

A Chronological Study of the Life of Christ

An SIM Ethiopia TEE Course



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by Tim Fellows

SIM



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LESSON ONE

FIRST DAY

More than two thousand years ago in what most educated people considered an unimportant part of the world, a poor peasant girl gave birth to a son. When her son grew up, he began to move throughout the countryside boldly proclaiming that "the kingdom of God" had arrived. He made bold statements claiming that he was equal to God, that he could forgive sins, and that he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. He confirmed his statements with amazing miracles. Ordinary people and even despised "sinners" loved him and gathered around him to listen to his teachings. However the rich and the powerful people, especially the religious leaders, hated him. From among the ordinary, religiously untrained people, this poor man chose 12 men to be his disciples. He told these simple disciples that he was soon to be killed, and if they followed him, they could also expect persecution. He promised them few earthly blessings, but claimed that if they followed him, God would forgive their sins, they would live for eternity, and be rewarded in heaven. He only taught for 3 ½ years. Then the anger of the religious and political leaders increased until they killed him, punishing him with the most cruel death possible, which was death by crucifixion. Afraid for their lives, his followers fled.

Q. 1. a) Explain why it would be difficult to believe a poorly educated person from a remote part of Ethiopia if he claimed to be God. b) Why would it be hard to follow him if he promised physical persecution, but rewards after death? c) What attitude would you tend to have towards his claim to be God if the person was killed by someone from another religion?

Three days after Jesus' death, these fearful disciples suddenly began to make claims that their master was alive and 40 days later taught that he was God, and enthroned in heaven in a position of authority next to God the Father. Rather than openly showing himself to crowds of people, this man only showed himself to around 500 believers. (1 Cor. 15:6) Forty days later, those appearances stopped. It was not long until these backward disciples of Jesus began to openly proclaim that the crucified Jesus was the Savior of the world. They called people to believe in Jesus, to become his followers and receive salvation. From this remote part of the Roman empire, a growing number of people began to follow Jesus Christ. Not many years later, those who followed this son of a peasant woman became known as "Christians" or the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Q. 2. a) Explain why you chose to become a Christian. b) List reasons why most Christians choose to become believers.

Most likely the ones who read this book are among those who claim to be Christians. We boldly claim to follow Jesus Christ, the peasant from Galilee who was crucified by Romans. But how many of us really understand the amazing claims that Jesus made? Often the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection has become so familiar that we are no longer amazed. And for many of us, we claim to be followers of Jesus, but make little attempt to understand and apply the truths that he taught. Some prefer to call themselves "Christians" or members of the largest religion on earth. Others like to call themselves "believers" for they focus upon the truth that it is by putting one's faith in Jesus Christ as their personal

Savior that they receive eternal life. But Jesus did not call people to join a religion called Christianity. Nor did he invite people to only believe on him. His call was "Come follow me. Be my disciple."

Q. 3. Read Mt. 4:19; 8:19-20; 10:37-39. a) What invitation did Jesus give? b) How is this different from what we often ask people to do when they want to be saved? c) What does the word disciple mean? d) Describe the difference between being a "believer" and being a "follower" of Jesus?

Jesus' command to the apostles was not to go into the world and make Christians or believers. Rather, he told them to go throughout the whole world and make disciples. (See Mt. 28:19-20) The heart of Christianity is for men and women to become disciples of Jesus. One person reported that the word "disciple" is used 269 times in the New Testament. But the word "Christian" is only used three times and "believer" two times. Clearly, the invitation of Jesus to us today is to "come follow me" in a walk of discipleship. And our response should be "We have left everything to follow you." (Mk. 10:28)

In the New Testament the word "disciple" means "a learner who accepts the teachings of Christ, not only in belief, but also in lifestyle." Being a disciple of Jesus means we not only put our trust in him as our Savior, but we commit ourselves to obey what he commands and seek to resemble him in character and actions. His purpose becomes our purpose. His will becomes our will. How he lived becomes the way we live. His character becomes our character.

Q. 4. a) Write your own definition about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. b) How well are you doing to be a disciple as described above? c) Describe what would change in our churches if we emphasized becoming a disciple of Jesus rather than believers in Jesus Christ.

The major purpose of this study guide on the Life of Jesus Christ is to learn how to become disciples of Jesus. We will examine the earthly life of Jesus in the four Gospels. Not only will we study what he did during the 33 years he was on earth, but we will examine his life and teachings to see what he is asking us to do today if we want to be his disciples. May our eyes be opened to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus once told people *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* (See Lk. 14:25-27) This difficult challenge to follow Jesus as disciples also applies to us today. Are we willing to follow Jesus no matter what the cost?

Take time to examine your life. If Jesus stood before you and called you to be his disciple using the above words, would you accept his call? How are you revealing that in your life?

UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION IN PALESTINE WHEN JESUS WAS BORN

For many of us, the story of the life of Jesus is very familiar. But we tend to imagine that Jesus was living in a similar situation to Addis Ababa or another major city in Ethiopia. But Jesus was a Jew, born over 2000 years ago. In order to fully grasp Jesus' teaching, we must understand Jesus within the context of life in Palestine during the first century. So another major goal of this study guide on the Jesus' life is to help us understand how people lived during the times of Jesus so that we can understand him and his teachings better. As followers of Jesus, we must first seek to understand Jesus within his world. Then we are better able to explain to people today how the message of Jesus applies to our situation which is very different.

For the next two weeks we will look at various facts which will help us understand Jesus' political, religious, and cultural situation when he lived on the earth.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF ISRAEL

Q. 5. a) Explain how geography has played an important part in the history of Ethiopia. b) Look at a map of Ethiopia. How long and how wide is it? c) What is the total population of Ethiopia? List the major tribes of Ethiopia and approximately how many people make up each tribe. d) Study the map in Appendix A of the land of Israel at the back of the book.

When we look at history, there are usually centers of civilization which impact many countries and millions of people. For example, great empires have grown up in Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greek, Rome, and China. In more modern times, there have been France, England, Italy, Russia, Germany, and the US. The world measures greatness by how much power or influence these nations have.

But during the Old and New Testament times, in the eyes of God, the most important country was Israel. From a human perspective, when compared to the other empires of world history, Israel has rarely been important. Its importance to God does not come from the geographical size of the nation, its impressive civilization, its ability to control other nations, its wealth, the number of people living there, or anything else the world uses to define greatness. It is only great because it is the land of Promise for God's covenant people of Israel. And it is in what the Romans thought was a backward, unimportant part of the world that the Son of God came to die for the sins of the world. Clearly what is important in the eyes of the world is not important to God.

During the days of Jesus, Palestine was under the control of the mighty Roman Empire. The Roman Empire spread across vast lands from Spain in the west, to Germany in the north, to India in the east, and to Egypt and North Africa in the south. (See map in Appendix B of the Roman Empire at the back of the book.) The land of Canaan was only a very small part of the empire. The Romans did not consider it to be very important other than it was an important trade route which joined Asia and Africa.

If we want to have a clear picture of the situation when Jesus lived, we must understand a little about the geography of Canaan. During the New Testament times:

1. Israel was very **small**. From north to south it was only about 245 kilometers in length. That is about the distance from Addis Ababa to Sheshemane. From east to west, at the widest point between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, it was only about 85 kilometers. That is less than the distance between Addis Ababa and Wolisso.

2. Israel did not have a large population of **people**. One estimate is that during the days of Jesus there were between 500,000 to 600,000 people living in Palestine. This is less than 1/5th the number of people living in Addis Ababa. The largest city, Jerusalem, probably had about 60,000 people living in it. So it was about the size of Debre Zeit or one of the mid-sized towns in Ethiopia. Jerusalem was only a center of commerce for people living in southern Palestine. It was not a city which impacted a large number of people like Addis Ababa does for Ethiopia today.

3. Israel has a very **diverse** geography. On the west, Israel's boundary was the Mediterranean Sea. Both Gentiles and Jews along this coast. The coastal people were not as zealous in keeping the Old

Testament laws as the Jews were in central Judea. Rather, they tended to follow the Greek culture and people lived in Greek-styled cities. In one of these cities called Caesarea, the Romans had their governmental base in Caesarea, an important port city in Samaria. The western part of Palestine gets more rain and is therefore more fertile than the rest of Palestine, much like southern Ethiopia.

The central part of Palestine consists of very high and rugged mountains making travel difficult. For instance, it was very hard to travel from Jerusalem in the south to Galilee in the north because of high mountains and deep valleys. Around Jerusalem the land was rugged and rocky, similar to Mekele in northern Ethiopia. To the east the land quickly drops down to the Jordon River which is below sea level. The Dead Sea in the south is one of the lowest places on earth. Southern Palestine is primarily desert, useful only for raising sheep, goats and camels, similar to the Afar territory.

JUDEA: Just like the mountains of Ethiopia protected it from Europeans and others who attacked and so remained a "Christian island," the rough terrain of Judea helped them resist armies much larger than themselves. It helped David hide from Saul, and it helped Jewish armies resist Gentile armies like the Romans. It also helped small groups of rebels and bandits hide. During the times of Jesus, there were many groups of bandits both in Judea and Galilee. Jesus used this situation to illustrate what it means to be good to others. (Lk. 10:25-37)

GALILEE: Because Galilee was remote from Jerusalem and did not have a major town, Galilee never became a major political center like Jerusalem. In 733 BC the Assyrians took most of Galilee away from Israel. From then on for most of its history, although under the control of Gentile nations, it remained separated from all regions around them. Some scholars think that unlike Samaria which was very rich and was the center of political power there were few rich people and government workers in Galilee. Rather Galilee was mainly poor farmers and so some scholars believe few Galileans were sent into exile. Its remoteness kept it from having much relationship with Jews in Jerusalem. As a result, Galileans tended to be independent and were concerned with their own affairs. But when attacked, they fought back. Other scholars, however, believe Galilee was predominately Gentile until shortly before the time of Christ when many Jews moved up into Galilee from Judea.

Jesus called this remote area of the world home. He grew up in Galilee and most of his earthly ministry was there. Most of the apostles Jesus chose came from Galilee. They were simple farmers and fishermen. What an unlikely place for the Son of God to come and work! It is as if God chose to use Southern Omo as the place where he would start a mighty movement to change all of Ethiopia and the whole world. It is not what we would expect. Wouldn't it have been better for Jesus to be in Judea, in the heartland of Jewish life? Or wouldn't it have been better for Jesus to be part of one of the ruling families? But God's ways are not our ways. (Is 55:8-9) In 1 Cor. 1:18-31 we are told that God prefers to use people that the world views as unimportant to do his work. And so God chose this remote part of the world and simple peasants to greatly change the world in one generation.

Q. 6. a) What can we learn about the character of God from His plan of Jesus living in Galilee? b) What warnings should this give us against thinking that God wants primarily to use those who are rich, or highly educated rather than the common people?

SAMARIA: The land between Judea and Galilee was called Samaria. It was less mountainous and more convenient for farming so there were more people living there than in Judea. However, because

Assyria imported many Gentiles into this area after 722 BC when Israel was captured, during the days of Jesus, the people were a mixture race of Gentiles and Israelite. Starting from the time of Zerubbabel, there developed strong hatred between the Jews and Samaritans. When the Jews refused to allow the Samaritans to join them in building the Temple (Ezra 4:1-5), the Samaritans built their own Temple on Mt. Gerizim and developed their own type of worship. Jews hated the Samaritans so strongly that they would rather walk many extra kilometers rather than go through their territory to travel between Judea and Galilee. Jesus, however, refused to allow prejudice to determine what he did. So not only did he travel through Samaria on several occasions, he most clear claims to be the Messiah was to a Samaritan woman and those in her town. (Jn. 4)

4. Israel was primarily an **agricultural** society. Palestine had few natural minerals or industries. Except for a few people who worked as potters, blacksmiths and carpenters (like Joseph, Mary's husband), the majority of people living in Palestine were farmers or herdsman. Almost all of the people lived in small towns and then farmed the land around the farms. The farmers plowed with oxen, harvested their crops with sickles, thrashed with oxen, and carried goods by donkey much like we see in rural Ethiopia. Rather than live in individual houses scattered throughout the land, most people lived in small villages and farmed the land around that village. It is estimated that there were about 200 small villages in Galilee alone. (Note: Estimates on population vary greatly from scholar to scholar. One scholar insists that in most of the villages in Galilee there would have been from 300 to 700 people living. A large village, like Capernaum, had about 700 people. But a smaller village, like Nazareth, had about 300 people living there. Other scholars estimate that there would have been between 1600 to 2000 people living in Nazareth and more in Capernaum.) As in every small village, people would have known Joseph, Mary, and Jesus very well. Having grown up with Jesus, they had a difficult time believing that he was the Messiah. (Lk. 4:14-30) In Galilee, those living along the Sea of Galilee often earned their living by fishing. And those people south of Jerusalem, like Bethlehem, usually raised sheep and other animals.

5. Israel had several important **trade routes** passing through it. Israel was important to Gentile nations primarily because of these trade routes connecting important parts of the world. So merchants traveling from the African continent (Egypt) to the Middle East (Syria) and the East all had to pass through Israel. One of the trade routes ran along the coast (through towns like Caesarea), but one passed through Jerusalem and then through Galilee. Although these trade routes brought revenue for the leaders in Jerusalem, it also brought many extra hardships to the Jews. The traders brought in new cultures and new religious teachings which tempted the Jews to leave their pure faith of following God as outlined in the Old Testament. And also frequently Gentile armies used the trade routes to march through the land. So any time there was a war between the civilizations of the north and Egypt, the armies would travel through Israel. Most ancient armies would force the farmers to give food to feed the armies, so many farmers would face starvation once the armies had moved through. When Jesus was just a boy in 6 AD, he would have watched the Roman armies move throughout the land harshly putting down any resistance to their rule. He would have seen people from surrounding villages being crucified by the Romans for resisting the rule of King Herod's descendants.

6. Palestine was **surrounded by Gentiles** who often interfered with the life and culture of the Jews. The major center of Roman administration for the Middle East was in Syrian Antioch which was north of Galilee. To the east there were the Arab tribes and to the south the Idumeans (descendants of Edom). Between Judea and Galilee were the Samaritans who were the mixed descendants of Israelites from the northern kingdom of Israel and Gentiles brought in during the Assyrian empire. Around Galilee there were

Gentiles living to the west and north. The town of Capernaum which became Jesus' major headquarters, was close to the border where predominately Gentiles lived. Galilee was even called "Galilee of the Gentiles." (Mt. 4:13-16) This means that Jesus would have grown up seeing Gentiles and observing their cultural push upon the Jews.

Not only did the Gentiles often seek political control over the Jews, but they wanted the Jews to accept their culture. Like the West (especially the US) has become the dominant cultural influence throughout the world today, the Greek culture, called Hellenism, was the dominant culture during the days of Jesus. The further the Jews lived away from Judea and Jerusalem, the more they tended to be influenced by Greek culture. In Galilee there were two Greek styled cities. One was the capital of Galilee and called Sepphoris, just a few kilometers to the north of Nazareth. The other was Tiberias, at the southern border of the Sea of Galilee. It is interesting that Jesus did not minister in these political and Greek cultural centers. Rather, he ministered among the common people in their small towns.

7. Like today, during the days of Jesus, **the majority of the Jews lived outside of Palestine**. It is estimated that there were 8 million Jews living in the Roman Empire. However, no matter where they lived, the Jews always thought of Jerusalem and Judea as their true homeland. All Jews living throughout the Roman Empire had to pay an annual temple tax to support the Temple worship in Jerusalem. Those Jews who lived in the Promised Land were found in three major regions. The majority of the Jews were found in Judea and in Jerusalem the capital city. The other area where Jews lived was Perea to the east of the Jordan River. Finally there was Galilee where Jesus grew up and where he had most of his ministry. (Find these three areas on the map in Appendix A at the back of the book.)

8. During the times of Jesus, the Promised Land was divided into **five political regions**. After Herod the Great died in 4 BC, shortly after the birth of Jesus, his kingdom was divided up among his children. The oldest living son who controlled **Judea** and **Samaria**, however, was such a poor leader that the Jews complained to Rome. The Romans took his rule away and in 6 AD, put Judea and Samaria under direct Roman rule. The Romans used Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea as their center of administration. They allowed the high priests and the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem to handle most of the daily administrative matters for Judea.

The second political region was **Galilee** and **Perea**. These territories were under the administration of Herod Antipas. Perea was to the east of Judea on the other side of the Jordan River and was where John the Baptist worked and baptized and was later killed. (See Mt. 14:1-12) Jesus' ministry was primarily in Galilee, three or four day's journey by foot to the north of Jerusalem.

The third political territory was **Phoenicia** a Gentile area to the northwest of Galilee which was administered by the Romans. The fourth political region was northeast of Galilee, and consisted of different regions called **Gaulanitis**, **Batanaea**, and **Trachonitis**. This territory in which primarily Gentiles lived was administered by Philip, one of Herod's sons. Jesus sometimes crossed into this territory. It was at Caesarea Philippi, a major city in Philip's territory, that Peter acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ. (Mt. 16:13-20) The fifth territory was called **Decapolis** which means "ten cities." It was a predominately Gentile territory. It was in this territory that Jesus cast out demons called "Legion" from a man. (Lk. 8:26-39)

Q. 7. Read the following verses: Lk. 2:4; Lk. 3:1; Mk. 7:24; Mt. 16:13; Lk. 8:26. Examine the map in Appendix A at the back of the book and list the different regions that are mentioned in the Gospels.

SECOND DAY

POLITICAL EVENTS IMPACTING PALESTINE DURING JESUS CHRIST'S TIME

Q. 8. a) List some historical events (both good and bad) in Ethiopia which continue to impact Ethiopia today. b) Read 2 Chron. 36:11-23. What happened to the nation of Judah? Why did it happen? How do you think this event would have impacted the Jews? c) Read Ezra 1. What historical event is described? Why is this event important to the Jews? d) Read Daniel 2:36-45 & 7:1-14. List the different empires which God said would rule over the Jews.

All nations can point to major historical events which continue to impact them hundreds of years after the event. For instance, although they took place long ago, the battle of Adawa or Menelik's kingdom expansion still impact Ethiopians today. The same was true for the Jews during Jesus' time. The captivity of Judea and the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians impacted the Jews living 600 hundred years later during the time of Jesus.

For the next two days we will examine the time of history between when the Old Testament was completed and until the time of Jesus. Our focus will not be on understanding the details of the historical events but try to understand how these events changed what the Jews believed during the time Jesus, the Messiah, the King of the Jews lived on earth.

1. The Babylonian Captivity (606 BC to 539 BC) (The head of gold and the lion in Daniel's visions.)

For over 800 years (1400 BC-600 BC) the Jews had been living in the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They began to think that no matter how they lived or whether or not they obeyed the agreement they made with God on Mt. Sinai, God would always protect them. But after years of warnings by prophets, in 586 BC, God sent his people into captivity to Babylon. The great Temple where God had been worshiped for over 400 years was completely destroyed and all of the important people in the land were led off to captivity. Life as the Jews had known it for centuries was now over and would never be the same again. The "time of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) had started, and from then until today, the Jews have lived under the domination of Gentiles.

The captivity to Babylon brought a major crisis to the Jews in three ways:

a. It was the start of Jews being scattered throughout the world. The land which God had promised to Abraham was taken away from them. From 586 BC until today, more Jews live outside of Palestine than would live in Palestine. The Jews could no longer live isolated from the Gentile nations around them but had to relate to the Gentiles who were culturally and religiously very different from them. Would the Jews disappear as a people by intermarrying with the Gentiles like many other nations had? Would they lose their unique identity of being the covenant people of God with their special way of living as they followed other religions? This happened to many other nations, would it happen to the Jews? While in captivity, God protected his people, and there was always a remnant who remained true to God. In the nations where they were scattered, the Jews formed small communities where they tenaciously held on to their beliefs and much of their culture. But when given the opportunity to return to their homeland 70 years later, only

a small percentage of the Jews returned. Throughout history the Jews remain scattered and can be found in almost every nation on earth.

b. Politically, the Babylonian captivity ended their independence as a Jewish nation. No longer were they able to manage their own affairs under the leadership of a Davidic king. The Gentiles who had a very different culture, began to control the Jews. Even when they were allowed to return to the Promised Land, the Jews were never able to re-establish leadership under a king from David's line.

c. The biggest crisis the Jews faced was religious. Jerusalem and the Temple had been the center of worship of God since the time of King David. How could they worship God in a strange land where there was no Temple and therefore no sacrifices? (See Ps. 137) Was God only found in Palestine or was he the God of all nations? Was their defeat because the gods of other nations were more powerful than the God of Abraham? And how could they apply all of the commands of the Old Testament since many referred to how to worship God in their own Temple? Probably starting from this period, Jews in captivity began to hold assemblies called "synagogues" for community meetings and worship.

Q. 9. a) Explain how like the Jews, we begin to think that God will never punish us as a denomination even though we are not faithful to him or his Word. b) If your church was suddenly closed, what things would change in your worship and understanding of God?

