Jesus tells them in verse 11 not to be anxious about what to say, for the Holy Spirit was promised to make sure this opportunity would be used to the fullest extent. Under this unique situation the direct work of the Holy Spirit was essential for the success of the spread of the Gospel. If we go to the book of Acts, we discover that almost all of the great preaching, and all of the great defenses of the Gospel were delivered before official bodies, or men in high places. We find Peter and John before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:8-21 and 5:29f. The seventh chapter is Stephen's great defense before his martyrdom. Paul is before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23; before Felix in Acts 24; before Festus in Acts 25; before Agrippa in Acts 26, and in a Roman prison in Acts 28. It is no less than fantastic when we see the role of the legal system of Rome in the spread of the Gospel. Had God not prepared the world through the development of the Roman legal system, the church would not have gotten off the ground to such a rapid start.

Freedom of speech and liberty to be heard, and to present your side of the case, was essential for the growth of Christianity. At other times and under other systems Christianity would have been denied this privilege. We see another explanation of the statement, "In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son." God knew all of these factors before time began. He is never too early or too late in His actions. It would be interesting to digress here, and consider the whole history of how the Gospel has spread through its conflicts within the courts of this world, but this would take us too far afield. Many of the great men of God and movements of God became that due to conflict with the law or official bodies. The Baptist General Conference began with the trial of F.O. Nielson in Sweden where his defense of the Baptist position was published all over the nation by reporters at his trial. This led to many believing and becoming followers. Never underestimate the value of the truth being brought before the courts.

Jesus wants to encourage His disciples with this knowledge that what they suffer will be worth while, for it is part of the necessary price to pay for the success of the church. In verse 10 He makes it clear that the persecution will not destroy the church. The Gospel will be preached in all nations before the end. This has both an immediate and ultimate application. The Gospel did reach all nations before 70 A. D., in the sense that through the synagogues Jews all over the world had a chance to choose Christ as their Messiah before Judaism was judged in the fall of Jerusalem. This is the primary application for the benefit of the disciples, and to comfort them as to the immediate success of the Gospel before the fall of old Israel.

If our assumption is valid that the judgment on Judaism is a type of the coming final judgment on the world, then we can see the application of this promise to our own day also. The end will not come until the great commission is fulfilled, and people of every nation have the chance to respond to the Gospel. Not knowing the precise definition of this means that this goal is certainly within sight in our day.

Mark's record of the statement clearly makes it a reference to the world of the disciples. It is put between verses 9 and 11 which are references to their own personal trials. In verse 11 Jesus tells them not to be anxious about what to say when they are brought to trial. This has nothing to do with their responsibility to expound the Word and their study habits. Paul said, "Bring me the books and the parchments." He was a student of the Word, but he did not have time to prepare speeches when

he was brought before the courts. Jesus is saying, do not worry at such a time, for all you need to do is defend your right to believe, and the basis for your belief. All that is necessary is your love for and faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit will do the rest. Anyone who gets a wide open opportunity to express their faith in Christ is able to do a good job of it, for the Holy Spirit continues to operate this way under such circumstances. When there is perfect liberty the Christian needs no preparation, but simply a living faith in Christ.

Verse 12 is the saddest part of this prophecy, for the tension will be so terrific in homes where some believe and others do not that there will be hatred unto death developed between loved ones. Here is clear civil war; not between Jews and Gentiles, but between believers and unbelievers. This is why Jesus said that if you love father or mother, or son or daughter, or brother or sister, more than me you are not worthy of me. He knew the day would come when men would have to choose between Him and family loyalty. This was true for both Jews and Gentiles. Emperor Domitian slew Flavius Clemens and his niece because they were Christians. Emperor Maximin killed Artemia his own sister. Diocletian killed his own wife and other relatives for being Christians. Only eternity will reveal how many Christians were killed by their own family.

In verse 13 Jesus indicates that men of all places will be hateful toward believers. There will be no sanctuary, for Christians will suffer universal persecution. Jesus promises no escape, but encourages them to endure to the end and be saved. He promises no cheap grace, but He says it is worth going through all the suffering, for all who do shall be saved. Be faithful unto death and you will receive the crown of life. This was true in the first century, and is true for Christians today who suffer all over the world.

## **34. A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLEHILL      MARK 14:22-25**

Basil Matthews tells of being in a little Arabian village and seeing a tall Arab boy playing a flute in the dusty streets. He was surprised and asked the boy if he could examine the instrument. He discovered it was made out of an old gun barrel. The boy had found it on a nearby battlefield. He had filed it down, drilled holes in it, and out of a weapon designed to inflict misery he created a instrument of music.

Creative people are always taking something worthless and turning it into something worthwhile. Many can take trash and junk and turn it into trinkets and jewelry. No one can match the creative ingenuity of Jesus, however. He can even make a mountain out of a molehill. We are using an old cliché in a positive way when we say this, for we mean that He can take something minor and minute and turn it into something major and magnificent.

Ordinarily this saying is used as a negative remark about those who turn trifles into tragedies, and who exaggerate minor miseries into monstrous malignancies. Every gas bubble is made into a bleeding ulcer; every minor pain is the onset of cancer; every storm is expected to be a rerun of Noah and the Ark. The worry wort and the hypochondriac are experts at making mountains out of

molehills, but very few can persuade themselves to appreciate this awesome ability because it is all negative. There is a positive side to this cliché, however. G. K. Chesterton points out that if you can see the tremendous in trifles, and find wonder in the commonplace, then you are making mountains out of molehills, and he can think of no more productive form of manufacture.

When we look at the life of Jesus we discover He was a Master at making mountains out of molehills. He was always finding the sublime in that which was simple. He used the insignificant over and over for the basis of inspiration. A poet put it-

He saw the world in a grain of sand,  
and Heaven in a wild flower,  
Held infinity in the palm of His hand  
and Eternity in an hour.

You will search the Scripture in vain to find Jesus speaking of the 7 wonders of the world. The common people heard Him gladly because He spoke of commonplace things. All of His illustrations were from everyday life that all men were familiar with. He spoke of the birds of the air; the lilies of the field; the grain white unto harvest; the sheep and the shepherd, the fishermen and his nets, women baking, men plowing, and all the commonplace facts of life. Ninety nine per cent of all Jesus said was plain bread and butter talk. When He came to the last night of His life in the flesh He did not change His life style. In fact, if it is possible, He specialized even more in life's commonplace basics. He took a towel and a basin of water to wash His disciples feet, and that is about as commonplace and down to earth as you can get. Now we want to examine His instituting the memorial by which His church will remember Him all through history, and again we see His love for simplicity.

He does not leave to his church some elaborate ceremony with complex ritual that only the well trained could participate in, but instead he takes a cup and he takes bread. Cup and bread, no big deal. The lowliest peasant has a cup and some bread. The condemned prisoner in the dungeon has his cup and bread. What kind of memorial is this for a king? Look at the Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln memorials, and then you will see honor. For Jesus there should be a crown with glorious jewels, and a long shiny jewel-studded sword, or at least something that is lasting. Anything but a perishable piece of bread that can be thrown to a dog, or left to mold and decay in a day.

What madness is this? A king whose hand can grasp the constellations, and he takes a cup. A Master whose marvels and miracles could astound the world, and he takes a piece of bread as the basis for his memorial. Where would the Pharaohs be today if they had taken a piece of bread and a cup instead of building the majestic pyramids? They would have been forgotten completely. Jesus does not want His disciples to forget Him either, but He does not insure their remembrance with anything elaborate or complex. If He can build a perpetual memorial to His name out of these commonplace things, then He is making a mountain out of molehill, and turning the trivial into the tremendous.

The fact that we are here today ready to obey His request to do this in remembrance of Him, proves that He was successful in making the simple sublime. Joy Romans wrote,



Tuck me in a cozy shanty,  
In some unique, secluded place.  
Wind a lane, all twisty slanty,  
Up to her unpainted humble face.  
Happiness comes to those it seems,  
Who seek out truth, in simple things.

We want to seek out truth in simple things by examining the significance of the bread and cup, these mere molehills which Jesus used to make a mountainous memorial.

## I. THE BREAD.

Here is the ultimate in the commonplace. It is the universal food, and just because of that, it is an excellent symbol of life and what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. The cross becomes a source of life for all men who will look to the Christ of the cross who is the bread of life. In John chapter 6 the word bread is used 16 times. Jesus makes it clear, as He compares Himself with the manna of the Old Testament, that He is the true bread of God from heaven. He is the living bread that can nourish, sustain, and give growth and life in the wilderness of this world.

The bread of communion is to be a reminder that Jesus is the Resource for living. When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," it is a request, not just for the physical bread, but for the soul food supplied in Christ. Jesus was frequently engaged in making a mountain of blessing out of a molehill of bread. Some of the greatest miracles He performed were miracles with bread. He fed the 5000, and again the 4000 by the multiplying of bread. Bread was thereby made to represent His all-sufficiency in supplying our needs. Jesus was not the cake of life, but the bread of life. He has such a love for bread, and such a unique method of handling it, and giving thanks for it, that the two He met on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus after His resurrection until He broke the bread. When they saw Him breaking bread they suddenly were enlightened. Why should bread and the Lord be linked so closely so that even when we look back to the cross Jesus asks us to use bread as a reminder?

In spite of the fact that bread is very perishable, it is an ideal symbol of the Lord who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Times change, and a ceremony with meaning in one age can become completely meaningless in another. Had Jesus made foot washing the basis for His memorial, for example, the changing times would have made it irrelevant. It was a custom when sandals were worn by those who walked on dusty roads and needed their feet washed when they entered a home to eat. This is no longer the case. Jesus selected the eating of bread because He knew that for as long as history lasted, and however radical the changes of culture, every man on the face of the earth would be an eater of bread. Jesus selected the commonplace of bread for His memorial because it would be lasting and universal.

When we begin to emphasize the unique and complex, as theologians often do, we tend to make Christ exclusive and available only to the few. Jesus purposely majored on the commonplace so as to be inclusive, and to make it clear He is available to all men who will receive Him. Jesus and His life giving power are as available as bread. Someone has said, "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where he can get bread." The Gospel is really that simple. When we begin to ignore the insignificant and become careless about the commonplace, we will find ourselves fumbling with

the fundamentals.

Everything connected with the Gospel is basic, simple, and appeals to the common man. A mountain top experience with Christ demands nothing that is not available to every man. Jesus was a carpenter by trade, for a carpenter deals in wood, and wood is universal. It is the common material available to most all men. From the wood of His crib to the wood of His cross Jesus was a specialist in the commonplace.

It was not a bolt of gold,  
But only a cross of wood,  
Yet the bliss can never be told,  
When its meaning is understood.

The poet is saying in another way, Jesus made a mountain out of a molehill by using the commonplace to accomplish the plan of redemption. Wood, water, bread, and the cup are His tools. Where in all the Gospels is there anything of importance that is not common and available to all men.

Failure to see this has often led Christians in a vain search for the spectacular. They begin to dream that deep Christian experiences can be found in the unique. They feel the glory of Christianity is hidden mysteriously like gold in the hills. The result is that they become blind to the glory in the bread. They miss the meaning of grace in the commonplace. They are like a man on the desert wishing he had some sand for his hour glass. They are like researchers on the ocean wishing they had some salt water for their experiments. When Christians become bored and their spiritual life seems dull and flat, it is because they have become blind to the glory of the commonplace all about them. They need to learn how to make mountains out of molehills. They need to see how the commonplace realities of life can be magnified into meaningful adventures.

All the physical realities about us can become symbols of spiritual realities. All things lead back to God, even bread. The poet has written:

Back of the loaf is the flour  
And back of the flour is the mill,  
And back of the mill is the heat and the shower,  
And the sun and the Father's will.

If we learn to relate all things to God, we will learn the amazing positive art of making mountains out of molehills. The secular and the material can be made into stepping stones which lead us up to the sacred and spiritual.

We look for better bread than ever comes from wheat, but the bread of wheat is so much a part of our daily lives that it becomes an ideal reminder of the higher bread for which we are to hunger. Jesus took bread to represent His body broken for us that we might never forget. If we forget to eat, we lose strength. If we fail to partake of the Bread Of Life, we become spiritually weak.

When I forget the death which is my life,  
How weak I am! How full of fear and fret!

How my heart wavers in a constant strife  
With mists and clouds that gather round me rife,  
When I forget!