Because of the dramatic changes the Jews faced under Babylonian captivity, they began to change. This process of change took place over a long period of time. As the Jews began to reflect on their captivity, certain teachings from the Old Testament became very important to them.

a. There is only one true God: Although God had told the Jews to not have any gods other than him (Ex. 20:3), the Jews struggled with trying to worship both the God of Abraham and the gods of the nations around them. But after they were taken into captivity, the Jews became strongly monotheistic. Not only did they believe that God was the greatest of all gods, but they began to believe that he was the only God. Even though Gentile nations tried to get the Jews to worship other gods, the majority firmly resisted.

b. How the Jews lived their lives became more important than worship practices. With no Temple and no sacrifices, the Jews were forced to rethink what God-honoring worship was like. Before they were taken into captivity, many Jews thought that as long as they brought God the sacrifices, it did not really matter how they lived. (Is. 1:11-17) They thought that God was more interested in worship than correct living. But captivity the Jews started to focus upon rituals of worship and the keeping of many regulations which they thought was the best way to honor God. By Jesus' days, the Jewish focus upon laws led them to see their relationship with God consisted of keeping thousands of man-made laws as the way to please God.

c. Living in a certain way (e.g. not walking on the Sabbath more than one kilometer) became more important than having belief (doctrines) that were accurate Biblically. During these years the Jews began to focus upon getting all Jews to live in what they thought was a correct way. So they strongly emphasized not eating the wrong type of meat forbidden in the Old Testament, or upon not allowing themselves to be ceremonially unclean by eating wrong food. Salvation became more defined not as a gift of God, but as something earned by strict obedience to laws. Jews were able to live together peacefully even though they believed greatly different truths (e.g. some believed only the first books of Moses were inspired by God and others believed all 39 books of the Old Testament were inspired, some believed in a resurrection from

the dead and others didn't) as long as they followed a certain set of rules. Over the next several hundred years, these rules kept increasing. Jesus strongly reprimanded the religious teachers of his day for making up rules and yet not keeping God's true desires in the law. (See Mt. 23:23-24)

d. The Jews began to think that they were special and that is why God chose them. They forgot that they were a special people because of God's gracious choice, not because they were any better than others. (Deut. 7:6-11) They became proud of their Jewishness, looking down on all who were not Jews. And they began to live in more distinct ways to reveal their being Jews. Some Jews thought that non-Jews had no hope of salvation and were only useful to keep the fires of hell burning. One reason the Jews got so angry at Jesus was because he freely related to the non-Jews and taught that they too could become God's children. Stephen and Paul also felt the Jewish leaders' anger when they taught that God desires to bring salvation to the Gentiles.

e. The Jews chose certain things to demonstrate their differentness. For instance, they began to emphasize circumcision, a practice despised by many Gentiles. This is one reason the early church had such a strong debate about the need for Gentile believers to be circumcised. (Acts 15) And the Jewish leaders began to make up many regulations about what types of food were to be eaten and not eaten. Only things killed in a special Jewish way were allowed to be eaten. And any contact with those not ritually clean was to be avoided. Therefore many Jews refused to get near a Gentile, afraid that they would be made ceremonially unclean.

Q. 10. a) Describe how it is easy for Christians also to begin to focus more upon obeying certain man-made rules more than having a close personal relationship with God. b) Describe ways that Christians can begin to think that we are somehow more special in God's eyes than the people of other religions. c) List things that Christians do to keep ourselves distant from non-Christians in our communities. Explain how this limits our ability to show love to non-Christians and share the Gospel with them.

2. The Persian Period (539-331 BC) (The chest of silver, the bear, and the goat in Daniel's visions.)

Q. 11. Read Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10 & Is. 44:28; 45:1 & 13. a) For how long did Jeremiah foretell that the Jews would be sent into captivity? b) Who did Isaiah say would bring deliverance to the Jews?

When the Persians defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC, they administratively took over the nations, including Palestine, that Babylon had previously controlled. However, they changed the policy of how conquered nations should be handled. The Persians allowed people who had been taken into captivity by the Babylonians to return to their historical lands and follow their traditional religions if they desired. They believed this action would cause better relationships with conquered people. As a result, the Jews were allowed to return to Judea. However, only a small percentage of the Jews wanted to return. Within a period of about 100 years, under Zerubbabel (538 BC), then Ezra (458 BC), and finally Nehemiah (444 BC), three groups of Jews returned to Judea. After some struggles with the local people, the Jews built a small Temple and started worshipping God according to the instructions in the Law of Moses.

Initially the Jews were like resettled people living around the city of Jerusalem. They were poor, under the administration of Samaria. When Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of the city, Jerusalem once again began to gain importance in world history and became an important commercial city once again. Throughout this period, although the Persians maintained political control over Judea, the Jews were able to oversee most

of their own affairs and live according to their ancient traditions. To the Persians, the Jews were a relatively small, insignificant province, administered usually by politicians in Samaria.

During this time, the Jews continued to change to meet the changing dynamics of living in Palestine, but under the control of the Persians. Several developments took place which would influence the Jews living during the times of Jesus:

a. The line between religion and politics began to disappear. In the Old Testament, the kings were responsible for the political matters and the priests were responsible for religious matters. The kings were not allowed to interfere in religious affairs and the priests did not get involved in politics. But after the return from Persia, there were no "kings" from the line of David to provide political leadership. Instead, the priests became the major leaders of the Jewish community. They began to try to get all of the Jews to live according to the Levitical understanding of holiness.

b. The focus of the Jews upon the Temple, keeping of laws, and other practices to keep Jews distinct from the Gentiles increased. Slowly over time, traditions began to develop as famous religious teachers called "rabbis" began to express their opinions as to how Jews should live in specific situations. They added man-made laws to the 613 laws found in the Old Testament to help people know how to act in various situations they faced in life. These leaders wanted to help the Jews keep from breaking the original laws of the Old Testament. By the time of Jesus, these traditions were seen as important, if not more important, than the laws of the Old Testament. Jesus angered the religious leaders primarily because he did not obey their traditions, not because he disobeyed God's Word. Jesus felt free to disobey their traditions such as not healing on the Sabbath (which they considered work) or their specific instructions on how to wash their hands to remain ceremonially pure before they ate. (Mt. 15:1-11) When he challenged the religious leaders to show how he had disobeyed God's written Word, they were not able to. (Jn. 8:46)

Q. 12. a) Explain why it is important to live differently from the world so that we are not corrupted by the thinking of the world. (See 1 Jn. 2:15-17, Rom. 12:1-2) b) Describe how leaders' zeal to keep people from sinning will often cause them to make up rules which they expect church members to obey. How is this beneficial? Explain how this can be dangerous. c) Read Ezra 7:6,10. 1) How is Ezra described? 2) Why are these things important for the church today?

c. Professional religious teachers began to develop: Because fewer people could read the Hebrew Scriptures, the Jews needed religious experts who could read and translate it into Aramaic for them. The Jews also needed experts who knew God's Word well and who could explain to them how to apply the Old Testament laws to their situation when there was no Temple worship or animal sacrifice. The Jews believe that Ezra was the first model "scribe" and after that people like him began to focus on the study and interpretation of the Mosaic Law. These professional religious teachers were called "scribes" or rabbis in the New Testament times. They often clashed with Jesus who refused to accept some of their interpretations of the laws of the Old Testament.

Later these scribes began to hold greater positions of power and influence and were considered as important as the rich ruling families. Starting from this time, tension developed between these scribes who knew God's Word and sought to get people to live in obedience to the Old Testament commands and their regulations and the rich ruling families (elders) who controlled politics. The ruling families usually were more concerned with wealth and political power and were willing to accept Gentile culture if it

brought more wealth and political power to them. In the time of Jesus, the Sadducees were a political party of rich rulers who were willing to work with the Romans so that they could maintain political control. The scribes, however, wanted to keep the Jews pure from the influence of the Gentiles, emphasizing obedience to the commands of Scripture and the traditions of the scribes. In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were the party seeking to get people to live in strict obedience to these Old Testament traditions.

d. Leadership of the Jews was shared by three types of people. The heads of the rich families (often called "**the elders**") wanted to control the common people and political situations for their benefits. There were the "**priests**" who had inherited the religious leadership of the Temple from Aaron. And there were the "**scribes**" or the scholars who came from different tribes who used their positions as religious teachers to try to influence the elders and priests to live according to the Bible standards. These three types of leaders became bitter enemies and most of this period of history of the Jews, including the time of Jesus Christ, there was a struggle for power and influence between each of these types of leaders. It was very easy for these leaders to be so interested in their own positions of power and authority that they were no longer concerned about God, his kingdom, and his people.

Q. 13. a) Explain how it is also easy for church leaders today to become so concerned about maintaining their positions of authority that they fight against each other rather than work in harmony for the benefit of God and his people. b) Read Ezra 4:1-4, Neh. 2:10, 19-20; 4:1-3, 7-8; 6:1-14; Jn. 4:9. Describe the relationship between the Jews and Samaritans.

e. There developed great animosity between the full Jews living in Judea and the half-Jews living in Samaria. You will remember that after the time of Solomon, in 930 BC, the nation of Israel was divided into two nations, with the southern nation being called Judah and the northern nation being called Israel. The northern nation rejected worship in the Temple of Jerusalem and moved their political and worship center to Samaria instead. In 722 BC, the northern kingdom of Jews, called Israel, was taken into captivity to Assyria. The Assyrians left the poorer Jews in Israel, but took all of the leaders and rich families into captivity. They brought Gentiles from other parts of their kingdom and resettled them in Israel. The Samaritans of Jesus' time were the descendants of these poor Israelites and the Gentiles who were brought to Israel by the Assyrians.

When the Jews returned to Judea in 539 BC, certain events happened which caused a major division between the Jews and the Samaritans. First, the Jews refused to let the Samaritans worship God with them since they were not seen as true Jews. When the Jews started to rebuild their temple, the half-Jews wanted to help them rebuild the temple so that they could all worship together. (Ezra 4:1-4) But the Jews were afraid that worshipping with half-Jews would compromise their faith and bring God's judgment upon them. So they refused the Samaritans' offer. Angered, the Samaritans, who were the political leaders of Palestine, got the Persian leaders to stop the building of the Temple for 16 years. Second, when Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, the center of political power for Palestine moved to Jerusalem. So Samaria lost their position of being the political center. Third, Ezra and Nehemiah insisted that only pure Jewish priests and Levites were allowed to minister in the Temple. When some priests intermarried with Samaritans, they were forced to get rid of their Samaritan wives and children.

Angered at being excluded from worship this way and treated as less important than Jews, and not wanting their people to become full Jews through circumcision and worship in Jerusalem, the Samaritans

decided to build their own Temple with their own priests. Around 400 BC, the Samaritans chose Shechem as their religious center and built their own Temple on Mt. Gerizim and started their own worship. Their priests were not from the line of Levi as commanded in the Old Testament. There was probably some influence in their worship from the idol worship of their forefathers. And they also made their own copy of the books of Moses, changing things which did not agree with their worship.

This greatly angered the Jews. Around 150 years before the birth of Jesus, Jewish leaders conquered Samaria, destroyed the capital city of Samaria, and also totally destroyed the Temple in Shechem. Thousands of Samaritans were killed and others were forced to be circumcised and become Jews. Later, in revenge the Samaritans dug up bones from a graveyard and scattered the bones in the Temple in Jerusalem. Because dead bodies made something "unclean to a Jew" this meant that the Temple in Jerusalem became unclean and had to go through a ritual cleansing before it could be used again. The Samaritans would often do all they could to hinder Jews traveling from Galilee through the territory of Samaria to Jerusalem for worship at the Jewish Temple.

This hatred between Jews and Gentiles continued through the days of Jesus. No wonder the disciples and the Jews were surprised and angered that Jesus would praise a Samaritan leper who returned to thank him for being healed. (Lk. 17:11-19) And Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of his story and the honored Jewish religious leaders the bad examples in his story illustrating what it means to show love to ones' neighbor. (Lk. 10:30-37) The disciples were especially amazed when the Jesus would talk with a Samaritan woman who lived close to the Samaritan Temple in Sychar. (Jn. 4) The hatred of the disciples for the Samaritans is revealed when they wanted to use their new power as followers of Jesus to punish the Samaritans. (Lk. 9:51-55)

f. The common Jew's language changed from Hebrew to Aramaic, which was the language spoken in Babylon. By the time of Jesus, few Jews understood Hebrew but spoke Aramaic in their homes. Jesus' mother tongue would have been Aramaic. Later, because of the influence of Greek culture, Greek would also become the language understood by most Jews.

g. The dispersion of the Jews: For most of the time of the Babylonian Empire, the Jews lived only in Babylon. But during the Persian Empire period, the Jews scattered throughout the major cities of the Persian Empire. This scattering of the Jews would increase over time as the Jews moved throughout the Greek empire and then the Roman Empire. By the time of Jesus and the apostles, Jews were found in every major city in the Roman Empire. Everywhere Paul took the Gospel in the Roman Empire, he would start by witnessing to the Jews before he shared the Good News with the Gentiles. (e.g. Acts 13:44-48)

Q. 14. Read Mt. 4:23, Act 9:20; 13:5. a) Where did Jesus often teach? b) Where did the apostles often worship?

h. The Jews started worshipping in synagogues because there was no Temple where most of them lived. It is not clear when and how synagogues, which became the Jewish place of worship, started. Many scholars assume that this gathering of Jews started during the Babylon captivity. By 225 BC, there were synagogues in Egypt, shortly afterwards in Syria and later in Jerusalem. Eventually by the time of Jesus there were synagogues in every major city throughout the Roman empire. When Judea captured Galilee over 100 years before the birth of Jesus and sought to turn the people into those who followed the Old Testament, they built synagogues in many cities. Scribes and Pharisees from Judea traveled to Galilee and

taught in these synagogues. Probably the scribes and Pharisees oversaw worship in these synagogues so that the Galilean Jews would follow the traditions established by the Jews in Jerusalem. Jesus grew up worshipping in these synagogues and later he often taught in the synagogues. But it was the scribes and Pharisees in these synagogues who most strongly resisted his ministry.

The word "synagogue" means "assembly." So any formal gathering of Jews for business and worship was called a "synagogue." Gradually, in places where many Jews lived, buildings were built for them to gather in. The synagogues had several functions:

1) For public ceremonies: They were used as a place for celebrating weddings, funerals, festival days, etc.

2) For community business matters: Formal decisions by the Jewish elders were held in the synagogue. It even functioned as a court and Jews would come to have the elders resolve their matters and pronounce judgment.

3) For religious worship: During the time of captivity, and for the Jews living outside of Judea, there was no Temple to worship in. So the Jews had to adjust how they worshipped God. There were no longer animal sacrifices in a centralized location. Instead, the Jews met every Sabbath (Saturday) in their synagogue.

The synagogue was often a simple building with a large room. Later a separate balcony was built where the women would worship separate from the men. In the front of the synagogue was what was called the "holy place" where a symbolic "ark" or a box where the scrolls, were kept. These sacred Scriptures of the Books of Moses and the rest of the Old Testament books became the focal point of their worship. Two elders were chosen to oversee the synagogue. One was called "the ruler of the synagogue" (Mk. 5:22) and the other "the attendant." (Lk. 4:20)

Jewish worship was held on Saturday. (Note: It was only after the resurrection of Jesus that Christians began to worship on Sunday.) There were benches for people to sit on and the important men (elders) would sit in the front facing the people. There was a very carefully prescribed order of worship.

a) After the people had gathered, the Jews would say the "Shema" together, a statement of their beliefs based upon Deut. 6:4-9 and Num. 15:37-41.

b) The leader would then stand in front of the "ark" (a box containing the Scriptures) and proclaim 18 benedictions. After each benediction the people would say "Amen." (Later the Jews would add a "curse" upon Christian Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah.)

c) The attendant would bring out the scroll of the law of Moses. Three to seven people would be chosen to read from the scroll in Hebrew and interpret what was read into Aramaic so that people could understand. The translator was trained so that he did not make a mistake in translating God's Word. The Jews developed a system where they would read through the Law of Moses every three years. (At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was given the opportunity to read from the book of Isaiah. Some scholars think that he did not choose what to read, but in the providence of God, he was asked to read about the Servant of God, a prophecy in Isaiah about Jesus' ministry. Imagine their amazement when instead of

preaching a sermon, Jesus told everyone in Nazareth that he was the fulfillment of the prophecy. Lk. 4:14-21)

d) A person (often the one who read from the scroll) was asked to preach. There was a special seat in the front called "the seat of Moses" (Mt. 23:2) where the preacher would sit down and preach a short sermon.

e) Then a final benediction was pronounced and people went home.

At various times during the service the Jews would also sing songs from the book of Psalms.

Q. 15. Explain the benefits of having God's Word systematically read to people on Sunday. Why is this especially important when people are illiterate or do not take time to read God's Word for themselves?

As we read the Gospels and Acts, we see that these synagogues were important places not only for the Jews, but also for the early Christians. Jesus often taught and healed in the synagogue. (Mk. 3:1-6) Paul would always start his evangelism work in the synagogue. (Acts 13:14-15) Only after the synagogue rejected his message would Paul move on to open ministry to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:44-48) Scholars speculate that the worship and leadership structure of the early church was patterned after the Jewish synagogue.

4) For religious teaching. In places where there were synagogue buildings, all Jewish boys were expected to be taught how to follow their Jewish faith. This teaching continued until the boys were 13 years old. At that time there was a ceremony and the boy became a man who was now responsible for his own actions and beliefs. Few Jewish girls were formally taught in the synagogue but received their instruction from their parents in the home.

i. The Jews developed the "Great Synagogue." The Great Synagogue, or the Great Sanhedrin as it is called, was a political-religious group of leaders who guided Jewish affairs in Judea and even the Jews living among the Gentile nations. Some people think that Ezra started this group of leaders. It was this gathering of leaders who one day judged Jesus and decided that he should die. (We will study more about the Sanhedrin later when we study the political structure during the times of Jesus.)

THIRD DAY

The years from 400 BC to 70 AD are called the "Intertestamental Times" by scholars. Great changes took place in the culture of the Jews during these years. If we are to understand what people in Palestine believed when Jesus lived and taught, we must understand the events during those 500 years and how they would have changed the way Jews thought.

3. The Greek Period: (332-164 BC) (The thighs of bronze, the leopard, and the ram in Daniel's visions.)

Q. 16. Read Daniel 11. Describe the struggle that would take place between the "kings of the south" and the "kings of the north." Who would first be strongest and who would later become the strongest?

Most of the Old Testament is the story of events in the Middle East. But when the Greeks defeated the Persians, for the first time in the story of the Bible, a European nation began to impact events in the Middle East. About 100 years before this time, there was a major growth in civilization in the nation of Greece. Because of the teachings of Aristotle, Plato, and others, the Greeks began to focus upon education. Large universities in places like Athens were started. Ideas like democracy which influence our world today were born.

Three hundred years before the birth of Jesus, a young Greek man by the name of Alexander the Great decided to conquer the world. He was one of the greatest military leaders the world has ever seen. In just a few years, he was able to expand the Greek empire from Greece to India and down to the borders of Ethiopia. What made his empire different from the empires which preceded him (Assyria, Babylon and Persia) was the fact that not only was he seeking to bring political control over many nations, but he wanted to spread Greek culture which he believed was the best for all people. In almost every nation which he conquered he built a city according to Greek cultural standards. There were gymnasiums for sports competitions. The modern day Olympics had its start in Greece. Education and philosophy for the upper class was emphasized. And of course the Greek-styled temples and gods were encouraged. The Greeks emphasized living in cities as compared to the Jews who preferred living in the countryside. And Greeks consolidated power in the hands of rich merchants rather than with elders as the Jews were used to. Alexander encouraged his soldiers to marry local girls so that they could influence the local people in Greek culture. This Greek culture is called "Hellenism" by scholars and was the dominant cultural influence upon the world for over a thousand years. Although Alexander wanted to influence the local people to choose Greek culture, he did not force it. So he allowed people to live according to their ancient cultures led by their own tribal style of leadership. As long as people paid their taxes and maintained their allegiance to him, he did not interfere in their affairs.

In 332 BC, Alexander reached Palestine. Both Samaria and Judea welcomed him and submitted to his authority with little resistance. In fact, the Jewish high priest met Alexander dressed in his priestly garments. Alexander used this opportunity to say that before he had started his conquest, he had a dream where a similarly dressed person told him to go and conquer in God's name. Most likely this was Alexander's way to try to win the favor of the Jewish people.

Just a few years later, however, Alexander, still a young man, died of a combination of sickness and drunkenness. Two of the most powerful generals were called Ptolemy and Seleucid. Ptolemy was able to gain control of Egypt and Palestine and Seleucid took over Syria and the rest of the Middle East. Both of these generals started a line of kings who would continue ruling these territories for almost 200 years.

Over the next two hundred years, there were frequent battles between the Ptolemy kings and the Seleucid kings as each one tried to gain more territory. Palestine was the middle ground between these two strong generals and their descendants. Often the battles were fought in Palestine bringing death and destruction to the Jews who had no interest in war. (The struggle between these two lines of kings is described in Daniel 11.) Both the Ptolemies and the Seleucids were committed to continuing Alexander's attempt to bring Greek culture to the lands over which they ruled. But whereas the Ptolemies sought to make it happen naturally, the Seleucids forced people to adapt the Greek culture.

a. The control of the Ptolemies (320-198 BC) (The kings of the south in Daniel's vision)

For most of the Greek dynasty period, Palestine was under the jurisdiction of the Ptolemies ruling from Egypt. Palestine had little economic or political significance to the Ptolemies. But because of the important trade routes between Egypt and Syria passed through Israel, they built some Greek fortified cities along the Mediterranean coast. Greek cities were also built by the Seleucids to the north of Palestine and to the east of the Sea of Galilee in a region called "the Decapolis." (See the map in Appendix A at the back of the book.) These Greek cities tempted Jews to leave their traditional culture to become more modern just like western culture influences the youth in Ethiopia today. Eventually only Judea remained without a strong Greek influence.

In Egypt, the Ptolemies built a new Greek city called Alexandria which became one of the major universities of the ancient world and was known for its huge library. Between 323-285 BC, thousands of Jews moved to Alexandria and it became the largest Jewish colony outside of Judea. One of the Ptolemaic kings heard about the Hebrew Scriptures and wanted a copy of it to be placed in the library in a language which non-Jews could read. So he asked Jewish scholars to come from Israel and translate the Old Testament into Greek. This translation is called the "Septuagint." This translation became so popular to Jews living among the Gentiles that it was read more than the Hebrew Scriptures. Later, the Christians used the Septuagint as their Bible and the New Testament writers preferred to quote from it more often than they did from the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Ptolemies allowed the Jews in Israel to continue to worship and live as they wanted. They set up leaders in Palestine from the rich ruling families to control Jewish affairs, demanding only that the Jews continue to submit to them and pay taxes. During this period, political power increasingly transferred from the hands of the governors into the hands of the high priest. It was not long and priests fought over the right to be the high priest. Two families called the Tobiads (probably a descendant of the Tobiah in Nehemiah 6:17-19, 13:6-9.) and the Oniads began to fight back and forth for the right to be political rulers as well as the leaders of the Jewish religion. These rich priestly families no longer sought to guide the people according to the Word of God. Instead they focused their energies on politics instead.

Q. 17. a) Explain why you think it is difficult for church leaders involved in politics to maintain a pure focus upon leading God's spiritual people. b) Explain how the temptation to follow the ways of the world causes difficulty to Christian youth in your church. What do you think church leaders can do to counteract this temptation?