I will remember all thy love divine;  
Oh meet thou with me where thy saints are met,  
Revive me with the holy bread and wine,  
And may my love, O God, lay hold on Thine,  
And ne'er forget.  
Author unknown

May God help us to make a mountain out of a molehill by letting this simple memorial with bread lead us to renewed participation in Christ, the Bread Of Life. Next, let's look at,

## II. THE CUP.

Like bread, the cup is a universal symbol. There are few who have ever lived who did not have a cup. As far back as archaeology can trace civilization, men have used cups. Thirst is as much of a human need as hunger, and so Jesus uses both of these universal commonplace needs as a foundation for His memorial. Do this in remembrance of Me-do what? Eat and drink the bread and the cup. This memorial will be obsolete when eating and drinking have gone out of style.

Since the cup represents the blood of Christ sacrificed for the sins of the whole world, the cup of communion, by its simplicity, represents a profound and precious truth. Every man who can quench his thirst by drinking can also be cleansed from his sin by partaking in the blood of Christ. To put your trust in His sacrifice for your sins is to have them forgiven and removed. To be forgiven is as simple as having thirst quenched. Here is something so insignificant, yet it has power to do what no big and great thing in the world can do.

This principle of finding mountains in molehills has been important all through history. In the 19th century Japanese sailors were dying with a disease called Beriberi, which means very weak. It kills yet today, even though the cure has been discovered. There is a molehill that can become their mountain of salvation very near to them. It was discovered by accident by a Dutch Doctor in 1896. He infected chickens with the disease and all of a sudden they got well. He was perplexed and began to inquire what was going on. He discovered the new hospital cook where he was doing his experiments was feeding the chickens, not the polished white rice fit for humans, but the unpolished with its unattractive brown hulls. Further study revealed that these hulls had a nutrient necessary for health, and it led to the defeat of the disease Beriberi. It also led men to realize that very minute elements in our diet make a major difference. A trivial change in diet can make a tremendous difference. It can be a molehill that becomes a mountain of blessing. So it is with this minute cup of the Lord. It is next to nothing, but it means everything in terms of a healthy soul that is cleansed and forgiven.

There are many Christians who do not partake of communion because of sin in their lives. A misunderstanding has become widespread because of the perversions going on in the church at Corinth. They were getting drunk and eating like gluttons at the communion service, and Paul

warned them that this unworthy conduct would be judged, and, in fact, was the cause for some of them being taken in death. This has led many Christians to feel they ought not to come to the Lord's table until they get their sin problem solved. The folly of this is that there is no way to solve a sin problem except through forgiveness based on the blood of Christ.

The 12 who sat there with Jesus when He instituted the Lord's Supper were far from ideal saints, and this has ever been the case since. Communion is for the sake of reminding us that we are sinners, and that there is only one way to deal with this fact, and that is by bringing our sins and our needs to Christ. Remember Him and His death which was for sin. The cup of communion is a call to come with your sin to be cleansed, and not a symbol of dread we are to shun until we get cleansed by some other means. The Duke of Wellington was once taking a trip through England. He stopped at a small chapel to take communion. Kneeling at the rail, as was the custom then, he noticed a ragged peasant had recognized him and began to move away. Wellington reached over and laid his hand on his arm, and said, "Stay. He invited you, too."

All are equal at the Lord's table. There is one Master, and all others are sin stained servants needing His cleansing. If you let sin keep you from the cup, you have managed to turn a mountain into a molehill. You have taken the marvelous provision for hope and turned it into a thing of fear and despair. You are like the man who took his chest of drawers and made some old orange crates. You have reversed the very thing that Jesus intended.

Why do we tamper with the works of Christ? He meant His memorial as a means to keep us ever mindful of His victory over sin that we might take perpetual advantage of it, so we can keep on climbing to the heights free from the burdens of our sinful nature. We are not worthy to gather up the crumbs under His table, but He calls us to sup with Him, and share His bread and cup. It is His table, and He does not shrink from eating with sinners. He did it frequently when He was in the flesh, for He alone had the answer to their need. The cup is an invitation to come to Him, and to quench your thirst, and to be cleansed from sin.

When John Wesley was asked who he invited to the Lord's table, he answered, "I invite to the table of the Lord every person whom I invite to the Lord, and upon the same condition: Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins." His brother Charles put it in poetry:

Come, sinners, to the Gospel feast;  
Let every soul be Jesus' guest;  
Ye need not one be left behind,  
For God hath bidden all mankind.

Sent by my Lord, on you I call;  
The invitation is to all;  
Come, all the world! Come, sinner thou!  
All things in Christ are ready now.

Let us climb this mountain memorial together, and find in Christ the forgiveness, the courage, the strength we need to live the victorious life. If you are hungry for more life, and thirsty for forgiveness and love, come now and eat this bread and drink this cup in remembrance of Him who is the Bread And Water Of Life.

## 35. A RISEN REDEEMER

## MARK 16:1-14

Back in 1851 two missionaries, one English and the other American, were walking past the temple of Siva in Tanjore, India. They noticed the people carrying out one of the brass idols. It was a hot sunny day and the idol had become heated. One of the worshippers happened to touch it, and feeling that it was very warm, concluded that it was sick with a fever. The Rajah, or king being present immediately sent for a physician. He came and told them not to be alarmed for the god was well. The king called him a fool and sent him away. He ordered that another physician be called. When he arrived and examined the idol, he told them the god was very ill with a high fever and would soon die if remedies were not immediately applied. He directed them to put the idol in a shady place, and wash him with cool liquid. When it was cooled off the physician pronounced him cured, and the Rajah gave him three thousands rupees for saving the life of the god.

It is not everyday that a man can save a god, and he was no doubt delighted with his accomplishment. We can laugh, of course, at the ignorance of men who could seriously believe in a god capable of getting sick, dying, and needing to be rescued by men from the jaws of death. Any god who can get sick and die is no god at all. This ought to be as obvious to us as any truth is. Those who make statements that God has died only reveal that the God of whom they speak is no more than a man made idol, and not the God of Biblical revelation. It is true that God, out of the great love with which He loved us, became incarnate in human flesh, and submitted to the death of the cross. He did literally go through the experience of dying, but the vital fact, the great fact of Easter, is that He went through it. He did not remain in death, but rose to live forever. Jesus said to John in Rev. 1:18, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen and have the keys of hell and death." Christ has the keys of hell and death because He experienced both, and triumphed over both. A poet has written,

Yes, He is risen who is the First and Last,  
Who was and is, who liveth and was dead.  
Beyond the reach of death He now has passed.  
Of the glorious church the glorious head.

This is more than the message of Easter, for this is the foundation of the whole of Christianity. Anyone is free to disbelieve, and even deny it, but none are free to honestly bare the name of Christian who do so. There is no Christianity if the resurrection is not true. If men have lost faith in the idols of their self-made religion, let them cry out that their god is dead, but let us not confuse their petty idols with the Living God of Revelation. Those who have a God who is dead need to be even more enlightened, and recognized that their god was never alive.

We want to consider the great story of the resurrection from the point of view of two groups of people. Both groups are believers, but Mark's account first deals with the experience of the women, and then of the men. We want to consider the male responses in another message. For now we will consider the experience of the women on this day of resurrection. The first thing we see is-

I. DEVOTION DISPLAYED. v. 1,2.

These few loyal women have endured the agony of watching their Lord die a violent death, and they watched Him being placed in a tomb hastily before the Sabbath began. How much real resting they did on that Sabbath we do not know, but our text shows that as soon as it was over these devoted disciples made a purchase. Late in the evening they bought spices for the purpose of going to the tomb in the morning, and anointing the body of this one they so loved.

They harbor no hope of the resurrection, for they would not spend money for spices to anoint His body if they had any hope that it would be alive soon. They acted in the belief that this was the end, and that His body would forever lay in the tomb, or at least until the resurrection at the last day, which all faithful Jews looked for. They are so grateful, however, for all that He was, and all that He did for them, that they must express their devotion, and the only way they could do so was to honor the body that once housed His much loved soul.

Call it an extravagant waste if you will, but to discerning eyes it is an act of devoted love that is taking place. It is in sharp contrast to the despair that characterized the 11 disciples. All of the men were thrown into a state of paralysis by their sorrow. They did not make a move until they were compelled by the testimony of the women, and even then it was with reluctance and skepticism. But here we see action in the women, and a love that has not altered because it alteration found. Jesus was no longer alive and with them, yet they display what Macaulay refers to as "The perfect disinterestedness and self-devotion of which men are incapable, but which is sometimes found in women."

They had seen the worst and were convinced that Jesus was dead for good, yet they could not wait to display their loyal devotion. Verse 2 says it was very early in the morning they came to the sepulcher. It was at the rising of the sun. They were hardly able to wait for dawn to carry out their act of love. When we consider the devotion displayed by these faithful female disciples, we can well understand why it was they were granted the honor of being the first to receive the good news of the risen Redeemer. Women bore the shame of being the first to bring the cause of death upon man, but now she bares the honor of being the first to bring the good news of victory over death to man.

Not only were they the first to hear the message, but Mark makes it clear in verse 9 that Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Christ. This is no accident, or incidental fact, but appears to be an act by which the risen Redeemer recognizes and rewards her devotion. Jesus could have appeared at anytime to any person, but he chose to appear first to Mary. Jesus said, "To whom much is forgiven the same loveth much," and this was certainly true for Mary whose devotion did not depreciate even in the face of death. Valzac spoke in truth when he said, "To feel, to love, to suffer, to devote herself, will always be the text of the life of woman." It is also true that it will always be the role of the risen Redeemer to richly reward those who are devoted to Him.

If these women were so devoted to Christ when they thought He was dead, imagine the beauty of their lives when the shock wore off, and they realized he was in reality a risen and living Lord. Mary Magdalene was the first to be able to affirm with assurance and confidence the conviction of the poet Robert Heirich who wrote,

I do believe, that die I must,  
And be return'd from out my dust;  
I do believe, that when I rise,

I shall see, with these same eyes.

She was the first to see Jesus risen and transformed; the first to know that the grave has been conquered. If such was the reward for her devotion, and such was the honor granted to the other women to be the first to hear the good news, how great will be their reward in heaven after a life of devotion to the risen Redeemer? We cannot pretend to know, but we can learn a marvelous lesson from their experience on that first Easter. We can learn that Jesus prizes devotion, and that there is no greater testimony to the reality of our love and devotion to Him, than to act in love and honor Him, even when the circumstances are darkest, and hope seems to be demolished. Their display of devotion was not anything profound. It was very simple and personal. There is no need for elaborate display, for Jesus looks on the hearts, and we should care only that He sees our hearts as He saw the hearts of those women in the morning hours of that first Easter. May the experience described by Thomas Moore be ours:

As down in the sunless retreat of the ocean,  
Sweet flowers are springing no mortal can see,  
So deep in my soul the still prayer of devotion  
Unheard by the world, rises silent to Thee.

As we move on to consider the second aspect of their experience that morning, we see their devotion magnified even more. The second point we want to consider is-

## II. DIFFICULTY DISSOLVED. vv. 3 and 4.

There is a saying that out of difficulty grows miracles. This is true, for if there is no difficulty, there is no need for a miracle. All miracles are divine solutions to human difficulties. A miracle is only a miracle to man, and not to God, for He has no unsolvable difficulties. These devoted women had a dandy of a difficulty facing them, yet they moved forward. They watched the large stone rolled in front of the tomb by strong men on Friday night, and now early Sunday morning, all alone with no muscular men to help them, they made their way to the tomb. When we add the details of the other Gospels, we see that the obstacles that they faced were even greater. Not only was the stone large, but it had been sealed, and not only that, the Jewish leaders had seen to it that a guard was standing watch lest there be any attempt to remove the body.

If ever the weaker sex faced what appeared to be an insurmountable problem, it was here as they walked along discussing how they will deal with the difficulty of the stone. When you consider the circumstances there is a natural tendency to question their good sense at this point. Common sense would tell them that they had to sit down and figure out a solution to this problem before they went marching to the tomb. They knew they could not do it, for they were wondering who could roll the stone away for them. Their devotion refused to be delayed until a solution was found, and so with the attitude in mind, we will cross that bridge when we come to it, they headed for the tomb. Lesser love would have failed to make such a plan in the first place, or would have forsaken the whole idea in the second place, and would have retreated in the face of the difficulty.

These women were like the English drummer boy who was captured and brought before Napoleon. He was told to sound the retreat and his prompt reply was, "I never learnt it!" Loyalty and love do not care to learn the march of retreat, but like these devoted disciples it marches ever

onward in spite of difficulties. And again we see that their determined devotion was richly rewarded. Like so many difficulties that are faced with no apparent solution, when they are met head on they dissolve and disappear. So here we see that when they arrived at the tomb their problem was gone. The difficulty had been dissolved, for they looked up and the stone was already rolled away.