Although there was no direct command by leaders in Egypt for the Jews to adapt Greek culture, the temptation to become "modern" was strong for many Jews. As Jews lived among the Gentiles and as merchants following Greek culture traveled through Palestine, many Jews could not resist adapting to Hellenism. Soon many cities along the coast became Greek styled cities. In Syria a Greek city called Antioch was built to be the capital of the Seleucid kingdom and many Jews moved there to live. You will remember that it was in this city that had the first major turning of Gentiles to put their faith in Jesus Christ. (Acts 11:19-24) Galilee became surrounded with Greek speaking cities and a Greek city called Sepphoris was built close to Nazareth. For the first time in their history, Galilee had a major administrative center in their territory controlled by outsiders who spoke Greek. Only Jerusalem and its immediate surroundings resisted the Greek cultural push.

b. The control of the Seleucids (198-164 BC) (The kings of the north in Daniel's vision)

About two hundred years before the birth of Jesus, a major shift in politics took place which deeply impacted the Jews in Palestine. In Egypt, the Ptolemy kingdom became weak and the Seleucid king was able to defeat the Egyptian army and take control of Palestine. Rather than let the Jews willingly choose to follow the Greek culture, the Seleucid kings began to force Jews to change their culture. There was an especially evil king called Antiochus IV Epiphanes who ruled from 175-163 BC. (This man is probably the proud king described in Daniel 11:14-35.) Because he was fighting an expensive war against the Ptolemies in Egypt as well as had to pay a large ransom to the Romans to keep them from attacking him, Antiochus was desperate for money. So he went to Jerusalem and took all of the gold and money that was stored in the Temple in Jerusalem. When some Jews resisted what they considered stealing from God, he killed them. He also determined that he would change all of Palestine into a Greek styled country and began to force Jews to become like the Greeks. And for the first time since Babylonian rule, he sought to replace the Jewish worship according to the ways of the Old Testament by making the Jews follow the "state religion" of worshipping him as a god and worshipping the gods of the Greeks.

Jewish leaders reacted in different ways to this push to make Jews like the Greeks. In Jerusalem the high priest was called Onias III. He was from the line of Zadok (the historical high priestly line) and wanted to maintain the Jewish ways. He had a brother named Jason who was more willing to adapt Greek culture. Antiochus appointed Jason as high priest and soon upper class people began to dress and live like the Greeks. But because Jason was not willing to follow the Greek way of worship, Antiochus removed him and put another priest called Menelaus as high priest. He was aligned with a rich family called Tobiah who were supportive of the Jews becoming more like the Greeks. The Tobiah family got their priest appointed by giving Antiochus a lot of money. The priestly family of Onias (called the Oniad priestly line) bitterly opposed this enforced change of culture and constantly worked to try to get back into power.

This tendency of political rulers to change of priestly family at will brought several changes to the way Jews lived:

a. The right to be a high priest became a political goal for various priests to fight over. Historically, a person was a high priest until he died and then it was passed on to his son. It was not a political prize the leaders gave to those who supported them. But from this time until the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, there were constant battles between priestly families as they sought to become the high priest. No longer were high priests primarily concerned about spiritual matters, but they were more concerned about political influence.

b. For the first time the right to become a high priest was taken from the line of Zadok and given to another family of priests. This broke a tradition established by David 900 years earlier. Jews like the Pharisees who were zealous to obey God's laws constantly worked to get a legal high priest from the line of Zadok back in as high priest, but were usually not successful. During the time of Jesus, most Jews did not view the High Priest in Jerusalem as a legitimate High Priest and so did not respect him.

c. The right to be a high priest became controlled by Gentile nations who awarded the high priesthood to whichever priest they thought would best meet their needs. During the times of Jesus, the Romans would frequently change high priests, first appointing Annas and then his son-in-law Caiaphas as high priest. In his trials leading up to his crucifixion, Jesus appeared before both of them. (Jn. 18:12-14; 24) This

was because in the eyes of the Jews, a high priest served until he died, so Annas was still the unofficial high priest in the eyes of the people and had a lot of influence in Jewish affairs.

d. The high priest and his family became the official supporters of the Gentile governments. They knew that in order to stay in power, they had to continue to please the Gentile rulers in Syria or Rome. The high priests began to focus their energies on staying in power, gaining more wealth, and in controlling the politics of Jerusalem and Judea. During the times of Jesus, the Sadducees were the descendants of these high priestly families who controlled the high priesthood and temple worship, but above all sought to maintain their political influence over the people. They considered Jesus a threat, because of his growing popular support and the potential of causing the Roman government to become angry over someone claiming to be a king.

e. A non-violent resistance movement against the interference of Syria and the forced Greek cultural change started among the Jews. They were called the Hasidim which means "pious ones." They began to encourage the Jews to keep their ancient culture, to resist the encroachment of Greek culture, and to return to obedience to God as he had revealed his desires in the Old Testament. This put them at odds with the leading priestly families. It was from this group that eventually the Pharisees would come with their zealous desire to follow carefully the Old Testament laws and the traditions of the fathers.

Q. 18. a) Describe how the desire for power and political influence can corrupt church leaders today.
b) List ways that this can negatively impact the church.

With the high priest now actively supporting the Syrian king, Antiochus, many Jews gave up their ancient culture to begin to live like Greeks. Even Jerusalem, the city which had historically resisted Gentile influence, began to feel the impact of Greek culture.

This interference by Antiochus caused unrest to grow in Palestine. Antiochus continued his war against Egypt. Having defeated the Ptolemaic forces, Antiochus was ready to take over Egypt. But suddenly a delegation from Rome arrived and told him he was not allowed to take over Egypt. Rome did not want Antiochus' kingdom to expand and Antiochus was afraid of the growing might of Rome. Angry, Antiochus returned to Syria by way of Jerusalem. He wanted to make sure Palestine remained loyal to him, so on the Sabbath, a day when Jews would not fight, he marched troops into Jerusalem and placed them in a fortress next to the Temple. And he began to force Jews to become Greeks.

In 168 BC, Antiochus stopped all worship of God in the Temple. He ordered the Jewish Scriptures to be destroyed and told the Jews that they had to work on the Sabbath and other religious holy days. He forced them to eat meat that was considered unclean. And in the Temple, he erected an altar to the Greek god Zeus and sacrificed a pig on the altar. All throughout Judea he built worship centers and ordered the Jews to worship the new Greek religion. Any Jew who refused to obey was quickly killed.

The time of the Greek domination brought major changes in how Jews understood themselves. Whereas Jews had maintained their culture by either living in Palestine or in small communities among the Gentiles, a cultural clash developed. (Note: This is similar to how in many remote areas of Ethiopia there is a cultural clash going on between those who want to be "modern" (dressing and living like westerners) and those who want to follow Ethiopian traditions. Most of the Jews living outside of Palestine looked for ways to honor both their Jewish traditions and following Greek culture as well. And so many

Jews began to wear Greek clothes, speak the Greek language, attend the gymnasium and open air theaters, follow one of the major Greek philosophies, etc. However they insisted on worshiping only one God. Some famous Jewish writers sought to combine their Jewish beliefs with Greek beliefs. So Moses was compared to famous Greek scholars.

For the Jews living in Palestine, things became more complex. The educated and the rich quickly adjusted to the Greek way of life. Along the Judean coastline, the Jews followed Greek culture. And the high priests who supported Syria became strong supporters and followers of Greek culture. But around Jerusalem, the Jews were more conservative and they resisted the encroachment of Greek culture. Although the Jews tolerated the expansion of most Greek cultural practices, they reacted strongly to anything they believed compromised their pure worship of God. This resistance to Greek cultural impact upon religion eventually led to a major clash between Judea and the Syrian government.

4. The Hasmonean (Maccabean) Period (164-63 BC)

Antiochus Epiphanes' forcing Jews to adapt Greek culture and religion soon caused the Jews to fight back. In 167 BC, an old priest called Mattathias who lived in a country town near Jerusalem refused to sacrifice on one of the Greek altars. When another priest started to offer the pagan sacrifice, Mattathias killed the priest and a government official. He shouted out to the people "Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me." He and his five sons fled into the Judean desert and began to fight against the Seleucid government. He was soon killed and his son, Judas Maccabeus, a gifted guerrilla warfare leader, continued the fight. More and more Jews joined him. At this time, there was a power struggle in Antioch Syria for the throne as well as attacks from a tribe called the Parthians, so Antiochus was not able to focus his attention upon the rebellion. In 164 BC, the Seleucid army in Jerusalem was overcome. The Temple was cleansed of idol worship and Jewish worship resumed. Even today Jews celebrate this great day (Called "Feast of Lights" or Hanukkah) when the Temple was cleansed.

Knowing that they were not prepared to fight the rebels, the Seleucids made an agreement with Judas Maccabeus allowing the Jews to go back to their historical way of worship, but demanded that they remain under Seleucid governance with the Syrian appointed high priest leading Jewish worship. Judas soon broke the agreement, seeking to gain political independence for Judea. There were many battles fought and many lives lost.

Judas was killed in battle and his brother Jonathan Maccabeus took over leading the rebellion. While the Seleucid kingdom was facing a lot of internal strife, Jonathan was able to gain control of all of Judea and ruled the nation almost totally independently of Syria. Although he was not from the Zadok line of priests, in 152 BC, the people appointed him to become the high priest. So not only was he the political leader, he became the religious leader well. The descendants of Mattathias (called by Hasmoneans) would control the priesthood until the Romans took over in 63 BC.

Unfortunately, the combination of spiritual leadership as high priest and political leadership over the nation soon corrupted the motives of the Hasmonean leaders. They were no longer interested in protecting the purity of the Jews and their following the laws of God. Instead they became more interested in maintaining their political power over the Jewish people. Soon the Hasmonean leaders became strong supporters of Greek culture. Jonathan had his children educated in Greek ways rather than Jewish ways. One of his sons preferred his Greek name to his Hebrew name. It is during the times of Jonathan that

Jewish historians refer to the different religious sects of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes spreading among the Jews.

Jonathan was killed by the Seleucids in 143 BC and Simon his brother, the last son of Mattathias, took over leadership of the Jews from 143-134 BC. By now Simon was so powerful that the Seleucid leaders agreed that the Jews did not have to pay taxes and Judea became almost totally independent of Syrian governmental control. The Jews expelled the Syrian army from Jerusalem. In their excitement over their independence, the Jews granted Simon and his family the right to be high priest "until the Messiah comes." For the first time in over 400 years (since 586 BC) the Jews were free to govern their own nation. The Jews tasted political freedom from the Gentiles and were never satisfied again to come under Gentile control. During this time the Romans were growing in power and were threatening the political power of the Ptolemies and Seleucids. Simon was able to sign an agreement with the Romans strengthening Israel's independent status.

As often happens, when there is freedom from external controls and having a mutual enemy to fight, people begin to fight each other. We see this in the church- when the persecution of the communist government (the Derge) stopped, the unity among believers disappeared as church denominations began to fight each other and divisions arose within church denominations. Among the Jews there were power struggles and one of his sons-in-law killed Simon and two of his children.

Eventually Simon's son, John Hyrcanus, became the leader and solidified his control over Judea. John's vision was to expand his nation and bring all Jews and even Gentiles under the control of Jewish traditions. He took over land south of Judea called Idumea and forced all of the people living there to be circumcised and follow the religious practices of the Jews. (It was from this area that Herod the Great later came and became the king of the Jews.) John Hyrcanus then conquered much of Samaria and destroyed the temple which they had built on Mt. Gerizim as well as the capitol city of Samaria and forced them to follow the Jewish way of worship. This of course increased the hatred between the Jews and Samaritans.

The Hasmonean leaders initially promoted Jewish culture. But eventually they became strong supporters of Greek culture. When John Hyrcanus used excessive force on the Samaritans and because he followed Greek culture, the conservative Jews called "Hassidim" separated from him. Probably these "Hassidic" Jews were the originators of the Pharisee party. When John first came to power, he was supportive of the Pharisees who were zealous for the obedience of the Old Testament laws and the traditions of the fathers. But when they came to him and recommended that John give up being high priest and only be the political leader since he was not of the line of Zadok, he became angry with the Pharisees. He then turned his support to the Sadducees who were the party of the rich merchants and high priestly family who were also willing to accommodate with the Gentiles. From this time on, the Pharisees became the enemies of the Hasmonean leaders and the enemies of the Sadducees. Scholars believe that it was during this time of struggle that some Jews, angry at the corruption in the high priesthood, formed a new group called the Essenes and started a monastery near the Dead Sea called the Qumran community. (Note: We will study more on various religious parties in Palestine next week.)

As political and religious power passed on to the descendants of John Hyrcanas, several things happened.

a. The Hasmoneans continued to expand their kingdom. They were able to conquer territory to the east of the Jordan River and also Galilee. For the first time since the death of Solomon in 921 BC, ancient

Israel was united under one leader. Galilee, the land where Jesus grew up and ministered, was now under the influence of Jerusalem and its religious teachers. The Jews now controlled almost as much land as David and Solomon had 800 years before.

(Note: There is conflicting evidence about how zealous in their obedience of God's laws conservative Jews in Galilee became and whether or not the majority of the people the control of Judea. Some scholars believe that because Galilee was independent for most of its history, the Jews in Jerusalem were not able to impact the cultural and religious beliefs of the Galilean very much. These scholars think that the Galilean Jews were too independent and too remote for Jerusalem to maintain tight control over them. Other scholars believe that starting from this time on, Galilee became a strong supporter of Jewish religion and Jewish political independence. During the days of Jesus, and culminating at the war against Rome in 66 AD, there were frequent attempts in Galilee to fight against the Roman occupation. And people from Galilee joined in the final battle in Jerusalem when it fell to the Romans in 70 AD.)

Since most of ancient history focused upon events in Jerusalem and Judea, we have little information about Galilee. We do know that there were some descendants of Judah living in Galilee. Joseph and Mary were descendants of David and yet they did not live in the land of Judea, but in Galilee. Did their family move to Galilee during the Babylonian occupation? Although most Jews were taken into captivity, especially the rich, some of the poorer Jews were allowed to live in Judea and could have migrated to Galilee where there was less Gentile interference. Or did the Hasmonean leaders send Jews from Judea into Galilee to govern the Galileans on behalf of the government in Jerusalem? We know that some Jews from Judea were sent to Galilee to administer the territory, but don't know how many. Or did the Hasmoneans settle Jews in Galilee? Was this how Joseph's and Mary's families ended up in Galilee? We don't know. But the Gospels indicate that there were people from Judea living in Galilee during the days of Jesus who still maintained their connection to their historical lands. That is why Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem for a political census. And it seems that close links were formed between Judea and Galilee. Scribes and Pharisees went up to Galilee and taught in their synagogues.

b. The Hasmoneans became strong supporters of Greek culture. Amazingly, they switched from resisting the spread of Greek culture and religion and soon became strong supporters of Greek culture. Although they tended to let Jerusalem follow Jewish cultural ways, in many cities outside of Jerusalem, the Hasmonean leaders built Greek cities and encouraged Jews to become like the Greeks.

c. Those who wanted Jews to follow their pure religion without becoming Greeks began to strongly resist which led to sharp clashes. One of the descendants of Simon was called Alexander Jannaeus (rule 103-76 BC) When the Pharisees resisted Alexander being high priest, he killed 800 Pharisees and their families. However, when the widow of Alexander, called Salome Alexandra, was leading (ruled 76-67 BC) she chose to support the Pharisees, allowing them to guide the affairs of the nation in support of conservative Judaism. The Pharisees sought to undo the influence of the secular Sadducees. At this time the Pharisees were able to get permanent seats on the Jewish parliament (called the Sanhedrin).

d. With the death of Salome, civil war developed as different Hasmonean descendants fought for political and religious power. The Roman army had conquered Egypt, Asia Minor and Syria, taking over the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires. Different parties in Jerusalem sent delegations to the Roman general in Damascus asking that he intervene and appoint them as the leaders of Judea. The Roman general Pompey decided to take over Palestine himself. So he attacked Jerusalem and in 63 BC, defeated the Jewish army

ending almost 100 years of Jewish independence. Pompey had heard rumors of great wealth being in the Holy of Holies, the part of the Temple which was so holy that only the high priest was allowed to enter it once a year. Wanting to see what was hidden in that part of the Temple, Pompey entered the Holy of Holies. He was amazed to find it empty- no gold and no ark of the covenant. But this action earned him and Rome the hatred of the Jews. From then on the Jews hated the Romans. 140 years later the Jews rebelled against Rome, leading to the end of the Jewish nation and the destruction of the Temple. Not until 1948 AD when Israel became a nation once again would the Jews enjoy political independence. What a price to pay because of fighting each other!

Q. 19. Describe some important lessons we can learn about church leadership from the Hasmonean period.

Power is Satan's major tool to corrupt leaders! "Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts completely" is a popular saying. This was true for the Hasmonean leaders. The sons of Mattathias started off wanting to encourage the pure worship of God's people. But soon their hunger for both political and religious power turned them into the enemies of following the God of Abraham and fulfilling the covenant of Moses. All church leaders must be careful that they too do not allow the desire for power to corrupt their motives for serving God as leaders.

Fighting and disagreements between God's people, especially leaders, brings great destruction! Because of so much internal fighting as different leaders sought political and religious power, Israel never became as strong as it could have been. Jealousies and selfish ambition became such a problem that the Jews even turned to non-believers like the Romans to resolve their fighting. And in doing so, they ended up losing the freedom that thousands of Jews had died to get. But isn't that what happens to us as a church? Some internal struggles in a church are so strong that believers go to the political courts to get resolution. Leaders destroy the spiritual life of many believers with their fighting. Their testimony is ruined and the church is powerless to take the Gospel out to the unreached areas. Like Rome conquered the Jews, Satan overcomes our churches and it is very hard to restore the unity and effectiveness of the church. Paul warned "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will destroy each other." (Gal. 5:15) Isn't it time we stopped this fighting and worked together for God's kingdom and his glory instead?

FOURTH DAY

Q. 20. Give an example of how losing a blessing often increases our desire for that blessing.

100 years of Jewish independence was taken away by the Romans. But the experience of having freedom and then losing it had a major impact on the thinking of the Jews. For the first time they began to seriously yearn for the Messiah. They knew that the Old Testament had promised that one day one or more special leaders would arise. There would be deliverance from their enemies much like the Maccabees brought to the Jews, but even greater. And there would be spiritual renewal as the Jews would be led not by a leader who wanted power and manipulated things for his benefit, but would lead in justice and righteousness. Like a small seed, this longing was planted in the hearts of the Jews. That longing would grow until after the days of Jesus, this desire resulted in several failed rebellions against Rome.

5. The Roman rule over Palestine (63 BC-135 AD) (The legs of iron and the fearful beast in the vision of Daniel)

The Roman empire was probably the greatest empire the world has seen. Starting from a small city in Italy, it grew until at its peak, the Roman empire reached from Spain in the west, Britain in the north, India in the East, Egypt in the south, and all across northern Africa. Not only was it a vast empire, it remained the dominant world power for over four centuries.

After 150 BC, the Romans desired to increase their empire into the Middle East. When the Roman general, Pompey, captured Jerusalem, he established a leadership structure called "client-kings." This style of leadership was to place local people in authority over the nation who would submit to the conquering nation. For the next five hundred years, Rome controlled Palestine. So the ultimate authority over Palestine when Jesus lived on earth was the Roman government. However, since Rome ruled "through" local leaders, most of Jesus' dealings were with local politicians and religious leaders chosen by Rome to manage Palestine. The local leaders were responsible to keep the peace and to collect the allocated taxes from the people. As long as there was peace and they received their taxes, the remote Roman governments generally let local officials rule any way they wanted. There were few Roman soldiers living among the Jews so only rarely would Jesus have come in contact with them. Rather, Jesus' dealings were with the religious and Jewish political leaders who administered Judea under the authority of the Romans.

After defeating Jerusalem in 63 AD, initially the Roman government continued the rule of the Hasmonean leaders. But then a civil war broke out among different Roman generals for rulership over the empire. That civil war even spread to Galilee. After one battle, 30,000 Galileans were taken as slaves. It is estimated that between 67 BC to 37 BC, over 150,000 Jews perished in Palestine as they sought to resist Roman rule. In order to pay for the civil war, the amount of taxes assessed upon Galilee increased and some Galileans turned to banditry and unrest grew in Galilee. No doubt growing up Jesus heard about all the problems the Romans had caused in Galilee and witnessed the hatred of the people to the Romans and anyone who supported them.

a. King Herod, the Great (37-4 BC)

When Pompey captured Jerusalem, the last two Hasmonean leaders (who were brothers) continued their struggle for leadership over Judea against each other. One sought the help of Rome. The other sought the help of the Parthians, the last major enemy of Rome. Rome was in the middle of its own civil war as various generals fought each other for power. South of Judea there was an influential man called Antipater who became the governor of Idumea. He decided to support the brother who was faithful to Rome. He took money from the Temple and used it to help the Roman general in Egypt fight. When that general became the official king over Rome, he did several things. First, he greatly honored the Jews. Jews throughout the Roman empire became popular with the Romans and were given special privileges. They were allowed to build synagogues and worship their own way without opposition from the Gentiles. Second, Augustus Caesar rewarded Antipater for his assistance. He took the leadership of Judea away from the Hasmoneans and made Antipater the governor of the Jews. Antipater made his son Herod the ruler in Galilee who used force to bring peace to the region.

Not long afterwards, the Roman Caesar (king) was killed resulting in another power struggle in the Roman empire. Antipater was murdered as well leading to a power struggle in Judea as the Hasmonean brothers sought to regain control of Palestine. When the Parthians captured Syria, the Hasmonean

descendant called Antigonus got the Parthians to help him fight against Rome and led a rebellion. He conquered Jerusalem and for three years was able to rule as king of the Jews. He cut off the ears of the high priest so that he could no longer be high priest because he was maimed. (Lev. 21:16-21)

Herod escaped and fled to Rome. The Romans welcomed him warmly, and even though they were no longer in control of Palestine, proclaimed Herod "king" of Palestine. And he was also rewarded with the land of Samaria. Of course Herod had to go back and defeat the Hasmoneans. But with Roman help, he recaptured Jerusalem. By 37 BC Herod was able to gain control of all of Idumea, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. (See map in Appendix A at back of the book.)

History calls this king Herod the Great. But Herod did not rule independently of Rome. Rather, he ruled under the authority of Rome whose political center was in Antioch Syria. The Romans gave Herod a lot of freedom to govern Palestine as he desired. All he had to do was be loyal to Rome, keep the peace, and collect the taxes required from Palestine. When Herod became king, he immediately started to consolidate his control over Palestine. Everyone who was a threat to his absolute power was killed. So he executed many of the members of the Hasmonean royal family, even one of his own wives who was related to the Hasmonean family. He killed the high priest and 45 Sadducee priestly leaders, and even many of his own family (e.g. his brother-in-law, his uncle).

After securing control of Palestine, Herod ruled almost as much land as King David had 1000 years previously. Herod then turned his attention to large building projects. Herod wanted to be known throughout the Roman world as a great promoter of culture. So he rebuilt Samaria and built a large temple there in honor of the Roman emperor. He also built a new harbor and called it Caesarea after the Roman emperor. He built a magnificent palace for himself and several military fortresses throughout Palestine. He even helped build great buildings in cities far away from Palestine, like in Greece. Generally he continued to advance Greek culture.

But in Jerusalem he was sensitive to Jewish feelings and tried not to offend them. His greatest building project was the Temple. Construction started in 20 BC and 9 years later the major Temple building was finished. But building on the greater Temple complex continued until 63 AD. This Temple is viewed as one of the most amazing architectural structures in ancient times. The Temple was built using the Greek style of architecture. He also built a "Court of the Gentiles"- a place where Gentiles could come close to the Temple and present their sacrifices to God. There was only one part of the Temple which greatly angered the Jews. Over the main gate of the Temple he placed a golden eagle which was a sign of the Roman sun god.

It was this Temple building that the disciples proudly pointed out to Jesus. When Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days." (Jn. 2:18-22) he caused the Jewish leaders to become very angry because they thought that he was referring to the physical Temple and not the temple of his body. Although they hated King Herod, the Jews were proud of the Temple which they believed demonstrated their greatness as God's people.

Herod's great building projects earned the Jews great honor throughout the Roman Empire and many Gentiles even became "god-fearers." (See Acts 10:2; 13:26) A "god-fearer" was a Gentile who refused to become a Jew by being circumcised, but who believed that there was only one God, the God of Abraham. After Christ returned to heaven and the church expanded outside of Palestine, it was often these "god-

fearers" (like Cornelius) who were most ready to place their faith in Jesus Christ. Amazingly, since people had a good view of the Jews and their religion, God used these projects of evil king Herod to make it easier for the Gospel of Jesus to spread!

Even during these days of great building, Herod remained afraid that someone would take his kingdom away from him. He would appoint someone from his family as a political leader, but soon took away the honor if he thought they were not faithful to him. He brought in a high priest from Babylon because he did not trust the local priestly families. But soon he demoted him and brought another priest from Egypt.

Although Herod brought great respect to the Jews, the Jews themselves hated Herod. He was not a full Jew, but was only part Jew from the line of Edom. He was also a symbol of the Roman occupation and he continued to spread Hellenism throughout Palestine. The Pharisees spoke out against him and because Herod was afraid of the power of the Sadducees he had many of them killed.

Towards the end of his life, Herod the Great became increasingly paranoid that someone would take over his kingdom. His sons were now old enough to take over his kingdom, so he became afraid of them. He killed his favorite wife and several of his children because of rumors that they were plotting to kill him. Things got so bad that the Roman emperor made a joke that he would rather be a pig in Herod's house than one of his sons- for a pig would live longer. (The word "pig" and the word "son" sound similar in Greek.) It was in these final years of his life, when he was almost insane with fear that someone would take his kingdom away from him, that the true King of the Jews, Jesus, was born in a stable in Bethlehem, ten kilometers away from Herod's palace. Hearing the rumor that a new king was born, Herod killed all of the male children below the age of two in the town of Bethlehem. (Mt. 2:16)

(*Note: Herod died in 4 BC. This means that Jesus was born sometime before this. The Western calendar was not started until 526 AD by a monk called Dionysius Exiguus. He was about five years off in his estimation of the birth of Jesus. The Ethiopian calendar, which follows the Egyptian Coptic church, is based upon a different way of determining the birth of Jesus and is probably about two years off.)

So it was during the times of the Roman king, Augustus Caesar, and the Jewish king, Herod, that Jesus was born. (Lk. 2:1) God entered human history as a poor Jew in a peasant family, living in what everyone considered as an unimportant backward part of the world. No wonder the rich and the powerful could not believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah! But that poor child of a peasant lady would not only purchase the spiritual freedom of all mankind by dying for their sins; he would start a spiritual revolution, changing the hearts of people, so that one day even the mighty Roman emperors would have to bow to honor the leaders of the church which Jesus started. More than that, one day every person, no matter how powerful and great, will kneel before the child of a peasant woman and confess that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. (Phil. 2:9-11)

Q. 21. a) Describe why it is amazing that when God sent his Son to put on human flesh, he placed him in an insignificant, backward part of the world and in a peasant family. b) What can we learn about God's view of political power and worldly riches and status from this fact?

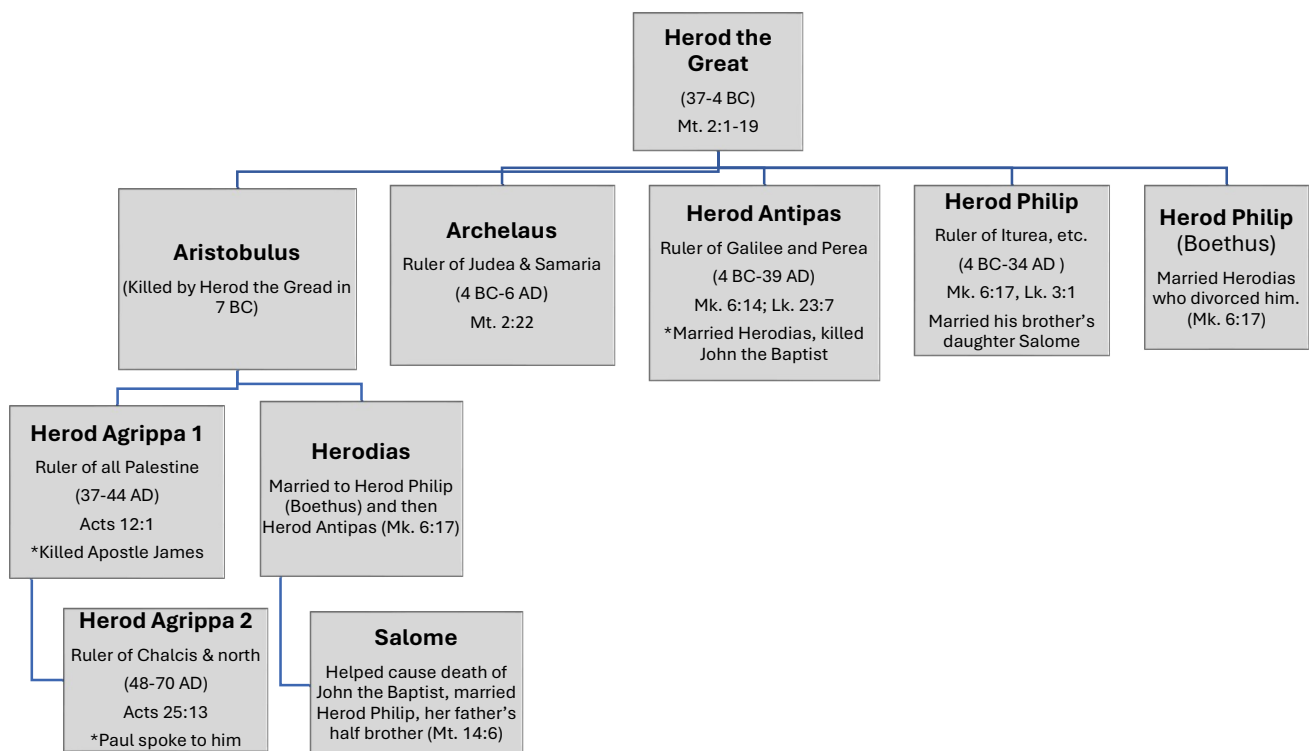
b. The rule of Rome and the sons of Herod (4 BC-66 AD)

Q. 22. Read Gal. 4:4-5. What does this verse say about the timing of Jesus' coming to earth?

Paul said that the coming of Jesus was "when the time had fully come." The world was ready for its Savior to be born for several reasons. For the 70 years after the birth of Jesus there was great stability in the Roman Empire. With Rome securely in control, evangelists could travel throughout the Roman Empire with little fear of war. The Greek culture had reached many countries and those evangelists could minister in Greek and be understood everywhere. Even among Gentiles, there was a deep respect for the God of Abraham and his moral teachings found in the Old Testament.

Just before Herod died, he decided that his kingdom should be divided up between three of his sons. Archelaus was designated ruler over Judea and Samaria, but was not allowed to be called "king" by the Romans. Antipas was assigned as governor over Galilee and Perea. And Philip was given the lands to the north and east of Galilee. Because the New Testament often calls the descendants of Herod the Great, "Herod," it is important to try to keep the different Herods clear in our minds.

Examine the chart showing the descendants of King Herod who are mentioned in the Bible:



Herod the Great's death in 4 BC caused widespread turmoil throughout his kingdom. Not only did his children try to influence Rome to give them added territory to rule over, but many in Palestine saw this as a chance to get rid of the rulership of Herod's family which they hated. Galilee and other areas decided to rebel against the descendants of Herod and tried to become independent of Herod's family control and the control of Rome. They longed for the times of the Maccabees when they were independent of Gentile control. During the feast of Pentecost, many Galileans traveled to Jerusalem to protest, starting a rebellion in Judea. In Galilee, some people attacked the major political capital called Sepphoris where delegates of Herod were living and captured the town. They tried to appoint their own leader who claimed to be a messiah. The Romans general in Syria quickly sent an army into Galilee to put down the revolt. The major

administrative town of Sepphoris was captured, burned, and its inhabitants taken away into slavery. Some Galilean villages were burned, thousands were made slaves and sent to far off places like Greece, and many crucified as an example to people not to resist Roman rule. The Roman army then moved down to Judea. People in Jerusalem tried to resist the Roman army and as a result some of the Temple was burned, but were soon overcome. In Perea, the Pharisees encouraged an uprising and people burned Herod's palace in Jericho, so the Roman army crucified over 2000 people. This was the first attempt of the Jews to overthrow the Roman Empire. Although the Romans easily overpowered them, the desire for independence burned strongly in the hearts of many Jews. In 6 AD they would try to revolt again, and then in 66 AD, thousands of Jews died as they tried to gain independence. It was during this time of great political upheaval that Jesus, the king of peace was born and had to flee to Egypt.

When Herod the Great died, many different parties sent delegates to Rome seeking to get the Roman king to grant them leadership of Herod's kingdom. Herod's will established that three of his sons were to receive the major parts of his kingdom. But the different sons of Herod were not happy with this arrangement and each asked Rome to give them the whole kingdom. And the Jewish wealthy families (aristocracy) sent a delegation asking Rome to rule them directly because they did not want any of the descendants of Herod to rule over them. The Romans decided to honor the will of Herod and divided different territories between the descendants of Herod.

Q. 23. a) Read Mt. 2:22. Who is mentioned here as being ruler so Joseph, Mary, and Jesus did not return to Bethlehem to live? b) Examine the map in Appendix A in the back of the book. List the different territories which the different sons of Herod were given.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) What is the difference between being a "Christian" and being a disciple of Jesus? b) Do you think most members of your church understand what it means to be a true follower of Jesus? Explain your answer. c) How well do you think the members of your church know what the Gospels teach about Jesus and what he wanted his followers to be like? What could your church do to help its members understand what Jesus taught about following him in a better way?

2. a) List the major facts we studied about the geography of Palestine during the times of Christ. b) Which of these facts surprised you? Why? c) Look at the map in Appendix A at the back of the book and list the various political regions which Jesus visited while on earth. d) Compare the size of Palestine to your home area. List a town that is as far away as how wide Palestine is. List another town which is as far away as Palestine is long. e) Summarize in your own words what the life was like growing up in a remote part of Palestine for Jesus and his disciples in Palestine. How was it similar or different to how many Ethiopians live today? f) Why do you think God chose for his son to be born in a poor family in a backward part of the world rather than in a large town with rich parents? What does this teach us about God and his ways?

3. a) Summarize the major political events between the Old Testament and New Testament. b) Describe how these political events influenced the Jews living during the days of Jesus. c) Describe

what happened to the leadership of the Jews when religious leadership and political leadership became combined. d) List some lessons we can learn about church leadership being closely linked with political leadership from these days. e) List other lessons on being followers of Jesus which we can learn from the Jews during these times.

4. a) List some events from Jewish history which contributed to the Jewish desire for a political messiah. b) How do these understandings concerning the Messiah help explain why the Jewish religious leaders got so angry with Jesus?

LESSON TWO

FIRST DAY

Paul told Timothy whom he was training in ministry that to be an approved minister of God he had to "study" so that he could correctly interpret the Word of God. (2 Tim. 2:15) It is only when God's Word is rightly interpreted and applied that we can hear God speak to us through the Word with authority and power. One of the important things to remember in correctly interpreting God's Word is to understand the context of the people who first received God's Word. We live over 2000 years after the birth of Jesus and the world has changed much since then. To better understand the Gospels and what Jesus taught about being his followers, it helps to know what the world was like when Jesus came.

Q. 1. Read Gal. 4:4-5. From what we have studied so far, what things of Jesus' time prepared the world for the coming of the Messiah?

God always has a purpose for what he does. He controls all of world history and when his time according to his plans, he does unusual things. He delays healing until his timing is right. Paul wrote that Jesus came when God had organized the world for his coming. He called this unique time in history the "fullness of time." During the times of Jesus, several things prepared the world for the Son of God and for the Church.

1. Most of Europe, the Middle East and northern Africa were governed by **one administration**, the Roman Empire. Therefore Paul and the apostles could travel all the way from Spain to India and all the way across northern Africa and didn't need any special government permission. Unlike today, there was no need for the apostles to get passports and visas in order to take the Gospel to different countries. Within a couple of generations, churches were started from India all the way across northern Africa and into much of Europe. Since the time of the Roman Empire, the world has never been so unified under one government.

2. Most of the world understood **one language**, which was Greek. Because of the spread of the Greek culture (called "Hellenism" by scholars), in almost every part of the Roman empire people spoke Greek. This made it easier for evangelists like Paul to share the Gospel wherever they went since they did not have to learn a new language in order to talk to people about Jesus.

3. There was **dissatisfaction with traditional religions and idol worship**. Great numbers of people were no longer satisfied with worshipping man-made idols and longed for the truth. As a result, when Christians shared about Jesus, and when they lived out the love that Jesus had given them for everyone, no matter what tribe or economic level, people realized that Jesus was the way and the truth that they had been yearning for.

4. In Judea, there was a **great longing for a Messiah** who would bring peace and justice for people. After centuries of watching their corrupt religious leaders and the cruel domination of Gentiles, the Jews longed for the son of David as prophesied in the Old Testament. Unfortunately, they wanted a political

king, not one who would come to rule in their hearts and reconcile them with God. So although they still longed for a Messiah, many of the Jews rejected the true Messiah and his kingdom.

Last week we began our study of the cultural and political situation in Palestine during the time of Jesus. History plays a large part in determining the situations in which we live and our culture, so we looked at the historical development of the Intertestamental times in order to understand what happened to form the culture in which Jesus was born. This week we will continue our study of the leadership structures and the economic situation of the Jews during those days. We have included a lot of details to help the student get a clearer idea of what life for the Jews during the first century which should help us understand what it meant for Jesus to be born a Jew who lived during the first century.

THE RULE OVER IDUMEA, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA

When Jesus was born, King Herod the Great ruled with great cruelty. Fearing the arrival of another King of the Jews, Herod the Great sought to kill Jesus. But God is always in control of kings. Kings like Herod come onto the scene of history and then die. But Jesus, the Lord of lords and the King of kings reigns forever. No matter what human kings seek to do to Jesus and his followers, the Kingdom of God continues to grow. In 4 BC, King Herod died, and his kingdom was divided out among three sons.

1. The rule of Herod's son, Archelaus, over Idumea, Judea, and Samaria (ruled 4 BC – 6 AD)

The oldest living son of Herod the Great, Archelaus, was given Idumea, Judea and Samaria to rule over. Idumea was the southernmost part of Herod's kingdom. About 100 years earlier it had been conquered by the Hasmonean leaders and forcibly made to follow the Jewish culture and religion. Archelaus' family line was from this region. The Idumeans were never happy being part of Judea and later rebelled against control by Judea. Judea was the most important part of Palestine politically and religiously. And Samaria was the most wealthy, and heavily Greek oriented part of Palestine. They too did not like being controlled by Judea.

Archelaus' rule was not peaceful. Matthew tells us that after the birth of Jesus, Joseph, Mary and Jesus fled to Egypt so that Herod the Great would not kill Jesus. When Herod the Great died, because of Archelaus' cruelty, instead of returning to Bethlehem where Joseph's relatives lived, Joseph and Mary returned to Galilee which was under the administration of Herod Antipas, a more favorable ruler. (See Mt. 2:19-23)

The Jews were not happy with a descendant of Herod continuing to rule over them and both the Pharisees and the Sadducees wanted greater authority. Archelaus ruled so poorly that the rich land owners traveled to Rome to meet with the emperor to ask him to remove Archelaus from office. They asked that Palestine be put under the administration of Syria and ruled through Jewish leaders instead of through a descendant of Herod. In 6 AD, the Romans agreed to remove Archelaus from office. But instead of giving power to another one of Herod's descendants or placing Judea under governorship from distant Syria, the Romans decided to directly rule over Judea and Samaria. So they placed a governor in Caesarea. However, they left most of the administrative matters of Judea to the high priest and the Sanhedrin (the Jewish High Court) to oversee.

2. The direct rule of Roman governors over Idumea, Judea, and Samaria (6 AD-41 AD)

For most of the time from 6 AD to 66 AD, Rome ruled Judea, Samaria, and Idumea directly through Roman governors appointed by the Roman emperor. Only a few of these governors are mentioned in the New Testament. Because of his involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus, Pilate is the most well known.

When Rome took over direct administration of Judea, they began to directly tax the Jews. This direct taxation by Rome angered Jews, especially in Galilee. Politically under Herod Antipas, Jews in Galilee had more political freedom than the Jews in Judea. So they were able to form small rebel groups. When the new taxation policy was announced, two Jews in Galilee, Judas the Galilean and Zadok the Pharisee, decided to rebel against Rome. The Romans relentlessly put the rebellion down, killing many Jews. No doubt Jesus, who would have been at least 10 years old, witnessed this rebellion and the destruction which it brought. Although the rebellion was quickly stopped, the desire for independence grew in Judea and Galilee. It was within this type of atmosphere that Jesus, the true Messiah, grew up in Galilee, which was the center of nationalistic feeling.

Q. 2. Read Mt. 9:9,11; Lk. 5:30, 7:34. a) What was the people's attitude towards tax collectors? b) What was Jesus' attitude towards tax collectors? c) What was Matthew's work before he was called to follow Jesus? d) What can we learn from this about not allowing people viewed as disreputable by society from influencing how we (are to) treat them?

The Romans kept about 3,000 militia in Palestine to help keep the peace. About 600 of them were stationed in Jerusalem next to the Temple and the rest in Caesarea. The official Roman soldiers were kept in Syria on call if the governor needed them. When Romans took over more direct governance of Judea and Jerusalem, it no longer used the leadership of a local political leader, but appointed a Roman governor to control the territory. This governor then turned over management of most political affairs to the high priest. The Roman governor appointed their own priest called Annas from another rich priestly family, continuing the practice of Herod of choosing a high priest who would submit to them. During the times of Jesus and the Apostles the family of Annas controlled the high priesthood. Annas ruled from 6-15 AD and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was the high priest when Jesus was crucified ruled from 18-36 AD. Annas was chosen because he was a Sadducee and a supporter of the Roman empire, not because of his spirituality.

THE RULE OVER GALILEE

Q. 3. Read Lk. 3:1, Mt. 14:1-12; Lk. 23:6-11. a) Who is listed as the ruler of Galilee? b) What did this Herod do to John the Baptist? c) What did this Herod do to Jesus?

Herod Antipas (4 BC – 39 AD)

Throughout the life of Jesus, his home area of Galilee was administered by Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas. When his father died, Herod Antipas was given the mainly Jewish regions of Galilee and Perea to administer. (See the map in Appendix A in the back of the book.) Galilee was densely populated but Perea had fewer people.

Antipas was a strong supporter of Rome. Like his father, he was known for his building projects. Antipas rebuilt the city of Sapphoris which the Romans had destroyed when the Galileans rebelled in 4 BC. It was built in Greek style as a strong fortress and restored as the capital of Galilee. Since Sapphoris was only a few kilometers away from Nazareth, and since Joseph was a carpenter, some scholars speculate

that Joseph would have been involved in rebuilding this city. No doubt Jesus would have gone there for market. Antipas also built a new city near the Sea of Galilee and called it Tiberias after the Roman emperor and made it the capital for a short period of time. But the Jews would not live there because the city was built on top of a graveyard which made the city ritually unclean for them. Both cities reflected Greek culture. Even though they were the governmental centers, we never read of Jesus visiting these two cities. Rather, he focused his ministry in the smaller towns of Galilee.

Galilee was surrounded by Gentiles and so it was sometimes called "Galilee of the Gentiles." (Is. 9:1) Originally Galilee was filled with Gentiles and Jews. But after it was conquered by the Hasmoneans about 140 years before the birth of Jesus, it seems that many Jews from Judea, including Joseph's and Mary's families, migrated there. Mary's cousin, the mother of John the Baptist, still lived in Judea. And Joseph must have still owned land in Judea so he had to go to Bethlehem to be registered in order to pay taxes. During the 140 years after the conquest of the Hasmoneans, the Galileans became very pro-Jewish, wanting to follow the Old Testament laws and live independently of Rome. More strongly than other areas they seemed to have longed for the coming of the Messiah. During the years before and after Jesus, there were several from Galilee who claimed to be that messiah and people quickly gathered around them to fight the Romans. But they were always disappointed and lots of people died in failed attempts to gain independence. But when the real Messiah was born in their midst, because he was not a military-type of leader who delivered them from Roman captivity, they had a hard time believing that he was the real Messiah.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus ministered primarily in Herod Antipas' territory. John the Baptist's ministry was mainly in Perea, east of the Jordan River. That is where he baptized Jesus and others. And most of Jesus' public ministry was in Galilee. Herod Antipas fell under the control of a strong woman called Herodias who was married to Herod Antipas' half brother called Herod Philip. [Note: This is not the Herod Philip who was ruler of the territory northeast of Galilee, but another son who was also called Philip. He is sometimes called Herod Boethus. This means that Herodias married her uncle Herod Philip and then married another uncle, Herod Antipas.] (Mk. 6:17.) Herodias did not think her husband Boethus was ambitious enough, so she convinced Antipas to divorce his Nabatean princess wife. This angered John the Baptist who accused him of adultery. Herod had John the Baptist arrested around 32 AD and at the insistence of Herodias and her daughter Salome, he had John the Baptist beheaded. The Nabatean (Arabs to the east of Galilee) king, angered by his daughter being divorced this way, attacked Antipas and would have defeated him had not the Romans intervened. Many years later, Herodias was still not satisfied with her husband's power and convinced him to ask the Romans for more territory. This angered the Roman emperor and he deposed Herod Antipas and sent Herod Antipas and Herodias into exile in a remote part of the Roman empire where they died.