We need to learn another valuable lesson from their experience. We need to learn to be persistently positive in the face of difficulty. We must be always actively advancing in our cause of serving Christ. Difficulties are not imaginary. They are real, as real as the stone that sealed the tomb, but the experience of these women reveals that for those who walk forward in the face of obstacles to serve Christ, there will be a solution available. The church has plenty of obstacles to overcome, but until there are devoted disciples marching forward, there will not be solutions to these difficulties.

In 1799 one of Napoleon's generals appeared before the town of Feldkirk in Austria. It was Easter day and the leaders of the town were at a loss as to what to do. The old dean of the church gave this advice, "This is Easter day. We have been counting on our strength and we know that always fails. On the day of our Lord's resurrection let us ring the bells and have our church service as usual and leave this thing in God's hands. He will show us the way out, and we can certainly not find a way out without Him.

The bells began to chime, and worshipers thronged the streets as they made their way to the house of God. The French general was frightened by the bell ringing, for he interpreted it to be a rejoicing on the part of the city because an Austrian army had arrived in the night to rescue them. He ordered his men to quickly break camp, and they marched away leaving the city safe. God specializes in special delivery, and so we need to learn to leave the impossible to Him, and move ahead in devoted service regardless of obstacles.

If these women could display such determined devotion with the conviction that Christ was dead, how much greater ought our devotion to be who have 19 centuries of evidence of the power of the risen Redeemer? They marched forward to a sealed tomb, a dead Lord, and a hard difficulty, on a dark morning. But we can shout with Fortunatus,

"Hail, Day of days! In peals of praise  
Throughout all ages owned,  
When Christ, our God, hell's empire trod,  
And high o'er heaven was throned."

We serve a living, royal, risen, reigning king. The Easter experience of these women challenges us to consider the weakness of our devotion, and to commit ourselves more completely to live for the honor and glory of our risen Redeemer.



## 36. THE REALITY OF RESURRECTION MARK 16:1-14

Ministers frequently call at a home when the man alone is there, and he will respond in some such manner as this: "I'm sorry my wife isn't home. She takes care of the religious matters in our home." I have not just read about this, but have experienced it, and have wondered how it is possible to be so misinformed about the Christian life. Men in general seem to think that spiritual matters are for women to handle. Men tend to be more skeptical, and women tend to be more sensitive to spiritual things. Eve may have gotten the problem of sin started, but men seem to have the biggest part in hindering God's solution to the sin problem. For some reason men feel that faith is feminine and not to be associated with the strong and self-sufficient image of the ideal man. Religion has the reputation of being a crutch, and no man wants a crutch, for he wants to walk on his own.

This attitude has had an effect on the lives of even those men already committed to Christ, and has made them timid. The message of Christ's manliness is missed, and even Christian males slip into the background, and let the women do the work. It is no joke, but actual fact, that many male responses to the call for missionaries is, "Here am I Lord, send my sister." Statistics reveal this to be far from fictitious. Dr. Barton was not just trying to be funny when he wrote,

In the world's broad fields of battle,  
In the bivouac of life,  
You will find the Christian soldier  
Represented by his wife.

He was serious, and was stating a well known fact. However else men are superior to women, they are statistically inferior in their commitment and devotion. Nothing could be more unprofitable, however, then to rant and rave about the problem. More profit, I am sure, can be gained by recognizing that this has always been the case. It is not new, but has been a characteristic of men from the start.

The very group of men Jesus hand picked to be the foundation on which He would build His church were of like nature. They were the first body of skeptics in the Christian church. If they had not been convinced by the personal appearance of Jesus in their presence, they would not have believed in the resurrection. If Jesus had not soundly rebuked them for their skepticism, they would have been the greatest hindrance to the advancement of the cause of Christ. The fact that Jesus did go to this length to convince them shows that in spite of the fact that men are more skeptical and harder to convince about spiritual realities, yet, they are responsible for the leadership of the church. They were the foundation, and once convinced they were dynamos of devotion. Men are harder to win, but when they are won they are of greater power, and power is what is needed to make Christianity appealing to other men. There must be a Christ-centered manliness for the church to appeal to the masculine mind. We want to consider how hard it was to even bring the Apostles to a state of belief and commitment to the risen Redeemer. In contrast to the devotion of the women, we see in the men, first of all-

While the women, who are supposedly more emotional, were up early and out actively doing something practical in the face of the great tragedy that had struck them, the men, most of whom had fled, and, as far as we know, did not even see the crucifixion, as did the women, were setting idle mourning and weeping in despair. They thought they were really going to be something, and now the whole thing has proven to be a failure, and they are left with no leader, humiliated and helpless, and with no further hope of establishing a kingdom. They are sad sheep without a shepherd. Despair had immobilized them. They were in the slough of despond. If the discovery of the empty tomb had depended upon them, the world would have long remained in darkness and ignorance.

Someone has said, "Despair is the greatest of our errors." This was certainly true on this resurrection day. All day long these men were in sorrow when the greatest event in history had taken place. Christ was alive, and they were the key servants of this living king of kings, and yet they lived in despair. These men give us a picture that is parallel with what is true in millions of lives in every age. The good news is available, and eternal life in heaven, and abundant life now is potentially theirs, yet while this good news is either unknown or unbelieved, they gain no benefit, and so are without God and without hope. The disciples had every reason to be the most happy men in the world, but they sat weeping in despair because they were ignorant. Even after they were informed of the fact of the resurrection they gained none of its benefits because they persisted in their unbelief.

Despair is an evil, for it is being ungrateful for the fact that the path of hope is still open. Despair refuses to move against the obstacles because it has already decided that the battle is lost. We saw that when the women advanced to meet the difficulty it dissolved. They cannot stand before determined devotion, but despair disables men and defeats them before they even encounter the enemy. These despairing disciples speculate on the problems from a distance, and their very attitude of despair distorts their vision, and all they can see are insurmountable obstacles. Burke said, "A speculative despair is unpardonable where it is our duty to act." If men would get out and put their faith to work, and test their devotion, belief, and hope by action, they would see difficulty dissolved. But to set in despair produces a vicious circle. Despair produces such a hopeless attitude that it actually does become a hopeless situation. Howe wrote,

The wise and active conquer difficulties  
By daring to attempt them, sloth and folly  
Shimmer and shrink at the sight of toil and hazard,  
And make the impossibility they fear.

Despair did this to the disciples. It hardened them so they would not even respond to the evidence. This brings us to the second point which is an attitude growing out of their despair.

## II. DISBELIEF DEMONSTRATED. v.11

You would think that a company of men in such despair would have welcomed, as an angel of light, anyone with a word of comfort and cheer. Anything that would ease the burden and lift the weight of darkness that had settled over their souls, you would think would be welcomed with joy. But instead we see them unresponsive even to the glorious news that Jesus was not dead but alive, and had actually been seen by Mary Magdalene. Certainly the paralysis will wear off soon, and they will shout for joy with Mary. But not so, we read on in verses 12 and 13 and discover that they

persisted in disbelief all day. In the evening when the two on the road to Emmaus returned to tell them of their experience, they still stubbornly refused to yield to the evidence and testimony of fellow believers.

Here is a paradox. The men who would soon be proclaiming the message of the crucified and living Christ, who would be persistent in their emphasis on the resurrection as the foundation of belief, are here examples of the most narrow minded unbelief. Mary and the other two disciples had seen Jesus and the empty tomb with the stone rolled away. Peter and John had seen the evidence as well, and yet the disciples are unconvinced of the reality of the resurrection.

Remember this when you are quick to condemn the unbeliever or the skeptic who refuses to yield to your array of evidence for the resurrection. Why should we expect men today to be less skeptical than the disciples who had eye witness testimonies from intimate friends, and still demonstrated a disbelieving heart? Unbelief, is the most natural response of men to the resurrection, and we should expect it. If this experience of the disciples teaches us anything, it should teach us that belief in the reality of the resurrection is not a matter of evidence, but it is a matter of the will. All the evidence in the world may not convince a man, but all that is needed sometimes is a testimony to the fact that Christ is alive and has changed your life. If a man will not be willing to believe, no amount of evidence will persuade him. One must want to experience the reality of the resurrection. You cannot compel them to believe by amassing evidence. The evidence only becomes valuable when the will has chosen to believe.

A paragraph from an editorial in Life Magazine way back in 1956 is worth repeating:

"The resurrection cannot be tamed or tethered by any utilitarian test. It is a vast watershed in history or it is nothing. It cannot be tested for truth; it is the test of lesser truths. No light can be thrown on it; its own light blinds the investigator. It does not compel belief, it resists it. But once accepted as fact it tells more about the universe, about history, and about man's state and fate than all the mountains of other facts in the human accumulation."

This being the case, we need to do less proving and more proclaiming of this truth. We need more testimony to the reality of the resurrection in our own lives and attitudes. Only as men actually encounter the living Christ in us will they have a desire to will that he live in them. G. Campbell Morgan said, "The resurrection is a fact that cannot be proved except to the faith of the heart." The evidence must be approached with faith, or it will not convince the skeptic.

The evidence did not convince those who were already followers of Christ, and so we should not expect it to convince those who are not his followers today. The only thing that could bring them to belief out of their stubborn unbelief was a personal encounter with Christ, and this is still true today for most. The disciples spent the whole day of the first Easter being bombarded by the evidence of the reality of the resurrection, and yet we see them in the evening still locked behind closed doors in the darkness of despair. Mark tells us that Jesus had to rebuke them for their unbelief. Imagine this, on the first Easter, the day of the greatest victory in history, Jesus has to give a message of rebuke, not to the world, but to his own church. Jesus had his problems with men that he never had with

women. He had to make his first message a negative one on this great day of joy.

We call Thomas the doubting Thomas, but remember he just happened to be absent from the meeting. He was no more a doubter than the rest of them. They all needed the same evidence that he demanded before they would believe. Let us then be aware that it is hard to convince men of this truth. They will need more than evidence and argument. They will need to see Christ in us before they will believe in the reality of the resurrection.

## **37. THE ULTIMATE HEALING**

### **16:9-20**

## **MARK**

Pat Boone in his book *A Miracle A Day Keeps The Devil Away* tells of some very spectacular examples of the hand of God in history. His friend Tay Garnett, who is a film director, was showing the stunt driver in a mountain chase scene what he wanted. He drove the car right up to the edge of the cliff, and then at the last second he cut the wheel to veer away from the disaster of a 700 foot drop to the rocks below. The only problem was the car didn't veer, and while the crew stared in frozen horror he plunged over the edge. He was a believer, and all he had time for was to pray, "God keep me in the circle of your love."

Four hundred feet below there was one tree growing out of the side of the cliff, and that was the only tree for hundreds of yards in any direction, and Tay's car fell right on to it. The impact demolished the car and injured Tay's back seriously, but he was alive. It took hours for a rescue team to get him on a stretcher and back to the top, and then to a hospital where a surgical team repaired his back. But a few weeks later he was back to work where he was not bashful to share his faith in a God, who for all practical purposes, brought him back from the dead.

He was a dead man flying off that cliff, but God in his providence spared him. He was not literally dead, of course, but neither was Jonah literally dead in the belly of the whale. But he was as good as dead, and his only hope was a resurrection. That is why Jesus used the experience of Jonah as a sign of His burial and resurrection. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Jesus draws a parallel, but there was a major difference. Jonah was only as good as dead, and Tay Garnett was only as good as dead, and many have been as good as dead, and yet restored to life. But Jesus was totally, absolutely, and unequivocally dead. He was not merely rescued from a near death experience. He was resurrected from a clear death bondage. It is important that we see this event for which we celebrate Easter as unique and distinct from all the other miracles and wonders of history. It is in a category by itself.

There were other resurrections of the dead, but none of them was a cure of death. Lazarus was raised after being clearly dead and decaying, but it was not a cure. It was only a remission of the disease of death, for he had to die again, as did all the others who were raised. The resurrection of

Jesus was the only resurrection that could be called a cure, for it was a permanent victory over death, and, therefore, the resurrection of Jesus was the ultimate healing.