RULE OF HEROD PHILIP (4 BC – 34 AD)

Little is said in the New Testament about Herod Philip who was given several small predominately Gentile territories to the northeast of Galilee. (See the map in Appendix A at the back of the book.) That is because neither Jesus nor the apostles worked much in his territory. Herod Philip enlarged two cities, Caesarea Philippi and Bethsaida, which Jesus visited on a couple of occasions. Bethsaida was close to Capernaum, which was Jesus headquarters and just inside Philip's territory. Jesus did miracles some miracles there. (Mk. 8:22-26) And Caesarea Philippi, in the northern part of Philip's territory, was where Peter made his pronouncement that he believed Jesus was the Son of God. (Mt. 16:13-17) When the major Jewish war in 66 AD began, many Christian Jews moved into this territory to flee the persecution from the

non-Christian Jews and the Jewish war with Rome. Because there were few Jews living in this territory, these territories did not get caught up in the Jewish struggles against Rome.

Q. 4. Read Acts 1:6-7. a) What did the disciples ask Jesus? b) Read Lk. 17:21, Mt. 13:31-33. What did Jesus explain his kingdom was like?

THE POLITICAL CLIMATE DURING THE DAYS OF JESUS

Starting from 6 AD when Jesus was a boy of about 10, there was growing opposition to the Roman occupation. More and more Jews were looking for a Messiah who would deliver them from Roman rule. And there were often rebel leaders who claimed to be the Messiah and people would gather around them and try to fight against Rome. The Jews were longing for another leader like the Maccabees to overcome Gentile occupation and bring them independence once again. Rome usually responded harshly, killing all involved, destroying their villages, and taking most of the people as slaves. After he did miracles, Jesus was often pushed to publicly start the resistance against Rome. Even his disciples expected Jesus to start an earthly kingdom. But he always resisted because his goal was to start a spiritual kingdom instead.

There were two major wars by the Jews against the Romans. The first was from 66-70 AD. In 66 AD, the Jews were initially able to overcome the Romans in territories like Galilee and Judea. But slowly the Romans were able to regain control. In Galilee the Roman soldiers quickly overpowered the rebellion with great cruelty. In some areas not one male was allowed to live. Over 50,000 people were killed, and at least as many people were sent into slavery to other countries. Having quickly recaptured all of Galilee and Samaria, the war centered in Jerusalem where a long bitter struggle with thousands of deaths resulted. In 70 AD, the Romans captured Jerusalem, reduced the Temple to rubble, even breaking down the stone walls. Sacrifices which had been offered for over 500 years stopped, and until today the Jews have no temple in which to sacrifice according to the Old Testament practices. (Note: The only sign of the Temple today is one of the outside walls. Jews go there to pray and weep- so it has become known as the "wailing wall." A mosque is built on the site where the Temple once stood.) One fortress called Masada was able to resist the Romans for three more years. In the end, rather than being taken captive by the Romans, every person in the fortress committed suicide.

During this war and afterward, the Jews' hatred of Jewish Christians increased. Because the Christians would not join in the rebellion against Rome, they were persecuted. Just before the war started in 66 AD, most of the Jewish Christians left Judea and moved to other areas like Perea or moved to other countries. Soon these Jewish Christians were no longer allowed to come into the synagogue and throughout the Roman Empire, Jews encouraged the Gentiles to persecute Christians.

In 132 AD, the Jews revolted against Romans for the second time. They captured Jerusalem and briefly established a Jewish state. The leader was called "Messiah" by some Jews. For three years a bitter war was fought with Rome. When the Romans retook Jerusalem, they completely destroyed it. The Romans expelled all Jews from Jerusalem, killing any Jew who dared to return. Jerusalem was rebuilt as a Gentile city. Until 1940 EC, there was no Jewish state.

Q. 5. a) Summarize the political climate during the days of Jesus. b) In what way would people long for a political king?

INTERNAL LEADERSHIP OF THE JEWS

For the Jews there was no separation between politics and religion. The leaders were often the same and the constitution was basically the Old Testament laws. How the Jews were administered in ancient times more closely resembles how Ethiopia was governed in ancient Ethiopia when the king of Ethiopia and the patriarch of the Orthodox church worked closely together. The king sought to influence the church and the church tried to influence the king. If we want to understand Jesus and his times, we must realize that there was a close relationship between religion and politics.

So far we have only been looking at political leadership from an external political perspective. We have seen how Rome and the Herods controlled the Jews and influenced the way the Jews lived during the times of Jesus. Today we will study how the internal politics and leadership of the Judea impacted the Jews and Jesus.

1. Types of leaders during the days of Jesus

a. Political leaders:

1) Roman leadership: The ultimate rulers of Palestine were the Romans. During Jesus' times, the Romans placed a governor in Caesarea which was about 95 kilometers by road from Jerusalem. (See map in Appendix A at the back of the book.) In most everyday matters, ordinary Jews saw little evidence of Roman domination. However they were constantly reminded that they were under the occupation of Rome in three ways. First, they knew from bitter experience that the Romans were carefully watching the events in Palestine and would punish them severely if there were any signs of rebellion. One person has estimated that between 67 BC to 37 BC alone over 150,000 Jews died by Roman hands. There were no doubt thousands more who died between 37 BC and 30 AD when Jesus lived and died. Just before the birth of Jesus, the Romans were killing so many people that Herod the Great said "Will the Romans deprive the city of people and let me rule over a wilderness?" Second, there was the constant reminder that Rome was ruling because there was a yearly need to pay taxes and the hated tax collectors were constantly traveling throughout the towns collecting taxes. Finally, Rome ruled by interfering in local politics. They could remove both political and religious leaders when they were not pleased with them. So the Romans deposed Archelaus as well as replaced the high priests frequently

2) Regional political leaders: Rome ruled "through" local leaders. Scholars call this style of government "client-king" leadership. Ancient empires functioned much differently from how nations are governed today. When Menelik conquered different kings in Ethiopia, his goal was to bring all of the different people groups under direct administrative control of a centralized government. So he sent his representatives throughout Ethiopia to administer the affairs on his behalf. But when ancient nations captured new countries, they usually did not try to turn the empire into one unified country. Rather, they maintained many small nations under one large empire. After Herod the Great died, Galilee was ruled by his son, Herod Antipas. For most of Jesus' life, the political center of Galilee was only 5 kilometers away from the town of Nazareth in a town called Sepphoris.

In Judea, after 6 AD (when Jesus was about 10 years old), when Archelaus was deposed, Rome changed how it managed Palestine. It placed a governor in Palestine who was the absolute authority under the direct supervision of the Roman emperor and who worked on behalf of the Roman government. However, in most governmental affairs, the Roman governor left the decisions up to the high priest and

the Sanhedrin who were appointed to manage Judea on behalf of the Roman government. This style of government is called "temple-state" governance, or a religious country led by a religious leader and not a political leader.

Rome allowed local people to reign on their behalf as long as they did four things:

a. The leaders were responsible to keep people faithful to the empire. The Roman government would harshly punish the leaders and the people at any sign of rebellion. Rome, with only a few soldiers, was able to maintain control over vast areas by creating "fear" of what would happen if people rebelled. When there was any sign of rebellion in Galilee or Judea, the Roman government would send in soldiers from Syria. These soldiers would totally destroy villages that joined the rebellion. They would crucify the males old enough to fight so that all could see what happened when they rebelled. And they would take most of the people into slavery and send them to far off places like Greece. So it was not uncommon during the time of Jesus for whole villages to be taken by the Romans into slavery. When Jesus was just a child, over 30,000 people from Galilee were taken as slaves and never saw their families again.

Q. 6. How do you think watching the crucifixion of rebels and the enslavement of people would have impacted the Jews during Jesus' time?

b. The leaders were responsible to maintain peace in the region. Although the Roman government allowed some local fighting, if there was continual unrest in an area, they would appoint new leaders. So local rulers did all they could to maintain peace. One reason the Jewish leaders were so afraid of Jesus was because if people gathered around Jesus and fought Rome, they would be punished by Rome.

c. The leaders were responsible to make sure the people paid the taxes which the Romans demanded from the nation. One of the major reason one nation would conquer another nation was so that the empire could get money from taxes which they would use for their own benefit. And so when Rome conquered Palestine, they assessed a yearly tax upon the nation. The leaders were responsible to collect that tax and give it to Rome. If they did not pay all of the taxes, they were punished.

d. The people were required to worship the emperor as a "god." It was a common practice in ancient times to view the emperor as a representative of a "god" and therefore he was supposed to be worshipped as a god as a sign of allegiance to the emperor. To refuse to sacrifice to the emperor was seen as an act of rebellion against the empire. Although the Romans allowed the Jews to not do this as long as they offered a sacrifice to God on behalf of the emperor, there were frequent times that the Jews in Jerusalem reacted against things the Romans did, such as pictures of the emperor showing him as a god, which brought the Jews to the brink of war with Rome. Later, when the book of Revelation was written, because many Christians refused to sacrifice to the emperor, they suffered persecution.

Q. 7. Read Ex. 24:1; Num. 11:10-17. a) Whom did God give to help Moses in administering the Jews?
b) How many members were there?

3) The Sanhedrin: During the times of Moses, when he found it too difficult to lead all of the Israelites alone, God gave him 70 elders to help him in administration. This set the pattern for which the Jews after the Babylonian captivity used to administer the Jews. Jewish tradition says that Ezra re-

established this rulership by a group of elders. Eventually seventy men were assigned to assist the high priest in administering the Jews. (A total of 71 people.) Like a parliament, this group was called the "Sanhedrin." During the days of King Herod, the Sanhedrin had very little power and he executed several members of the Sanhedrin to keep the Sanhedrin from growing too strong. But when Rome took over administration of Judea and Samaria, the role of the Sanhedrin was enhanced.

During the days of Jesus, the Sanhedrin was the "spiritual" authority over all Jews throughout the Roman empire. So they could make decisions about religious matters which all Jews were expected to follow. And it was like a Supreme Court which judged serious matters like whether someone was a false prophet. (See Acts 9:1-2.) They were also the political leaders of the province of Judea and Samaria. The Roman governor in Caesarea delegated the handling of normal administrative matters in Judea and Samaria to this administrative body.

Q. 8. Read Mt. 16:21; Mk. 14:53. a) What are the three types of people Jesus prophesied would kill him? Look at the following verses: Mt. 26:57-6; Jn. 11:47, Jn. 18:13. b) Who were responsible to bring judgment against Jesus?

During the days of Jesus, the Sanhedrin was made up of three different groups of people.

First, there were the chief priests. This included the high priest who was the chairman of the Sanhedrin, the administrative head of the Temple, and other key family members from the major priestly families. This group was the most powerful group in the Sanhedrin and belonged to the Sadducee party.

Second, there were the "elders." These elders were the heads of the rich families of Jerusalem and Judea and were also mainly members of the Sadducee party. Therefore, most of the members on the Sanhedrin were Sadducees. As often happens when leadership is based upon family descent and money, these elders tended to be partial to the rich in their judgments, allowing the abuse of the poor to continue.

Third, there were the "scribes" or the "teachers of the law." These scribes were the experts in interpreting the Old Testament laws and were trained in law. Although some of the scribes were from the Sadducee party, the majority were Pharisees.

The full Sanhedrin met in a hall in the Temple district and all of the members would only meet occasionally when there were key judicial or administrative matters to discuss. As judges, they met whenever a major judgment was needed, like the execution of Jesus or when someone was accused of being a false prophet. It was to this High Court that Jesus and later Stephen were taken and both were declared guilty and given death sentences. (Mk. 14:53; Acts 6:12)

4) The town elders: Each community was empowered to handle most of the local administrative matters. These local communities were administered by elders who were usually the leading heads of key families in the community. Often these elders were also the leaders of the local synagogue.

b. Religious leaders: Similar to the times of Menelik and Haile Selassie when the Orthodox Church leaders were able to influence politics, in the same way, the high priest and his family was able to greatly influence the politics of Judea and to a lesser extent Galilee. The Romans set up Judea as a "temple-state"

or a religious state. Therefore they placed the general administration of the Jews under the control of the high priest.

There were four types of religious leaders during Jesus' days:

1) The high priest: The high priest was the most important person in Israel in the eyes of the Jews. The Jews looked at the high priest as a representative of God. Although the Jews were forced to listen to political leaders, they turned to the high priest for actual leadership. When the high priest was not able to control the people or became too powerful, the Romans would often remove him and appoint someone else from his extended family as high priest. The high priest usually belonged to the Sadducee party. (We will study about the Sadducees tomorrow.) This meant that he was a descendant of the wealthy nobility.

The high priest had both religious and political responsibilities. He was the religious leader of Jewish worship and officiated over the worship and sacrifices on most holy days and the Sabbath. The high priest would go into the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement to gain forgiveness for the sins of the Jews. He also was the first to receive a portion from the offerings and tithes. The Jews carefully monitored the family line of the high priest to make sure that there was no Gentile blood or non-Levitic blood in his line. Sadly, the Jews placed great emphasis upon a high priest meeting external qualifications (e.g. a pure Jew from the line of Aaron who did not have any female in his line who had been divorced and remarried or a captive of war) rather than considering spiritual qualifications of loving God and living in holiness.

Q. 9. a) Describe how Christians today can also place more emphasis upon external qualifications of church leaders than in their level of spiritual maturity. b) How can this harm the church? c) Describe why spiritual qualifications are more important than external qualifications (e.g. education) for church leadership.

The high priest was also a political leader. He was responsible to manage all administrative matters for Judea and Samaria and was the chairman of the Sanhedrin, the high court of Jewish affairs. That is why Jesus was taken to the house of the high priest and from there to the Sanhedrin. (Jn. 18:12-14; Lk. 22:54; 22:66) Unfortunately the high priest would often focus more on political issues rather than on the spiritual leadership of the Jews.

The high priests jealously guarded their position as high priests even if it meant compromise with the Romans. Once in power, he would reward important leadership positions in the Temple and in government to his family. This of course caused jealousy with other priestly families. He would often abuse the authority of the high priesthood to become rich from his leadership position.

Q. 10. a) Describe how church leaders today can begin to act like these high priests and seek to get and maintain their position as church elders even if it means doing unspiritual things. b) How do church leaders also seek to use their leadership position to benefit themselves and their family? c) Read Mk. 10:35-45. Explain how the attitude towards leadership which Jesus taught is different from how the high priests and many church leaders treat leadership.

During the days of Jesus there were many conservative Jews who disliked the high priest for two reasons. They were disgusted with how the high priest focused more on politics and accommodating to

the Gentiles rather than keeping the pure worship of the Old Testament going. The high priest was also not zealous for God's laws or the traditions of the scribes. The common people preferred the "spirituality" which the Pharisees taught. There were times that when the high priest did not follow the procedures of the Pharisees in how they offered certain sacrifices, the people threw things at the high priest.

During the three years of Jesus' earthly ministry, the legal high priest was called Caiaphas. However, his father-in-law, Annas, who had served as high priest before the Romans deposed him, was viewed by the Jews and the Sanhedrin as the true high priest. That is why for Jesus' trial he was taken first to the house of Annas where he interviewed Jesus before taking Jesus before the official high priest, Caiaphas. (See Jn. 18:13-24)

2) The Priestly Aristocracy: Starting from shortly after Ezra's time, the family of the high priests became like ruling nobility. By the time of Jesus, most of the power was in the hands of four families of priests. It was from these key priestly families that high priests were chosen. Herod the Great and the Romans would appoint high priests from these priestly families who were submissive to them, replacing them frequently when they could no longer be trusted.

3) Ordinary Priests: Most of the religious and political power lay in the hands of the high priest and his family. But there were thousands of priests and Levites scattered throughout Judea and Galilee who played an important part in worship in the temple and in the synagogues. What type of ministry they had in the Temple was determined by lot. That is how Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was chosen to burn incense in the Temple when the angel appeared to him. (Lk. 1:8-11)

Priests lived in their home towns for most of the year and would travel to Jerusalem five times a year to work their shift in the Temple. At home, they had a secular job (e.g. farming, tent making) but often had some religious responsibilities in their towns. They would declare lepers clean, receive the people's tithe, help local elders in pronouncing a decision, and if trained as a scribe, taught in the synagogue and helped lead in local synagogue worship. These local priests were often very poor because most of the money received at the Temple was given to the high priest and his family. When the Jews rebelled against the high priest and Rome, many of these poor priests joined in the rebellion.

Unfortunately we face similar situations today. As churches build large buildings, purchase choir robes and musical instruments, often the evangelists live in poverty. When ministers in the church don't live at the same economic level as the members of their congregation, it becomes a temptation for the ministers to leave their service of God to look for other work. God's Word warns us against this by showing what happens to the ministry when people aren't paid enough (Neh. 13:10-13) and Paul commands that those who serve in the church receive sufficient money. (1 Tim. 5:17-18)

Q. 11. a) Explain why you think many young people do not want to minister in churches. If people do not want to serve God in their churches, do you think lack of sufficient pay is a reason? b) What is most of the tithe in your church being used on? Do you think the ministers in your church are sufficiently paid for their service? Explain your answer. c) What do you think would need to change in the church's attitude towards pay to make gifted men and women want to serve in our churches?

Q. 12. Read Ezra 7:10. a) How is Ezra described? Explain how God used him. b) Why is this type of character important for church leaders?

4) The Scribes: After the captivity in Babylon, a new type of religious leader started which was unknown in the Old Testament. Like Ezra, these religious leaders were known for studying the Old Testament law, obeying it, and teaching it to other Jews. They became the theological scholars and lawyers of the nation of Judah. When Judah was sent into captivity in 586 BC, several things happened which caused the position of scribal religious leaders to begin.

First, most of the people, including the priests, no longer understood Hebrew (the language of the Jews in the Old Testament) and could not read God's Word for themselves. This is similar to how few Ethiopians today can read Geez and read the Bible with understanding in that language. So people like Ezra who knew Hebrew were needed to read and interpret God's Word into the language of the common people. (See Neh.8:1-8) Who better to know and interpret God's Word than the "scribes" who were responsible to make copies of the Law?

Second, the Jews could no longer worship in the Temple as they had before captivity. These scribes helped the Jews understand how they could worship God when there is no Temple in which to offer sacrifices. The Jews began to focus upon keeping the "laws" of the Old Testament rather than how to offer sacrifices. Worshipping God often became defined as keeping these laws. Professionals, called scribes, who understood the Old Testament laws developed.

Third, many of the Old Testament laws no longer directly applied to Jewish life. For instance, the Jews were living in many Gentile nations far away from Jerusalem, so how did the laws of visiting Jerusalem apply to them? Experts, like scribes, were needed to help Jews apply the Old Testament laws to their current living conditions. These scribes carefully applied the Old Testament laws in ways suited for new situations. These specific instructions were passed on throughout the generations and were called the "traditions of the elders." (Mt. 15:2)

Fourth, many priests had adjusted to Gentile living so that they no longer sought to understand and teach God's Word. But Jews who were serious about following the law of God determined to study it for themselves, even though they might not be from a priestly line. People then asked them for advice since they were the experts in the Old Testament. So scribes were no longer limited to those who were priests.

Unlike the high priest or political leaders, a person did not become a scribe by being born into a certain family or tribe. Rather, a person became a scribe through study. So any Jew could become a scribe. However, most of the key scribes were also from the priestly line of Levi and Aaron.

In order to become a scribe, an individual would join himself as a disciple to a famous scribe. One of the most famous scribes in Jesus and the apostles' time was Gamaliel. Paul left his home town in Tarsus (in modern day Turkey) and traveled to Jerusalem to study under him. (Acts 22:2-3) Each student wanting to become a scribe would live with an approved scribe who would teach him how to interpret the law. Often this included learning the different interpretations which had been passed down through the centuries. After several years of study under the scribe, the student slowly began to make personal decisions on questions of religious issues, but was still not officially a "scribe." Only after he was 40 years old and had proven himself qualified in understanding the traditions of the past and how to interpret God's law was he formally recognized to be a scribe and called "rabbi" which means teacher. (Note: Our modern day equivalent to the scribe in our churches are those trained in theology at schools like the Evangelical Theological College, Makene Jesus Seminary, or Evangelical Graduate School of Theology.) Most of the

scribes were Pharisees, but the Sadducees had scribes as well. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, these scribes became the religious leaders of the Jews and formed what is known as "Judaism," the worship system of the Jews which many Jews practice today.

These scribes had three major ministries.

First, the scribes preserved the laws of Moses and their interpretations. The scribes made new copies of the Old Testament. (Note: In those days there were no printing presses to make many copies of the Bible. Rather, copies were carefully copied by hand.) But these scholars also carefully studied the Old Testament and all of the historical understandings of how the laws were to be interpreted. By the time of Jesus the interpretations were being written down and today are used by the Jews as commentaries used alongside the Old Testament Scriptures.

Second, they were the teachers of the law. After they were designated as "scribes" they would often have groups of students whom they would teach. And they also taught in the local synagogues.

Third, they were also lawyers. The government leaders would ask the scribes for advice on how to apply certain Old Testament teachings. They were even given advisory positions in the government, pronouncing judgment over issues based upon what the traditions of the elders taught. Some of the most famous scribes were part of the Sanhedrin, the High Court of the Jewish nation. This is probably how Paul became a member of the Sanhedrin. (Acts 26:10-11)

Many scribes were very zealous about guarding the law and strongly resisted any attempt by Jews to disobey any of the laws of the Old Testament. And in order to make sure people knew how to apply the laws, they would make specific rules about how to apply the law. For instance, although the Old Testament taught that they were not to work on the Sabbath, it did not define everything that was considered "work." These scribes carefully determined what was to be classified as work- how far they could walk, how much they could carry, etc. Over time the specific applications of these scribes were seen as authoritative as God's written word. Jesus would often clash with these scribes when he refused to obey the man-made rules of the scribes. (Mk. 7:5-13)

Q. 13. Read Mt. 23:1-32. a) Describe the attitude that the scribes developed because they were respected by people. b) Summarize the reasons why Jesus spoke out against the scribes.

Once a person was an ordained scribe, he was highly honored by the people. Because they were usually not paid for their ministry, they also had other work. Like often happens, what started as a very important ministry of understanding God's Word and teaching it to people, Satan used it to cause pride. It was not long until these scribes drifted away from their important ministry and began to abuse it. Several things happened. First, the scribes began to focus more on their interpretations than upon God's written law. So when Jesus did not obey their traditions and interpretations of the law, they became very angry. Second, they enjoyed the respect and recognition of being the educated elite and being called "rabbi." They wore special clothes, were given special seats in the synagogues, etc. This increased their pride. Third, they were willing to manipulate situations for those who paid them. So they often sided with the rich and not the poor in their judgments. Fourth, they carefully protected their religious power by making sure the Old Testament and their commentaries expressing their interpretations were not available to common people. They believed common people were not holy enough to see their books, or they believed common

people would misuse some of the teachings, or did not know the oral teachings of the fathers. To maintain their power over people, they hid this knowledge from the common people so that people were forced to come to them for a ruling on a law. This guaranteed the scribes good places of work and the continued respect of the people.

Q. 14. a) Explain why well-trained theologians are important for the church today. b) Describe how it is easy for theologically trained people to develop a similar attitude as the scribes of Jesus' days had.

Q. 15. a) Summarize the Jewish political and religious leaders' understanding of leadership. What problems did it cause ordinary people? b) Read Lk. 22:24-28. What did Jesus say leadership in his spiritual kingdom was to be like? c) Explain how this was different from what the high priest and other leaders demonstrated in their leadership? d) Think about leadership in your church. Is it more like the leadership of the high priest and scribes during the days of Jesus or like how Jesus described leadership should be like? Explain your answer.

SECOND DAY

Q. 16. Read Luke 20:27; 11:37-44; Mk. 3:6. a) Make a list of different groups who are mentioned. b) Explain some things that each group believed. c) List five different types of "denominations" found in Christianity in Ethiopia today.

Often when we go to a wedding, there is a "buffet" where there are many choices of food. Each person can choose the types of food he likes and leave the food he does not want. During the times of Jesus, life for people living in the Roman empire was much the same. There were many different philosophies which educated people followed. And there were also many different religions that people could choose to believe. This was true not only among the Gentiles, but among the Jews as well. Because of the influence of Greek culture in Palestine, many of the religions found among the Gentiles could also be found in Palestine, especially in the Greek-styled cities scattered throughout Judea and Galilee. Jesus spent very little time ministering in these Greek-styled cities so he was not often confronted with the different religions of the Gentile world. He would have seen pagan temples in cities like Sepphoris which was only a few kilometers from his home town of Nazareth. But even within Judaism there were many different types of understandings of religion. Some Jews adjusted their understandings to what the Greeks believed as much as possible without totally renouncing their faith in the one God. Other Jews strongly resisted adjusting their culture and religion to the Greek and Roman beliefs. As often happens when beliefs are similar and yet different, there were many arguments and struggles between different factions of Jews.

Q. 17. How is this similar to Christianity today?

GENTILE RELIGIONS

For hundreds of years, religion among the Gentiles was stable as each people group held their own cultural worship system. So the Romans would worship in one way, the Greeks in another, the Persians in still a different way, and the Egyptians in their own way as well. But when the Greek and then the Roman Empire spread across many different nations and cultures, various religions began to mix. During the times of Jesus and the apostles, the following Gentile religions held great influence among many people, even the Jews in Palestine.

1. Greek and Roman religion: Except for the Jews, all religions of the ancient world believed that there were many gods. The world of the gods was often patterned after the world of humans. So the Greek gods had a "king" called Zeus and a "queen" called Hera. Each major aspect of life had its own god. There was a sun god and a female goddess of love and fertility. Like the world of humans, the gods fought, had sexual relations, etc. By the time of Jesus, it was primarily the uneducated people who still believed in these beliefs. Educated Greeks and Romans still sacrificed to these gods in the temples, but did not pay much attention to them. Scattered throughout Palestine were Greek cities with temples for various gods. It was a temptation for many Jews to want to be "modern" and worship in these temples with their Greek friends.

2. Mystery religions: During the time of Jesus and the apostles, there was a great variety of religions which emphasized secret societies where people had to learn secret knowledge to join each group. Once they were part of the group, then they were said to have full knowledge of the gods. Often these mystery religions would start with a strong leader and only certain people were allowed to join after they had careful teaching of the hidden knowledge. Paul, writing to Gentiles, would later insist that in Christ was hidden all of God's wisdom (Col. 2:1-3) which was openly proclaimed and available to all people.

3. Gnostic religion: Starting about the time of Jesus and for the next two hundred years, one of the major philosophies/religions which would impact the Gentile world was called "Gnosticism," the Greek word for "knowledge" in Greek. Several of the New Testament books (e.g. Colossians, John, 1 John) addressed some early forms of Gnostic teachings. Gnostics believed that only the spirit world (and the spiritual part of man) was good and important. The visible world was evil. Some Gnostics believed they should have as little to do with the visible world as possible. They would not marry, dressed in poor clothing, ate only simple food like vegetables, etc. They thought that by not satisfying their physical appetites they were spiritual. Other Gnostics taught that since their physical nature was unimportant and God was only concerned with their spiritual nature, as long as they worshipped correctly, it did not matter how they lived. Therefore they were able to freely fulfill their sexual and physical appetites without any restrictions, which led to gross immorality.

4. Emperor worship: By the time of Jesus, most Gentiles, especially those living in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, believed that the Roman emperor was a "god." So they would offer sacrifices to him. This practice became closely associated with maintaining allegiance to the emperor. To refuse to sacrifice to the emperor was seen as rebellion. By the time of Domitian, the Roman emperor when the book of Revelation was written, all people had to offer this sacrifice. Because Christians would not offer sacrifices to the Emperor, they were severely persecuted and many believers died for their faith. The book of Revelation was written to encourage Christians to stand firm in spite of persecution.

This variety of religions caused many Gentiles to begin to question their historical beliefs and look for something that was "true." Many were attracted to Judaism and its focus upon one God and moral living. So sometimes Gentiles would become Jews through the act of circumcision and following the Old Testament laws. Other Gentiles would not be circumcised, but honored the God of the Old Testament. They were known as "god-fearers." Christianity found a receptive audience among these god fearing Gentiles. (See Acts 10:1-2)

Q. 18. a) List some non-Christian religions in Ethiopia that tempt believers to renounce their true faith in Jesus. What tempts believers to follow these religions? b) What are some false Christian sects which also tempt believers to follow false teachings? Why do many Christians accept their false teachings?

JEWISH RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Just as the Gentile world was filled with a variety of understandings about religion and worship, so also the Jewish world was filled with different understandings about how to worship God. Some Jews sought to integrate their beliefs as much as possible with some of the Gentile understandings of religion. Many Jews living in Galilee and Judea had learned to adjust to Greek way of life while also seeking to be good Jews. For other Jews there was a growing desire to maintain their distinct beliefs and lifestyles as Jews.

1. Beliefs held by the majority of Jews

During the time of Jesus, the Jews had a great diversity of beliefs. Some believed there were no angels, demons, or a resurrection. (e.g. Sadducees) Others (e.g. Pharisees) focused on angels, demons, and the resurrection of people. Some believed that only the first five books of Moses were God's Word, but others believed that that all of the books of the Old Testament were inspired by God. In the midst of this great diversity, however, there were some basic beliefs that the majority of Jews held in common. (Note: Jews during the days of Jesus were much less interested in right beliefs (correct theology) than they were upon correct living. And so even though a person might not have a similar belief about the resurrection, as long as they kept the "purity" laws, then they could live together in peace.)

The Jews strongly believed that there is only one God, Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although before they were sent into captivity in 586 BC many Jews fell into the sin of idolatry, after their time of captivity, most Jews were strongly monotheistic. They also began to emphasize the greatness of God. They would no longer say God's special name "Yahweh." Instead, they would use words like "heaven" or "name." And the titles "God of heaven" or "Most High God" became their favorite titles of God. For many Jews God became remote and no longer seemed loving and merciful.

The Jews believed they alone had a special relationship with God. Even though compared to the great nations of the world like Rome they might seem unimportant, they believed that they were the most important people, for God had specifically chosen them. When Paul insisted that God equally loved the Gentiles, this brought a strong reaction from the Jews. (See Acts 13:44-51; 22:21-22) Jews were careful to only marry other Jews because they wanted to maintain their pure race.

Jews believed the books we call the Old Testament was God's inspired Word. Although the Jews did not formally state that all 39 books of the Old Testament were God's Word until after 100 AD, by the time of Jesus, most of the books of the Old Testament were deemed to be God's Word by the majority of people. (The Sadducees believed that only these five books were inspired.) To the Jews, the most important part of the Old Testament was the first five books written by Moses which they believed came directly from God. In order to protect themselves from disobeying the laws found in the books of Moses and in order to understand how the laws were to be applied in specific situations, scribes gave specific interpretations and applications for these laws. These regulations made by the scribes often became as important as the Bible.

The Jews believed that the land of Palestine had been given to them by God. Therefore to be controlled by the Gentile nations like Rome went against God's will for them and had to be resisted. Although the Jews tolerated the control of Gentile nations, they strongly felt that they alone had the right to the land of Palestine and were often ready to fight to return Palestine to their control. The Jews during Jesus' time looked back to the Maccabean rebellion as a model for how they would throw off the Roman control.

The center of Jewish religion was the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews did worship in synagogues, but these did not replace the Temple as the place where God was supposed to be truly worshipped. Only in the Temple could sacrifices be offered for the sins. Just like Muslims pray towards Mecca, Jews would pray towards the Temple. Every Jew, no matter where he lived, would support worship in the Temple by sending money for the upkeep of the Temple. If at all possible, a Jew would travel to Jerusalem to worship each year to attend at least one of three major religious holy days.

The Jews' relationship with God was primarily defined by a life-style that demonstrated that they were different from other people. The Jews believed that God had given specific regulations on how they were to live as the distinct people of God. To them, the major thing that indicated that they were God's people was not only keeping the 613 commands found in the Hebrew Scriptures, but also the many regulations designed by the scholars to show how the Jews could live in a God-honoring way. One scholar says that the three practices which indicated they were true Jews were 1) keeping of the dietary rules (e.g. not eating unclean animals like pig); 2) observing the Sabbath as a day of no work; and 3) circumcision of Jewish males.

Most Jews believed that one day there would come one or more "messiahs" who would deliver them. There would be a "son of David" who would bring political deliverance from the Gentiles and initiate a great time of material blessing for the Jews. Others believed there would be a priestly messiah who would restore pure worship among God's people. But no one expected a messiah who would come and die for their sins. When Jesus did not fit their understanding of a messiah who would bring either political deliverance or pure worship, most Jews turned against Jesus.

Q. 19. Compare the beliefs of the Jews to how your church believes. What things are similar? What things are different?

2. Sadducees: The religious/political party of the rich

Remember that in Israel religion and politics were intertwined. So the leaders of the Jewish religion were also the political leaders. During the days of Jesus, the ones who controlled both religion and politics were called "Sadducees." No one knows where the name "Sadducee" came from. Some scholars believe it came from the name "Zadok" to refer to the official high priestly line of Zadok who controlled the high priesthood from the days of David until the time of the Maccabees. Others believe the name comes from the Hebrew word for "righteous" to reflect their strict adherence to Old Testament laws. This is more likely. The Sadducees were known for being very strict and legalistic. They focused upon law and order and strictly punished anyone who disobeyed the Old Testament laws.

Jewish history first mentions the Sadducees around 144 BC and they are always linked with the rich noble families of Israel. Although few in number, they were able to manipulate things so that they were usually in political power. They were closely aligned with the Hasmonean leaders who encouraged the spread of Hellenism. When Rome took over administration of Judea, the Sadducees again gained political

influence. They would usually resist any attempt by a Jew to rebel against Rome for they knew that this would bring the Roman anger not only against Jerusalem, but against them for not keeping the people in submission to Rome. When war broke out against Rome in 66 AD, the common people quickly got rid of the Sadducee high priest. When the Jews were defeated in 70 AD and the Jewish nation in Judea disbanded, the Sadducees were punished by the Romans and they disappeared from history. It was their enemies, the Pharisees, who continued to influence Judaism so that most of modern Judaism is based upon the Pharisee understanding of religion.

The Sadducee party was usually controlled by the ruling priestly families. The high priest and his family and the majority of the Sanhedrin belonged to the Sadducee party. Leadership and usually membership in the Sadducee party was hereditary, passed on from father to son. Although they enjoyed political power, the Sadducees were not liked by the common people because they supported the rich who often abused the poor and did not demonstrate a type of "spirituality" respected by the common people.

The Sadducees believed the following:

- a. Only the first five books of Moses were inspired by God. And only what was written in those five books was supposed to be carefully followed. The teachings of the scribes did not have to be obeyed.
- b. All who did not obey the written commands were to be strictly punished.
- c. Although they believed in God, they emphasized the role of humans in determining what happens in the world.
- d. They taught that there was no spirit world so they did not think there were angels and demons. Nor did they believe in the resurrection of the dead or in a future day of judgment. Rather, they believed that the soul went to Sheol and then ceased to exist.
- e. Because they did not believe in the resurrection and future judgment by God, gaining the benefits of this world was priority for most Sadducees. So they sought to become rich and enjoy positions of power and wealth. From the days of the Hasmoneans until the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the high priesthood was controlled by the Sadducees.

Q. 20. a) Describe how many Christians can begin to live as if what matters most is gaining material blessings. b) If we truly believed that there will be the resurrection from the dead and the judgment of God, describe how Christians would live differently.

There is no record in the New Testament of any Sadducee being supportive of Jesus or Christians. They were always a source of persecution against Christians. (See Mt. 16:1-12; Acts 5:17-18.)

3. The Pharisees: This popular religious party emphasized strictly keeping the Old Testament laws and traditions of the elders

Although the Pharisees rarely enjoyed formal political leadership, most Israelites looked to the Pharisees as the model of what it meant to be a spiritual person who followed God. So the Pharisees enjoyed a lot of respect and popular support, and could influence political life through their ability to

influence the populace. Their influence in religious practices was so strong that the Sadducee high priest was often forced to follow the Pharisaic understandings of worship in the Temple. Both before and during the time of Jesus, the Sadducees and the Pharisees were bitter enemies.

Scholars are not sure when and how the Pharisee party started. Most likely they originated from a group of people called the "Hasidim" (which means "pious ones") who were in Palestine during the time of the Hasmoneans. The Hasidim Jews strongly supported the Jewish religion, culture, and traditions and strongly resisted the influence of Hellenism. They were willing to die rather than do anything that went against their understanding of the Old Testament laws. When the Maccabees rebelled against Syria, the Hasidim joined the Maccabees in the rebellion. However, once the Maccabees (Hasmoneans) came to power and began to adapt Hellenistic practices, the Hasidim separated themselves from the Maccabees. About this time the formal "Hasidim" party ended. It seems that the Hasidim split into two parties. One party became the Pharisees and the other party became the Essenes.

The name Pharisee means "separate ones." They were called this because they separated themselves from the Maccabees who no longer followed the strict interpretation of the Old Testament laws. And they separated themselves from the common people who could not live according to their strict understandings of Pharisaic beliefs. The Pharisees saw themselves as the true Israelites or the holy remnant of Israel. Many of the original Pharisees were priests who resisted the tendency by the high priest to adapt to the Hellenistic culture. But non-priests also joined the Pharisees. At the time of Jesus, it is estimated that there were about 6,000 Pharisees, many of whom lived in communities which were scattered throughout Judea.

When a person wanted to join the Pharisee party, there would be a trial period of up to a one year. The individual had to show that he was able to follow the many ritual laws which the Pharisees practiced. At the end of the trial period, the person would take an oath before a scribe to follow all of the rules of the community. Usually the person who joined the Pharisees would then study under a famous scholar like Gamaliel, who taught the Apostle Paul. Pharisees often wore large boxes on their foreheads which contained Scripture verses. And they had special clothes with long tassels at the bottom.

The Pharisees are known for the following:

a. They were very zealous for the keeping of the Old Testament law. Whereas the Sadducees applied laws of purity found in the book of Leviticus (Lev. 11-15) only to the priests, the Pharisees sought to apply all regulations, even those given to priests, to all Jews. They did not emphasize internal spirituality but external actions which they felt demonstrated their purity. (Neh. 10:29-30) They viewed the Old Testament laws like a legal code which the Jews had to carefully follow. As part of their desire to totally obey the Old Testament laws, their scribes would outline ways to specifically apply the general laws of the Old Testament to every possible situation the Jews would find themselves living in. So they had thousands of oral laws and traditions passed down from their forefathers which they also sought to obey. For instance, where the Old Testament said not to work on the Sabbath, the Pharisees made up added regulations specifying how to obey this command. So they taught that travel of one kilometer was not work, but two kilometers was. When this type of command became too hard to obey, they would let people carry dirt the day before for the first kilometer. Since that dirt was the person's "land," the first kilometer did not count and the person could walk for another kilometer from where he put the dirt. So the Pharisees made up thousands of this type of laws. They tended to focus their teachings upon how to keep ritually pure,

keeping the Sabbath and on tithing. (See Mk. 7:1-8 where the Pharisees reacted to Jesus' refusal to obey their washing regulations.) Eventually these added regulations became as important to the Jews as the Scriptures themselves.

Jesus often clashed with the Pharisees because he did not focus on these regulations but on more important truths like loving God and each other or living in justice. Although the Pharisees were commendable in their desire to want to fully obey God's commands, their focus on obeying external rules rather than examining their internal attitudes and motives, led to a religion of external actions, but no relationship with God in their hearts. They would often become proud of their ability to obey many laws, looking down on the common people who did not follow all of the rules which they kept. Today, Judaism, the religion of conservative Jews, is based upon many of these teachings of the Pharisees of Jesus' time.

Q. 21. a) Describe how it is easy for evangelical Christians to focus more on external man-made rules than upon the condition of a person's heart relationship with God. b) List some rules evangelical Christians view as indications of spirituality. c) Describe how we can too can focus upon external regulations (e.g. "do not smoke") more than on the major teachings of the Bible (e.g. "love one another," "do justice and mercy").

b. The Pharisees believed that all 39 books of the Jewish Scriptures were God's Word, not just the first five books of Moses. Unfortunately they often focused more upon the traditions taught by scholars than (they did) on what God's Word said.

c. The Pharisees thought that God was actively involved in human history. They focused upon the sovereignty of God, often putting the blame on God for the wrong actions of people. They taught that people had little freedom to choose to do something.

d. The Pharisees believed that God would raise people from the dead and judge them based upon how they lived their lives while on earth.

e. The Pharisees were fascinated with teachings about angels and demons. Some of the Pharisees would go around and try to cast demons out of people. So after seeing Jesus do miracles, they assumed the power came from Satan.

f. The Pharisees believed that a messiah would come from the line of David who would defeat the enemies of the Jews and start a kingdom on earth.

g. The Pharisees were active in society and politics. They sent out Pharisees as evangelists, seeking to win Jews and even Gentiles to follow God's Word and their regulations. They often sent members throughout Judea and Galilee to teach people about God's commands. The Pharisees also sought to have an influence in politics. Unlike the Sadducees, they were not so much interested in being political leaders so that they could gain wealth and political power. Rather their desire was to reform Israel so that the people would obey God's Word rather than follow the practices of the Gentiles.

In the Gospels and the book of Acts, Jesus and the Apostles received different types of responses from the Pharisees. The teachings of Jesus were closer to what the Pharisees believed than what the Sadducees believed. And some of the Pharisees, like Nicodemus, were willing to meet with Jesus (Jn 3)

and some invited him to meals in their homes. (Lk. 7:36-39) But many Pharisees were angry when Jesus did not follow the many regulations taught by the scribes which were outside of the Bible. Jesus severely accused the Pharisees of so focusing upon the externals of following their regulations that they neglected the major teachings of God's Word on love, mercy, and justice. (Lk. 11:37-44) During the times of the apostles, some of the Pharisees were attracted to Christianity and put their faith in Jesus. (Acts 15:5) But at other times the Pharisees helped instigate persecution against the Christians. (e.g. Paul) After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the attitude of the Pharisees hardened so strongly against the Jewish Christians that they expelled them from their synagogues and wrote into their Sabbath ritual a "curse" upon anyone who claimed that Jesus is the Messiah.

4. The Essenes: The religious group who separated from society

Although the Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament, they were well-known during the times of Jesus. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees, we don't know when this religious group started. Their name means "pious ones." Some scholars believe that the Essenes started about the same time as the Pharisees and were initially part of the "Hasidim." It could be that around 140 BC, when the Zadok High priest was replaced with a Hasmonean high priest, that a Zadok priest started the Essenes. One of their largest communities was called Qumran which was discovered by archaeologists in Israel close to the Dead Sea in 1949 AD.

Around the time of Jesus it is estimated that there were around 4,000 Essenes. Unlike the Pharisees who lived within Jewish society, the Essenes formed monasteries or small communities in the desert where they withdrew from society. Anyone could become a member of the Essenes. However, many of the members were priests who were not happy with both the spiritual and the political situation of the Jews. They believed that the Temple and its worship had become so corrupted that no one could worship God there. They were strongly against any accommodation to Greek and Roman culture.

When someone wanted to join the Essene community, there was a year long trial period when the person was taught the beliefs and practices of the Essenes. If the person passed, they would swear an oath that they would obey the regulations of the community and "hate" the evil people. Those living in the community did not own any property but shared all of their possessions. Anyone who did not obey their strict regulations was expelled from the community.