If death is the worst thing that can happen to the body, then conquering death is the best thing that can happen to the body. Everything else Jesus did for the body was only temporary. All the diseases He healed, and the miraculous recoveries He brought about did not cure any of those diseases permanently. But when Jesus rose from the dead He performed the miracle of all miracles, the wonder of all wonders, the ultimate in healing, for He raised from that tomb on that first Easter a body that would never never die again; a body that would never suffer again; a body that would never be subject to sin or any of its consequences. In other words, Jesus by the power of the Easter miracle healed a human body permanently; not just for time, but forever. That is why Easter is the greatest Christian celebration, for it is the celebration of the only miracle that lasts forever.

Miracles just do not last. The feeding of the multitude kept them satisfied for a few hours, but they had to supply food again for their next meal. The stilling of the storm only lasted until the next wind came up, which could have been the very next day, or only hours later. The miraculous catch of fish did not set up the disciples for life. They had to fish again. On and on you could go through the miracles and see that they just do not last. You cannot count on the miracles for security. But when you come to the resurrection of Jesus all is different. Here is a miracle you can count on. Here is a foundation that will never be shaken, and never be changed. Here is the Rock of Gibraltar of the Christian faith. Here is the miracle that is forever.

History is loaded with great men and women who have discovered medicines to cure diseases, but nobody has ever found a cure for death. They can often delay it, but there is no antidote to this poison that sin brought into the world. Shakespeare said, "By medicine life may be prolonged, yet death will seize the doctor too." Easter is the celebration of the greatest physician in history, for He alone produced the antidote that heals from life's worst disease-death. There is no higher level of health than eternal life. It is health on a level where man can experience all God meant for him to experience.

I never linked Easter with healing before, because I never looked at Easter through the eyes of one looking at Jesus as the great physician, even in His resurrection. Your perspective as you approach the Scripture has a great deal to do with what you see. I want to point out just how clearly Easter is surrounded with the healing theme. Not only was the resurrection of Christ the ultimate healing, it was the center from which all other healings were to come. Look at how clearly Mark reveals-

#### THE EASTER-HEALING LINK.

First of all in verse 9 Mark reveals that the very first person Jesus appeared to in His resurrection body was Mary Magdalene, one of the great trophies of His healing power. She was a woman out of whom He had cast seven demons. She was a very sick woman, but Jesus healed her and set her free from her bondage. She was saved physically, mentally, and spiritually. She was one of the most healed people in the New Testament, and she is the first to see the ultimate in healing-the resurrected Christ.

It has been noted all through the centuries that women were the first at the tomb that first Easter

morning, but few have ever pointed out the role of healing in why this was the case. Doctor Luke in his Gospel tells us that Jesus had a strong following of women who supported Him financially. The interesting characteristic about these women was that they were women that Jesus had healed. Luke 8:1-3 says, "The twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out, Joanna the wife of Cuza, the managers of Herod's household, Susanna, and many others."

This group of women had experienced the healing miracles of Jesus in their bodies and minds. They had experiences that the 12 disciples did not have. There is no record of any of the 12 having demons cast out, or of being healed by Jesus. They saw all of His miracles, but these women had actually experienced the wonder working power of Jesus. The result is, that when Jesus was crucified the two sexes traveled two different roads in how they dealt with their grief. The males went the route of despair which paralyzed them. They were frozen into inaction. Whereas the female followers took the road of devotion. They were just as convinced as the men that Jesus was dead, and that His ministry was over, but they were still so grateful for what He had been to them that they were determined to minister even to His dead body. Let's focus on this theme:

#### THE DEVOTION DISPLAYED BY THE WOMEN.

It is not likely any of these women had a very restful Sabbath as their Lord lay in the tomb. Everyone of the Gospel writers indicates they were up at the crack of dawn, or even earlier while it was yet dark. They were on their way to the tomb by sunrise to anoint the body of Jesus. They do not come harboring any hope of the resurrection. They would not have spent money for spices if they had any hope He would be alive. They acted in the belief that His body would lay in the tomb until the resurrection of the last day. They were going to honor the body the best they knew how.

The despairing disciples probably would have considered this as a sentimental waste of resources. I must confess as one stuck with a male mentality, I do not know if I would have voted to spend more money on devotion to a dead body. Most men have this male mentality of practicality. That is why all of the extravagant gifts of honor and love that Jesus received were from women. Some unknown woman gave Him His seamless robe, Mary of Bethany anointed him with expensive perfume, and the men complained of the waste of it, and now these women are going to give His dead body expensive spices. The women are being sentimental and wasteful in their devotion, but in doing so they are the first to encounter the reality of the risen Redeemer. The men do not make a move until they are compelled to respond to the testimony of the women. Even then it is a reluctant response of skepticism.

Not a single woman was ever rebuked by the risen Christ, but in verse 14 all eleven of the Apostles are severely rebuked for their lack of faith and stubborn refusal to believe the women. It has always been hard for men to listen to women. Remember ladies, you could have been married to an Apostle and still not have a husband who would listen to you. So what we see that first Easter is that there is a reason why women were the first to be in on the Easter Gospel, and why Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Christ. These things were not just incidental or accidental. Jesus could have appeared at any time to anyone. He could have come to the despairing disciples first had He chosen to do so. But He chose to honor those who showed the greatest devotion.

Jesus prizes the devoted heart. They were not doing anything so marvelous or profound, or even

sacrificial, but they were displaying their love, and for that they were richly rewarded. In the silent stillness of that first Easter dawn Jesus was delighted, for one of the first things His risen eyes saw in the world of the living was this great display of devotion. That meant so much to Jesus, and it means so much to Him yet. If these faithful female disciples were so devoted to Jesus when they were sure He was dead, how much greater was their devotion to Him when they knew He was alive forever?

What our risen Lord most loves is to see disciples, male or female, who expressed their devotion to Him; for those who love Him will love all whom He loves, and this is the power that fulfills His purpose. The power that heals in this world is the power of love. Jesus saved these women and healed them, and they in turn love Him because He first loved them, and they express that love by giving of their resources. Their time and their treasure was devoted to Christ, and though it is not referred to, we can assume that any talents they had were also a part of their devotion. That which pleased the risen Redeemer on the first Easter is that which pleases Him every Easter-the devoted heart. Thomas Moore wrote,

As down in the sunless retreat of the ocean,  
Sweet flowers are springing no mortal can see,  
So deep in my soul the still prayer of devotion  
Unheard by the world, rises silent to Thee.