The goal of the Essenes was to establish "holy communities" of the "sons of light" as they called themselves. They believed that all others not part of their community were "sons of darkness." The Essenes looked forward to a time when God would supernaturally destroy all of the godless without any human fight. God would then work with them as the holy remnant community. The Essenes believed that there would be two Messiahs. There would be a political Messiah who would bring a righteous kingdom for the Jews. And there would also be religious Messiah from the line of Zadok who would introduce pure worship among God's people. The Essenes focused their religious practices on ritual purity with special daily washings which they believed would keep them free from sin. They were also very strict in the observance of the Sabbath.

Scholars debate how much of an influence the Essenes had upon Jesus and early Christianity. Although not mentioned in the Bible, they would have been well-known to Jesus and the apostles. John the Baptist lived and worked in the vicinity of Qumran, one of their largest communities, and some of his teaching resembles their beliefs. Could John's method of baptism have come from their practices? It is

unlikely. John's baptism was done only once whereas the Essenes "baptized" themselves daily. Rather than asking people to withdraw from society like the Essenes practiced, John the Baptist told people to live holy lives within their communities. Some of Jesus' teaching could reflect some Essene beliefs. For instance, Jesus also used the image of "light" and "darkness" (Jn. 3:16-21) and some of these teachings in the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt. 5-7) are similar to their teachings. But most of Jesus' teaching is different from what the Essenes believed and he attacked the legalistic teachings which the Essenes focused upon. Therefore Jesus did not seem to have been influenced much by them.

The Essene community of Qumran was abandoned during the Jewish war against Rome in 68 AD and this separate sect of Judaism stopped existing shortly afterwards.

Q. 22. a) Explain why it is a temptation for Christians to feel that we need to separate ourselves from non-believers and society in order to stay pure like the Essenes did. b) Why do people join monasteries in Ethiopia? c) Explain why some Christians want to leave their secular jobs and join a Christian organization or form Christian communities. How is this attitude similar to what the Essenes taught?

Christians often think that if we could only separate ourselves from unbelievers and their influence, we would live holy lives. Historically throughout Ethiopia (and Europe) people have withdrawn from society and moved into monasteries seeking to become more holy. Evangelicals are also tempted by this attitude. They often want to leave their secular jobs and join Christian organizations so that they will not be corrupted by the unbelievers or face the pressures of working alongside of unbelievers. Some evangelical Christians have sought land from the government together so that they can try to form small communities of believers. Or some believers spend all of their time in church meetings so that they have no time to be involved in the society around them. But this attitude goes against what God desires. Jesus called us "salt" and "light". (Mt. 5:13-16) We only demonstrate our light to a world in darkness or our being salt if we are living in society where we can show people what it is to live in a God-honoring way. Be careful of having the attitude of the Essenes!

POLITICAL-ORIENTED JEWISH GROUPS

Q. 23. Read Mk. 3:6; 12:13. a) What groups are mentioned here? b) What attitude did they have towards Jesus? c) What did they seek to do to Jesus?

1. The Herodians: The party who supported the continued rule of the family of Herod

The Gospels mention a group of people called the Herodians. (Mk. 12:13) We know little about them, but their name indicates that they supported the continued rule of the family of Herod. These were Jews who were probably related to the family dynasty of Herod and wanted to keep Herod's family controlling the events in Palestine. So they sought to get Judea and Samaria placed under the family of Herod once again. It seems they were centered in Galilee and were seeking to get Herod Antipas' control over Palestine increased to include all of the territories of his father Herod the Great. They were supportive of living under Roman rule as long as a descendant of Herod was the immediate head of Palestine. It is interesting that in the Gospels, the Pharisees joined with the Herodians to attack Jesus. Whereas the Pharisees were concerned about the religious implications of Jesus' ministry, the Herodians probably saw Jesus' popularity in Galilee as a threat to the rule of Herod Antipas. If Jesus was honored as the Messiah, then the Herod line would no longer have the right to rule. The Herodians sought to get Jesus into political problems by seeking to get him to encourage people to not pay taxes to Rome. This would have been an

act of rebellion for which they could accuse Jesus before the Romans and he would be punished as a rebel.

2. The Zealots: Those who actively resisted Roman rule

Q. 24. Read Lk. 6:15. What is the title given to Simon?

Religion and politics were often combined in Jewish life and the Jews viewed political life through religious eyes. Therefore, they viewed their political problems such as being under the control of Rome as coming from God's judgment upon their sinful lives. Some Jews took an active role in resisting the Roman control of their nation. The most popular resistance group during the times of Jesus and the Apostles was called "the Zealots."

Most Jews living in Judea and Galilee were strongly against any form of Gentile control. They longed for the days of the Hasmoneans where they were independent of all Gentile control. And they looked forward to the day when the messiah would come and deliver them from Gentile domination and the Jews would once more become a powerful nation similar to the time of David and Solomon. Out of fear of the Romans, however, these Jews would generally do what the Romans told them. At any sign of rebellion, they knew that the Romans would destroy whole villages, kill all of the men and take their families as slaves. Only when the Romans interfered with what they believed was pure religion, would most Jews react and were willing to die for their faith. As long as the Romans did not directly impose things which religiously offended their beliefs, however, they tolerated the Romans. In turn, the Romans usually did all they could to keep from offending the Jewish religious views and made Judaism a legal religion throughout the empire.

About 6 AD, however, things changed. In 6 AD, when the Romans took over direct administration of Judea and Samaria, they demanded pay them taxes directly. Many Jews did not like this. They did not want to give taxes directly to the Romans because that would support Gentile rule over them and also take away from taxes which should only be paid to God. Starting in Galilee and then spreading throughout Judea, people began to resist.

A man called Judas of Galilee led the resistance to paying taxes. This rebellion soon spread throughout Galilee, Judea, and Perea. At this time, those who resisted got the nick name "the Zealots" probably to reflect the Macabbean time where the call was "let all those who are **zealous** for the law come join us." Judas and others who resisted Roman and Herodian rule were soon defeated. However, the spirit of resistance continued, especially in Galilee. So as Jesus grew up and worked, all around him would be people who were constantly talking about how to resist Roman rule. One scholar said that things were as volatile for rebellion during the days Jesus as it is in Palestine today with the tensions between the Palestinians and the Jews.

Those who taught active resistance to the Romans formed groups of bandits who hid in the desert and would attack the rich merchants as they travelled because they viewed them as supportive of the Romans. Although most of these rebels were primarily interested in getting money through banditry, some of these bandit groups would occasionally attempt to resist Roman rule. When Jesus was just a boy, there was a rebellion in Galilee against the Romans and Herod. In retaliation, the Romans totally destroyed Sepphoris, the capital city of Galilee, located about 5 kilometers away from Jesus' home. Over 2000 people were crucified as a warning to people not to rebel. And after the death of Jesus, a man called "the

Egyptian" led a revolt against Rome in the vicinity of Jerusalem. He claimed that the walls of Jerusalem would collapse at his command. But the walls did not collapse, and the Romans killed 4000 people. After the days of Jesus, a resistance movement called "the Zealots" was started and the descendants of Judas the Galilean started open resistance which eventually led to the war against Rome from 66-70 AD. When this war broke out, the Zealots killed many aristocrats and Herodians who supported Rome. They expelled the Sadducee high priest and put a priest from the line of Zadok into power. These Zealots were the last to resist Rome. They were able to capture a Roman fortress called Masada and were able to resist the Romans until three years after the destruction of Jerusalem. In the end, rather than surrender to the Romans, every one in Masada including mothers and children committed suicide (960 people in all). The ruins of that fortress can be seen in Israel today and is viewed by the Jews of the model of resistance to their enemies.

Like the Pharisees, those who followed the Zealots refused to submit to Roman rule. They wanted the Messiah to come and bring political deliverance. But unlike the Pharisees who refused to use force, the Zealots were willing to fight and kill for their desires. Frequently during the times of Jesus and the apostles, rebel leaders would claim to be the Messiah and lead people to fight against the Romans. (Acts 21:38) They would often teach that since they were fighting for God, they were invincible. But they would quickly be overcome by the Romans and thousands killed. It is interesting that Jesus chose one from this group to become his disciple. He is known as Simeon the Zealot. Probably this means that before becoming a follower of Jesus he was supportive of active resistance against Rome. Since Jesus taught against active resistance, most likely he renounced this approach when he became a disciple. Some scholars believe that Judas Iscariot was supportive of this type of resistance movement as well. They speculate that the reason he betrayed Jesus was because he wanted to force Jesus to declare himself as the Messiah and start active resistance of Rome. But when Jesus refused to fight, Judas knew that he had betrayed an innocent person and could not live with his guilt of having betrayed an innocent man.

(Note: During the period just before the rebellion against Rome, another group developed called "the Sicarri." The Sicarri could have been related to the Zealots and were a terrorist group who would assassinate Jews who were too supportive of Rome. They would also kidnap or rob people to create unrest in Palestine and demonstrate their resistance to Roman rule.)

Q. 25. Review the religious and political climate of the days of Jesus. a) What would it have been like to be a Jew living in Judea and Galilee during the days of Jesus? b) How does this help us understand why people wanted to make Jesus a "king" but were not happy when he focused upon spiritual salvation instead?

THIRD DAY

Although we can understand Jesus' life and teachings if we only know a little about Palestine during his days, it helps our interpretation if we understand the situation when Jesus grew up. Jesus was a Jew; he was not from the west or from Africa. He dressed like a Jew, spoke like a Jew, and lived among the Jews who were longing for a Messiah. Religion no longer focused upon having a relationship with God but keeping regulations, so the Jews would have been shocked when Jesus called God "Father" and openly resisted these man-made rules. As Jesus grew up, people argued about various understandings of religion, but few sought a loving relationship with God. And political tension was very close to open

rebellion. Hatred for the Roman rule was strong and Jesus had to be careful not to be seen as a political threat and cause the Romans to attack him as a rebel.

What were some other things which we should understand about life for Jesus and the Jews during those days?

1. There were a few wealthy people and many very poor people

As is true in many parts of the world today, during the time of Jesus, there was a large economic gap between the rich and the poor. In Judea, and to a lesser extent, in Galilee, certain families were very wealthy and moved to Jerusalem. These families got wealthy in two ways. First, many were rich because they owned large farms. Like during the days of Haile Salasse when many people lived on land owned by a landowner, during the days of Jesus, many people in Judea also lived on land that was owned by land owners. What often happened is that a poor farmer would have a bad crop. If he needed money to pay his taxes or to buy seed for his farm, he would go to the rich land owner and ask for a loan of money. The land owner would make him use his farm as a guarantee in case he could not pay back the money in a certain period of time. If the poor farmer could not pay his loan back, the land owner would claim his land and the poor farmer would then farm for him. So the rich kept gaining more land and many poor farmers lost their land. (Note: In Galilee most people were farmers on small farms. They did not have as many large land owners unless they lived close to a major town like Sepphoris.)

In Jerusalem, many of the rich were traders. (Note: Joseph of Arimathea who placed Jesus in his family tomb was no doubt one of these rich merchants. [Mt. 27:57-60]) The 50,000 people living in Jerusalem needed a lot of goods. Since there was little produced in Jerusalem and Judea, these merchants would import things to Jerusalem and make a lot of profit. And three times a year all Jewish males were supposed to come to the temple to worship. During these times over 125,000 visitors would come to Jerusalem to worship. These rich merchants greatly benefited from selling to them.

The great majority of the people were the poor. One scholar estimates that about 2% of the population would be considered "rich." Another 15% could be considered middle class with sufficient money to eat and live comfortably. But over 70% of the people were struggling to make a living as farmers, fishermen, day laborers, etc. These poor fit into various categories:

a. Farmers and fishermen who had their own small piece of land to farm or a small boat for fishing. They rarely could earn enough to become comfortable in life. Farmers in Galilee were usually better off than farmers in Judea.

b. Those who farmed on behalf of someone else. As we saw above, for various reasons the rich land owners would get more and more land and they would then let poor farmers live on the land and farm on their behalf. These were better off than the day laborers because they had guaranteed work and had their basic needs met.

c. The day laborers: A large number of people were day laborers. They would go to the village center or into the cities every day. The rich would then come and choose the number of workers they needed for the day's work. They would be paid "one denarius" which was just enough for them and their family to buy food for that day. If these day workers did not find work for the specific day, they and their families would often go without food and starvation was common.

d. The slaves: Slavery was very common during the times of Jesus. In fact, it is estimated that over half of the city of Rome consisted of slaves where a relatively poor person would often have two or more slaves. A rich person could have 200 or more slaves. A person with 1000 slaves was considered very rich. The slaves were the poorest of the poor with few rights. It is not certain how prominent slavery was in Palestine during the days of Jesus. It is unlikely that the Jews had as many slaves as other Gentile countries did. But all of the rich would have had slaves. In Judea there were two types of slaves:

1) Jewish slaves: We saw earlier that one of the things that the Romans did when conquering a rebellious territory was to take many of the local people as slaves. One time in Galilee over 30,000 people were taken into slavery. Usually these captives were sent to far off Gentile territories where they were sold as slaves to rich people. But in Judea there were also Jewish slaves. A Jewish slave cost one or two mina. One mina was equivalent to about three months of work for a day laborer. The Jews had strict regulations about Jewish slaves. There were three situations where a Jew could become a slave to another Jew. First, if a Jew stole something and could not repay what he stole, he would be taken as a slave. Only an adult male could become a slave and could only be sold to another Jew to repay the debt. The person's wife or adult daughters could not be taken as slaves. Second, a Jew could volunteer to become a slave. Those who were so poor that they did not have anything to eat or had a debt they could not repay would often sell themselves into slavery to pay off their debt. Usually they sold themselves to another Jew. If they had to sell themselves to a Gentile, their relatives were expected to buy them back. (e.g. redeem them) Women were not allowed to be sold this way. Third, Jewish girls below the age of 12 could be sold as slaves to another Jew. She would be released from slavery when she reached the age of 12 when she was supposed to get married. Often the girl was destined to marry the person who bought her or his son.

All Jewish slaves were supposed to be released on the year of Jubilee, or on the fiftieth year. (See Lev. 25:20; 39-43 for teachings about Jewish slaves.) So when being sold, the buyer would only pay comparable to the number of years remaining before the year of freedom. However, a Jew could choose to be a lifelong slave. (Ex. 21:5-6; Deut. 15:16-17) This would usually happen when a Jewish slave had children with a Gentile wife who was also a slave but would not be released on the year of Jubilee.

Being a slave of another Jew was not considered disreputable. And the Jewish slave could not be forced to do certain tasks that were considered too demeaning. For instance, he could not be forced to wash the feet of the master. And if a Jewish man with a family became a slave, the owner had to take care of his family as well.

2) Gentile slaves: The Jews preferred Gentile slaves for several reasons. First, Gentile slaves were lifelong slaves and did not have to be released on the year of freedom. Second, they had few rights and could be forced to do any type of work. So Jews would pay up the equivalent of 2000 work days for a good slave, so only the rich had Gentile slaves. There was probably a slave market in Jerusalem where rich people would go and purchase their slaves. There were few regulations on how slave owners could treat these Gentile slaves. They could be sold anytime much like we would sell a cow or sheep. Female slaves could be used for sexual pleasure by the owner. When they became slaves for Jews, Gentile slaves were baptized and if the slaves were males, they had to be circumcised, so that they would not bring ritual impurity to the Jewish owners. All children born to a slave, even if the father was not a slave, were considered a slave and belonged to the master.

Q. 26. Describe how the economic situation in Ethiopia both in the past and today is similar to and different from life during the days of Jesus.

2. Heavy taxation upon all people

Most of us complain about the sales tax we pay when we purchase things. But life for the Jews was much worse. One of the reasons life for the poor was so difficult is because they were heavily taxed. One estimate is that the average farmer paid over 50% of what he got from his crop in taxes. Jews had two types of taxation.

First, there was political taxation. There were two levels of political taxes which the Jews had to pay. They would pay taxes to the Gentile nation which controlled them. Not only was there property tax, but it is estimated that about 30% of their earnings was paid to the Romans. But Jews also paid taxes to their local government. So Jews in Galilee would pay taxes to Herod Antipas and the Jews in Judea paid taxes to the Sanhedrin. A leader like Herod Antipas who wanted to build fancy cities like Sepphoris or Tiberias had to raise money for his building projects from the people. So local people had to pay taxes at whatever level these local leaders decided. Often these local leaders would knowingly tax the people up to the point where people would almost starve.

Secondly the Jews also had to pay a religious "tax." Every Jew, no matter where in the world he lived, had to pay the equivalent to two days' wages for the upkeep of the Temple. They also had to pay 10% of all income for the livelihood of the priests. Usually the chief priests in Jerusalem took this 10% leaving little for the common priests. So often ordinary priests were also very poor. During the war against the Romans in 66 AD, these poor priests were so angry at the chief priests that they joined the rebels and expelled the chief priests. There were often cases when the chief priests would send out delegates to the farmers as they were harvesting. As soon as the grain was threshed, they would take the first and best 10% using force if necessary.

When a poor Jew was unable to pay his taxes there was always rich people who were willing to loan money at exorbitant interest rates. When these poor people could not repay their money they either had to sell their land to rich land owners and become day workers, or they would sell themselves into slavery.

Q. 27. Read Lk. 5:30; Mt. 11:19. a) What was the Jewish attitude towards the tax collectors? b) What was Jesus' attitude towards the tax collectors?

During the Roman period, there were people called "tax collectors" who were responsible to collect the taxes from the people. Often these tax collectors were very corrupt and took more money from the people than they were supposed to. When a poor Jew was unable to pay his taxes there were always rich people who were willing to loan money at exorbitant interest rates. When these poor people could not repay their money they either had to sell their land to rich land owners and become day workers or they would sell themselves into slavery. So common people hated the tax collectors, whom they thought were both corrupt and supporters of the Rome government. And they hated the rich who took their land away. There were times when the common people got so angry at these rich people that when a revolt against Rome started, they killed the rich people first.

This should help us understand why many of the Jews hated the tax collectors. And yet the tax collectors were welcomed by Jesus and were often among those who followed him. He ate at their homes and he even chose one of them, named Matthew, to be one of his apostles. (Lk. 5:27) Jesus was not concerned about what people considered was socially acceptable. He was interested in the heart of a person and their salvation. As he shared with a Pharisee who was angry, that Jesus openly socialized with people like the tax collector and prostitutes, "a doctor is not needed for the healthy, but for the sick." (See Mt. 9:10-13)

Q. 28. a) List different types of people who are socially unacceptable in most people's eyes. b) How does your church treat this type of people? c) Describe how our attitude towards them would change if we developed the same attitude as Jesus: that the sick need a doctor, not those who think that they are already acceptable to God.

Q. 29. Read Lk. 1:53. a) What did Mary say the Messiah would do to the rich and for the poor? b) To which economic category of Jews did Mary and Jesus fit into?

When Mary was praising God for the privilege of giving birth to the Son of God, she was excited that finally the rich would be lowered and the poor would be raised up. Mary and Joseph were among these extremely poor people and the Messiah lived among the most poor people. He was born in a stable and his parents could only afford two pigeons as a sacrifice instead of sheep. (Lk. 2:24- Lev. 12:1-8) Jesus would have grown up in a small house made out of mud. If Joseph and Mary had any animals, the sheep and cattle would have lived in the house with them or under their house on the ground floor. (Many Jewish homes were built with two stories.) No doubt Jesus would have watched with anger as the rich abused the poor. No wonder he got angry at the Pharisees who were so concerned about keeping small religious rules but showed little concern for the poor. Like many Christians today, the Pharisees thought being rich was a sign of God blessing the person. But Jesus chose to side with the poor. He said "Blessed are the poor..." (Lk. 6:20) to show how both he and God the Father had a special concern for the poor, and especially for the poorest of the poor, the widows and the orphans.

Q. 30. a) Describe how many evangelicals become like the Pharisees, more concerned with our worship and becoming personally well off than with helping those who are suffering economically. b) Look at Deut. 10:18; Ps. 68:5-6, 113:7-9; Is. 25:4. What do these verses say about God's relationship to the poor? Why do you think God often shows special attention to the poor? c) Read 1 Cor. 1:26-31. Why do you think that often the poor and less educated listen to the Gospel and the rich and educated often chose not to follow Jesus? How has this proven true in your church?

Some of these poor people would turn to banditry. They would form gangs and rob from the rich. The story which Jesus told of a rich merchant being robbed on the road to Jericho was a very familiar scene during Jesus' days. (Lk. 10:30-37) Because they were stealing from the rich, the poor were often supportive of the bandits and would hide them from the officials who came to punish the bandits.

Q. 31. a) Write a two page summary describing what the political and religious situation was like during the days of Jesus. b) List ways the situation was similar to life in Ethiopia today. c) List ways the situation was different to life in Ethiopia today.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) List the things about the world during the days of Jesus and the apostles that made it easier for the Gospel to spread throughout the ancient world. b) How are conditions similar or different today? c) Many scholars think that God has arranged the events of the world today so that the church can reach the world with the Gospel in our generation. Discuss things seen in the world today which you think have made it easier for the Gospel to reach all nations. d) What can the church in Ethiopia do to reach the nations surrounding Ethiopia with the Gospel? What can your church do to send a missionary to one of these countries?

2. a) Summarize what leadership of the Jews (the political situation) was like during the times of Jesus. b) What attitude would this type of leadership have developed among the people? c) Why do you think the longing for the Messiah would have been strong?

3. a) Read Ezra 7:10. How is Ezra described? Explain how God used him. b) What role did the scribes fulfill in Jewish life? Discuss whether or not scribe-like people are needed in the church today. What role should they have? c) What warnings should the church take from the Jewish scribes in how it treats those who are theologically education and their ministry?

4. a) Describe what the different religious groups during the time of Jesus believed. b) What religious groups in Ethiopia are similar? How are they similar or different? c) What lessons for our churches can we learn from these religious groups?

5. a) Summarize the economic condition of the Jews during the times of Jesus. b) Why do you think the poor loved Jesus so much? c) Contrast God's attitude towards the poor, as seen in Jesus' birth and ministry, with the attitude that we often have towards the poor in our churches today. d) Read Lk. 1:53. Why do you think Mary prayed this? How do you think this statement is true now, or one day will be true? e) Read 1 Cor. 1:26-31. Describe how this has been seen in your church. If this is true, why do you think we place so much emphasis today on the wealthy and educated joining our churches?