The women shine brightest in the realm of devotion, and they always have, but they would not be the public defenders of the resurrection and proclaimers of the Gospel in their culture. This was the role of the stubborn male disciples who were finally convinced by overwhelming evidence. We focus now on-

## II. THE DOCTRINES DECLARED BY THE MEN.

The men went everywhere proclaiming the good news of Jesus, and He confirmed their message by His resurrection power. He did signs such as healing miracles to convince people that He was alive and well, and active in the world. The Great Commission to go into all the world was not given until after Jesus rose from the dead, and the reason is clear. There was nothing really to tell the world until death was conquered by Christ. The world already had the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. That was an ancient doctrine, and pagans all over the world believed it. What the world did not have was the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. This is the unique doctrine that made Christianity a distinctive faith.

If you think it is easy to be of sound doctrine even with the fundamentals of the Christian faith, you are wrong. You have to work like crazy to avoid being pagan in your thinking. For example, let me tell you the story of the brother and sister and the two little birds. The sister found the bird nest with four speckled eggs in it. One day she returned to see them again, and they were all broken. She began to cry because the beautiful eggs were spoiled and broken, and she was sad. Her brother heard her and assured her they were not spoiled at all. The best part he told her has taken wings and flown away. That is how it is with death. The body is left behind as an empty shell, while the soul which is the best part has taken wings and flown away.

Now this is a touching story with a powerful analogy that sounds pretty good to all of us, and not

just to children. The only problem with it is that it is completely pagan. It teaches the immortality of the soul, which is, and has always been, pagan theology. This is not what Christian thinking is all about at all. The Christian doctrine is not the immortality of the soul. It is the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the total man, and not just the so-called best part. The resurrection of Jesus is not about the soul of Jesus. It is about the body of Jesus. Easter is the celebration of the healing, not of the soul, but of the body. It is the body that dies and is held captive by death, and it is the body that needs to be delivered from this its greatest enemy. That is what Jesus did in conquering death, and He thereby opened up the door for all men to experience with Him the ultimate healing.

Because the body is important to God, it is one of His finest works of art, and so He sent His Son into the world to save it as well as man's lost soul. And because it is important to Christ and His mission in the world. He makes it clear in His great commission here in Mark that the body is to ever be a focus of the Christian church. He did not say just go and preach and teach, and thus reach men's souls only. He said also to get the body involved and baptize them. Baptism is a symbol of the resurrection, and a reminder that Jesus intends to save the whole man, and raise the body to live forever.

Jesus goes on to say some strange things about the physical signs that are to follow those who believe. The body stands out as the key field of activity. We are not going to stop to deal with the very strange idea of the snakes and the poison. We just want to make the point now that the body of believers are to be involved, and not merely spectators in the plan of Christ to reach the world. Sick bodies are to be healed, and these signs have been a part of the fulfillment of the Great Commission all through history. Jesus did not suddenly turn into a super-spiritual Savior after His resurrection. He was concerned about the bodies of men all through His earthly ministry. It was still His concern after the resurrection, and that concern is a part of His will for His church for all time. To care about people's souls and not their bodies is pagan and anti-Christian.

It took no power to have His soul live on eternally. He committed His soul into the Father's hands just before He died. If immortality of the soul is all you care about, the story of Christ could end at the cross, for what happened to the body would be of no consequence. But the New Testament story is not over until the body of Jesus is raised to life, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. If you cut the body out of the story, you cut the heart out Christianity, and leave it on the same level as most pagan religions. There is no Christianity in the New Testament sense without the resurrection of the body.

God, in the Easter story, is saying, lets get physical. Jesus is saying to His church, lets get physical. The body matters, and not just some, it matters a lot. It matters so much that without it you do not have Christian doctrine. The old time mobsters knew the importance of the body. That is why they spent a lot of creative energy in figuring out how to get rid of it. A body, even though dead, is a blabber mouth. It tells too much. The autopsy can tell often when and where and how the man was murdered. Professionals, who are keenly aware of how talkative a dead body can be, use to toss them into cement mixers, and so humanize our highways, or use some other imaginative way to get rid of the evidence. Some made arrangements with a funeral director to slip their victim underneath the other body in the coffin and by this double decker play solve the problem of a dead body squealing on him.



Getting rid of the body has been the big challenge also for those who would murder Christianity. If you can eliminate the body of Christ, you can, for all practical purposes, eliminate the Christian Gospel. The Jews said the body was stolen. The heretics said the body was never really dead. The liberals said the body does not matter, for His spirit lives on in history. There is no escaping this fact: What you believe about the body of Jesus is the key doctrine that determines if you are a Biblical Christian or not.

The New Testament women display devotion to the body of Jesus. The New Testament men declared the doctrine of the resurrection of the body of Jesus. Anything less than this is sub-Christian. Immortality can mean as little as the idea that a man's ideas and ideals survive death. But the resurrection of the body says that man himself in all his being survives death in Christ. Jesus did not save half of man, but all of man. And He demonstrated that on the first Easter by raising up His own dead body to life. This is the ultimate healing. Easter is what Christianity is all about. It is about the salvation of the total man, and Jesus is the only physician who has the power to heal the total man.

One of the best descriptions of Easter theology is that of a 3 years old Sarah, daughter of Dr. W. M. Anderson, who told this true account in a lecture. Her grandfather was paralyzed before he died, and this was her explanation of what happened. "Pa's body was sick, and it hurt him, and as long as he lived in it, it would hurt him. Jesus loved him and didn't want him to hurt. So he let Pa move out of his body and come up there with Him. We put Pa's body in the ground and covered it with flowers. Jesus is going to come back and get it, and fix it, and Pa will put it on again, but it is never going to hurt him after Jesus fixes it." This is pure Christian theology from the mouth of a babe, and is as good a description as you can ask for of the ultimate healing. The body is fixed to never hurt again.

He appears to His own, shows His hands and His feet,  
As they wonder with fear and great joy;  
He talks, and He eats in that body of flesh,  
The body Death sought to destroy.

But it did not succeed, for what did succeed was the Easter message-the message of resurrection power that produced the ultimate healing. If you want to be well forever, and be in perfect health perpetually, you need to let the great physician be your doctor, and invite Him to make a house call, and enter your life to stay. By the simple prayer of asking Christ into your life you can begin the process that will lead you to experience the ultimate healing. Jesus is a specialist; the only specialist there is in ultimate healing.