LESSON THREE

FIRST DAY

Getamisay grew up in a Christian home. Ever since he was a small child, he had been told stories about Jesus. When he went to University, however, he met people from different religions who did not believe in Jesus in the same way he did. Some people taught that Jesus was only a good moral teacher, not a divine Savior. Others taught that the stories about Jesus found in the New Testament have been corrupted. They said that Jesus was only a prophet, but he was not crucified- another man died on the cross in his place. Still others claimed that the stories about Jesus were "myths" made up by the early Christians to explain their faith. Getamisay began to wonder if it really mattered whether or not the stories about Jesus were real and accurate. Is it not enough to go to church, sing enjoyable worship songs and live a good moral life? Do we really need to believe that Jesus was a historical person who was both God and man, was miraculously born of a virgin, lived in Palestine, did miracles, died on the cross for mankind's sins and rose again?

Q. 1. a) Read Lk. 1:1-4. What did Luke claim he did when writing his Gospel to verify that the stories about Jesus were accurate? b) Read 1 Cor. 15:12-19. What did Paul say was useless if Jesus did not really rise from the dead? c) Read 1 Jn. 1:1-4. What did John insist about his personal relationship to Jesus, the Word? d) List some reasons why it is important to believe that Jesus really lived, died on the cross, and rose from the dead.

From the beginning, followers of Jesus realized that it was important that their faith rest upon the truth, not just something that makes them feel good or upon fables like we teach our children. Luke, writing to an educated man called Theophilus, insisted that what he was writing was historically accurate. The stories in his Gospel came from actual eyewitnesses and events which he had personally verified. And the story of Jesus took place during a specific historical time when real political leaders ruled over specific countries. (Lk. 3:1-2) Paul felt so strongly about the historical accuracy of the resurrection of Jesus that he said if Jesus had just died and not risen from the dead, or if the story of the resurrection was made up, then all of Christianity would be useless. The Apostle John also insisted that the eternal Word, Jesus, was not a spirit or a ghost or just a good story, but was a real person. He had seen Jesus and touched him. Christianity is based upon historical facts.

JESUS IS BRIEFLY MENTIONED IN ANCIENT SECULAR HISTORY BOOK

There is little written about Jesus in ancient secular historical books. However, several ancient secular historians writing a few years after Jesus' death acknowledged that Jesus was a man who lived in Palestine and was crucified by Pilate. There is no hint in these ancient writings that they felt Jesus was a mythical figure made up by Christians. For instance, a Jewish historian named Josephus, writing about forty years after the death of Jesus, verified that Jesus was a good man who was crucified by Pilate. Roman historians also acknowledged that Jesus was a man who had lived in Palestine during the first century whom Pilate condemned to death.

THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN PROVIDE THE MAJOR SOURCE OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS' LIFE AND MINISTRY

The major source of our information about the earthly life of Jesus comes from the first four books of the New Testament. The early Christians gave the title "Gospel" to each of the four Gospels because they tell us about the "Good News" of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. (Note: In the Greek, the word Gospel means Good News.

Q. 2. Read Acts 10:34-43. a) List the major truths or "Good News" which Peter sought to teach Cornelius. b) Explain why these truths are important for Christians to know today. c) How well do you think evangelists explain the "Good News" to unbelievers and new Christians today?

As the followers of Jesus we need to know about the founder of our faith. How can we claim to be disciples of Jesus if we do not know what Jesus did and what he taught? The major purpose of this study guide on the life of Jesus is to examine what the Bible tells us about the most unique person who ever lived and how to follow him. One author has written that Jesus never commanded an army, conquered lands, wrote books, or did any of the other things we humans use to define greatness. And yet more people throughout history have been impacted by Jesus than any other human in history. More claim to follow Jesus as their leader than any general or political leader has ever had. And more books have been written about Jesus than any other subject. This man who grew up in Palestine has changed world history more than any other person who has ever lived. So it is important for us to study about him and his unusual life. And if we claim to be his followers, we must seek to resemble how he lived and obey the truths that he taught.

HOW THE FOUR GOSPELS CAME INTO BEING

Q. 3. Read Lk. 1:1-4. a) What did Luke say about the existence of other written documents about the life of Jesus? b) What does Luke say he did to make sure his story of the life of Jesus was accurate? What sources did he use? c) Why did Luke say he carefully researched the facts about Jesus?

Jesus did not write his own story or write down his teachings for his followers. Rather, early church leaders tell us that the four Gospels were written between 50 to 90 AD by four different individuals. This means that the records of the life of Jesus were written from twenty to sixty years after the death of Jesus. So how did the story of the life of Jesus become the four written books we have today?

Except for the information we have in the book of Acts, there is little information about the early church and how the teachings about Jesus spread. From the information we have available to us, it would seem that the stories about the life of Jesus went through the following stages before they became formalized in the four Gospels which we have today.

Q. 4. Read Acts 2:42. a) What did the apostles do to the early converts who did not personally see Jesus? b) Explain why you think careful teaching was necessary. c) How does your church carefully teach its new believers the story of the Jesus? d) What are things you think your church could better do to teach believers who Jesus is and how to follow him?

STAGE ONE: The eyewitnesses of Jesus, especially the apostles, told the early believers what they had seen and heard from Jesus. Many of the sermons which the apostles preached would have included stories and sayings of Jesus which they applied to the lives of the believers. As the church spread from

Jerusalem, throughout Judea, into Samaria, on to Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and finally Rome, these stories were passed on to the believers by the apostles and early missionaries like Barnabas.

STAGE TWO: The stories became organized into portions which made memorization easier. When the Jewish scribes taught their disciples, they often had their students carefully memorize the stories and sayings of the ancient scribes. It could be that the early church used this type of system to teach new believers. Perhaps many of the stories of Jesus and his teachings, including his parables, were arranged so that it was easier for these new believers to memorize what their Lord had done and said. Perhaps this is why the Gospel writers did not write Jesus' story chronologically or show how much time there was between stories.

This period of passing on the truths of Jesus orally covered a period of about 20 years. Many modern scholars are uncomfortable with this long period of passing on the facts by word of mouth. They wonder "Did the stories change as they passed from person to person as many stories change in our churches today?" There are several things we must remember about this oral stage.

1) The early Christians believed that Jesus was God. So they would treat what he said with the same carefulness which they did the Old Testament Scriptures. They would not think they had the freedom to make up stories or expand stories carelessly.

2) Most of the eyewitnesses of the life and death of Jesus were still alive as the stories were being circulated. Therefore they would have corrected any wrong information. It is hard for a false story to develop when those who were part of the story are present.

3) From the very beginning, the believers were concerned about accuracy of belief. They were facing persecution and so they wanted to make sure they were suffering and dying for something that was true.

4) Non-literate societies are able to pass on stories very accurately because the people are skilled at memorizing them.

5) The apostles were viewed by the church as the ones who were the legitimate story tellers. One of the major criteria the early church used to determine whether or not the Gospels were authentic was to ask "What relationship did the writer have to a recognized apostle?" Matthew was one of the apostles, so his story was quickly accepted. Mark worked closely with Peter and early church writings state that Mark wrote down the stories which Peter had been telling the church. Luke was approved because of his close relationship to Paul, the founder of the Gentile churches. And he gives detailed interviews with eye witnesses. John was an apostle and was writing from personal experience.

6) Jesus told the apostles in John 14:25-26 that one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit would be to remind the apostles of the things which Jesus had said. So the Holy Spirit carefully protected the stories and teachings in the minds of the disciples so that when the Holy Spirit guided Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to write their stories of Jesus, it would be accurate.

Q. 5. Read Jn. 14:25-26. a) Explain why reminding them of what Jesus taught is an important ministry for the Holy Spirit to have with the disciples and with us today. b) Why do you think it is important to tell

stories, especially the stories of the Bible, accurately? c) What does learning to pass information on accurately reflect about us being people of integrity and accuracy? d) Explain ways that preachers can become too indifferent to accuracy in telling stories. e) Explain how these six truths would help Getamesay have confidence that the stories about Jesus are accurate and true so he would not doubt them?

STAGE THREE: People, perhaps the apostles, began to write down different accounts about Jesus. When writing his Gospel, Luke acknowledged that there were "many" who had written stories about Jesus. It is hard to know how early people began to write accounts about Jesus. For instance, did Matthew, who was trained in keeping financial records, keep a record of what Jesus said and did while he was with Jesus? In Jewish society it was common for disciples to take notes of what their teacher said and so the 12 disciples could have taken some notes of what Jesus taught while he was still alive. The Jews often collected the more important sayings which famous teachers taught into small booklets. Did the apostles do this shortly after Jesus went to heaven? We do not know. What we do know is that before the book of Luke was written, there were many written stories about Jesus.

No doubt the Gospel writers used some of these written stories as resources for their writings. We only know of four written accounts: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All other written accounts of Jesus were lost. Probably the early church recognized that these four were the most accurate accounts of the life of Jesus and no longer copied the documents which had been written earlier.

STAGE FOUR: From many possible stories about the life of Jesus, each of the four Gospel writers chose stories which fulfilled their teaching purposes. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, each author wrote an inspired account of the life of Jesus which we have in our Bible.

(Note: In his introduction in Luke 1:1-4, note how Luke mentions these different types of sources he used for writing his Gospel. There were **eyewitnesses** who were still alive whom he no doubt interviewed. Perhaps the unique stories about the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus which Luke records come from personally interviewing Mary, the mother of Jesus. There were also **oral accounts** passed on from the eyewitnesses which he heard and verified for truthfulness. And there were **written accounts** of Jesus' life. After carefully evaluating the accuracy of all of these, Luke wrote his story. Even secular scholars admit that Luke was a skilled historian and things he mentions which can be verified in secular history are accurate.)

IMPORTANT FACTS CONCERNIG THE FOUR GOSPELS

Q. 6. Suppose there were four people who saw a bus turn over and the police interviewed them to find out what happened. Suppose one of the witnesses was a person whose cow was killed by the bus, another was a passenger on the bus, another saw it happen but was not impacted by the bus in any way, and another was the bus driver. a) Why are four witnesses better than just one witness? b) How would each witness offer a similar version of the accident? c) How would each witness offer a different perspective on the accident? d) If each witness used the same words to describe the accident, what would the police assume about the witnesses?

When police try to verify the details of an accident they interview as many different witnesses as possible. Each witness, because he includes things which other witnesses might have overlooked, are valuable. But police also need to know what relationship the person might have to the accident. For

instance, the bus driver would probably tell facts which focus upon what caused the accident. But a passenger might more tell what was happening in the bus than what happened outside of the bus which caused the accident. It is by putting all of the different stories together that the police get the most accurate picture of what happened.

It is the same way with the four Gospels. God could have just had one Gospel written. But the Holy Spirit chose to have four Gospel stories. Why did God decide to have four different pictures of Jesus? One reason might be that in the Old Testament, for something to be verified as true, there had to be two or three witnesses. (Deut. 17:6) God went even further and provided four witnesses who told the story of his Son. Another reason might be that God wanted his story to be told through the eyes of different people in a way that different types of people could best identify with the story of Jesus. For example, Matthew wrote to show **Jews** how Jesus was their Messiah, the son of David. But Luke wanted **all people** to understand that Jesus was their Savior. By presenting the life of Jesus from different perspectives, we have a much fuller picture of Jesus than if only one person had written the story.

A careful study of the four Gospels reveal the following facts:

1. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are similar to each other, but John is very different. The first three Gospels stories focus upon Jesus' ministry in Galilee, but John focuses upon Jesus' ministry in Judea. The first three Gospels emphasize Jesus' healing ministry, casting out demons, and use of parables as the basis for his teaching. But John only mentions a few miracles, no casting out of demons, and records Jesus' long sermons rather than parables. Scholars therefore group the first three Gospels together and call them the "Synoptic Gospels." The word "synoptic" means "to see together" to reflect the fact that these Matthew, Mark, and Luke look at the life and ministry of Jesus in a similar way.

Q. 7. Compare the following verses: Mt. 9:6; Mk. 2:10-11; Lk. 5:24 and Mt. 8:1-4, Mk. 1:40-45, Lk. 5:12-16. Explain how these verses are similar in wording and not just telling the same story.

2. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are so similar in some of their stories that even the words are the same. When two people independently tell a story, they will describe the same facts but use different words. But when several students copy from a book, they all use the same words found in the book and so not just the facts but the words themselves are the same. So it would seem that there was some copying between Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But at other times, the three Gospels differ in wording and order so it is clear that they did not just copy each other but had other resources which they used.

This close similarity has led scholars to develop different theories about how these first three Gospels were written. (Note: We use the word "theory" to indicate that we do not know exactly how these Gospels were written. As theories, scholars are giving their thoughts based upon the information which they have available and could be right or wrong. It is important to note, however, that no matter what theory we hold about how the Gospels were written, it does not change the truth that all of the stories about Jesus are accurate and written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The theory does not change how we understand the teachings found in each of the three Gospels. So the most important thing is not the theory, but the truths of God's Word.)

Most scholars believe that Mark was written first, and Matthew and Luke used the book of Mark as their major source in writing their accounts. One estimate is about 97% of the book of Mark is included in

Matthew and about 88% of Mark is included in the book of Luke. Because Matthew and Luke also have similar sections which are not found in Mark, some scholars speculate that there was another document which Mark did not use, but both Matthew and Luke used as one of the sources for writing their Gospels. There are 250 verses in Matthew and Luke which are similar, usually in the teaching sections of Jesus, but which are not found in Mark. Scholars call this document "Q." A few scholars think Matthew was written first, Mark used Matthew as a source for his book, and Luke was written last and used both Matthew and Mark as the basis of his book.

Perhaps this is what happened. While Mark was traveling with Peter (See 1 Pet. 5:13), he heard Peter tell many stories about Jesus in his sermons. Some early church writers claim that as Peter got old, church leaders went to Mark and asked him to write down these stories before Peter died. So Mark wrote not only what he heard from Peter, but what he heard other apostles tell when they were in his home when he was younger. (See Acts 12:12, 25) Matthew got a copy of Mark's Gospel. However, he wanted to tell the story of Jesus in a way that was attractive for Jews and which also included more of what Jesus taught. So he used Mark, but added things he remembered Jesus teaching. Finally, Luke decided to write a carefully researched account of the life of Jesus for a non-Jewish audience. Perhaps as he was waiting in Judea during the time when Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea (See Acts 24:27), he decided to interview some people who had personally known Jesus, like Mary, the mother of Jesus, who were still alive. He used Mark, Matthew, and his other eyewitnesses to write his story of Jesus' life. Many years later, the Apostle John decided to write the story of Jesus from his unique perspective. He knew about the three Gospels previously written and so decided to not repeat their stories. Rather, he chose to tell the life of Jesus from the perspective of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. Plus he wanted to share more about the theological implications of who Jesus is.

SECOND DAY

THE GOSPELS, A NEW TYPE OF LITERATURE

Q. 8. a) What type of literature (letter, poetry, history, etc.) are the Gospels? b) How are they similar to and different from history books you have read in school or biographies you have read written about famous people?

Each one of the first four books in the New Testaments have a similar title. They are called "the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew, Mark, Luke or John." This was the first time in history that a book was called "Gospel." So in many ways, the writers of the four Gospels wrote their own type of literature.

Scholars agree that the original Gospels did not have these titles. And in the original, the writer of each Gospel is not named. Rather, toward the end of the second century, the early Christians began to use the title "The Gospel according to" The early Christian leaders believed that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were the authors of the four Gospels.

Most of us are familiar with history books. We have studied about the history of Ethiopia or the history of the world in school. Some of us might have read a story of a famous person. In many ways the four Gospels resemble historical writings or biographical writings. All four of the Gospels tell the story about Jesus, the Jew from Palestine. However, when we read the Gospels, we see that these normal

characteristics of historical and biographical writings are missing. There is very little mentioned about Jesus' family, his life as a child, his character, his education, his work before he was 30 years old, what he looked like, etc. In fact, most of the Gospels only cover about a time period of 3 ½ years. This has led scholars to say that the Gospels are a unique type of literature.

A close study of the Gospels reveals the following:

1. Most ancient biographies tell us who the author is, but none of the four Gospels tell us who wrote them. They are not like the epistles which Paul wrote where he began the letter with "Paul..." (See Rom. 1:1) Although each book gives some indication who the author might be, most of our evidence comes from church historians living more than 100 years after the writing of the Gospels who claimed that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each wrote one of the Gospels.

2. The Gospels have been called "biographical sermons" or "teach history." So although they seek to tell the story of Jesus, each author of the Gospels sought to use the story of Jesus to teach Christians and non-Christians alike.

Q. 9. a) What did Luke say was the purpose for writing his Gospel? (See Lk. 1:4) b) What was the reason John wrote his Gospel? (See Jn. 20:30-31)

In his introduction to his Gospel, Luke told the recipient, Theophilus, that the purpose of the book was so that Theophilus, and all Christians, would know the truths about the life and teachings of Jesus which formed the basis of their faith. Luke knew that we are not saved by good feelings or being zealous about something. There are many religious people who are more zealous than Christians. And we are not saved just because we have a "hope" (which some call faith) that something will happen to us. All religions are based upon a "faith" or hope that their teachings are true. Rather, saving faith is always based upon truth. Luke wanted believers to know the facts about the one who died for their sins to bring them salvation from sins, but was also both God and man. Saving faith only comes when we individually place our trust in something that is true. That is why having correct doctrine is always important in the Bible. As Paul said, if anyone preaches anything other than the true Gospel, he should be accursed. (See Gal. 1:6-9) To say something is good news when it is not true is not good news at all, but a way to trick someone.

Q. 10. a) Describe how many Christians are not concerned to know the truth, but just have "love" and enjoy worship together. What dangers do you see in this attitude? b) Why is truth important when it comes to religion?

We live in days when many Christians are suspicious of doctrine. They have seen the damage brought to the church when Christians argue over different opinions in small doctrinal matters. But there is a tendency among Christians to become so tolerant that they no longer are concerned with truth. In the west many Christians believe "all religions lead to God, so it does not matter what you believe as long as you are sincere." Many Christians in Ethiopia think that as long as they enjoy worship, it does not matter if it agrees with what God's Word teaches. But the Bible, and especially the Gospels, were written so that believers have a clear, factual understanding of who Jesus is. The authors knew that it was only the historical event of Jesus dying on the cross which brought salvation. As Peter said, "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

And they were willing to die for what was true, not for what just made them feel good. During the time the Gospels were written, many Christians were killed for their faith because they believed that the stories written about Jesus were true.

Not only did the Gospel writers want Christians to have a clear reason for believing that Jesus was their Savior, they also wanted to teach the Christians what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It is not enough to be a "believer" in Jesus. Jesus called people to be his followers. A follower of Jesus must understand what it means to live in obedience to God. And each one had to realize that part of following Jesus was to take up the "cross" of persecution and be willing to die for their faith if necessary.

Q. 11. a) Should Christians be concerned that what they believe about Jesus is true? Explain your answer. b) Why do you think Christians should know what Jesus taught about following him? c) What are some things your church could better do to make sure that all believers know what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

The Gospels were also written for non-Christians to encourage them to put their trust in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. As John said in the conclusion to his Gospel, his purpose in telling about the miracles of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus was so that those who read the Gospel of John would put their faith in Jesus Christ and receive eternal life. There are some who have found a good way to witness to those who follow "the prophet Jesus" is to give them a copy of the Gospel (Ingil) to read. God has used the story of Jesus to cause many to become followers of Jesus.

Q. 12. Explain some ways that we could better use the Gospels as an evangelistic tool to tell non-believers what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

3. Each of the authors of the Gospels wrote to a particular audience, seeking to teach specific truths. For example, Matthew focused his writing upon the Jews and emphasized teachings which the Jews were interested in, such as Jesus was the Son of David, the King of Israel. And his major proof was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Mark wrote to Romans who had little background in Jewish teachings but were interested in the "power" of a person, so he included stories of Jesus' miracles and power over demons showing that Jesus was a man of power. Luke wanted to show how Jesus was concerned for those whom society mistreated, so he told how Jesus showed compassion to the poor, the women, the outcaste Samaritans, and the Gentiles. John wrote to people everywhere seeking to get them to put their faith in Jesus Christ who is the Savior of the world. So his story of Jesus has a lot of "doctrinal teaching" showing how Jesus brings light to those living in darkness.

This fact that each Gospel writer wrote for a specific people influences us in two ways.

First, as we read the stories we should be asking "What is the Gospel writer trying to teach us about following Jesus?" For example, when Jesus told his followers that if they wanted to be his disciples, they must take up their cross and follow him, the Gospel writer is teaching that if we also want to follow Jesus, we have our cross which we must carry.

Q. 13. a) What do you think Jesus meant when he said that we must take up our cross and follow him? b) List three ways you are applying this truth to your life today.

Second, as we seek to understand the life of Jesus, we must realize that each of the writers told the story of Jesus from their unique perspective. Therefore we must seek to understand the perspective of the writers as they wrote so that we can interpret the story correctly. For instance, the book of Matthew was written to Jews who did not like to use the name of "God" and used a representative word for God called "heaven." So what the other Gospel writers meant by "kingdom of God," Matthew calls the "kingdom of heaven." If we don't realize this unique perspective of Matthew, we could misinterpret Matthew thinking that Jesus was only talking about heaven rather than the rule of God over the lives of people.

(Note: Although it would be best if we could study individually each of the four different pictures presented by each writer of the story of Jesus, in this study book on the life of Jesus, we will study the life of Jesus chronologically.

4. All of the four Gospels focus upon one week in the life of Jesus, which was the week of his crucifixion. One scholar has said that each of the Gospels consist of a long introduction telling about what Jesus did in his ministry followed by the major story of the death of Jesus. This is because the most important information in the story of Jesus is his death on the cross on behalf of sinners. For instance, Matthew has two chapters dealing with the birth of Jesus, 18 chapters covering over three years of the life of Jesus, and eight chapters on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Mark has 10 chapters covering 3 ½ years of Jesus life and 6 chapters covering the last week of his life. Luke, the longest book in the New Testament, has three chapters covering the early life of Jesus, 15 chapters covering the 3 ½ years of Jesus' public ministry, and 5 chapters covering the last week of Jesus' life. John has 11 chapters covering the public ministry of Jesus and 10 chapters covering the final week of Jesus' life. This is unique because most biographies focus upon the public ministry of a person and only give a short space about how a person dies. But for Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus is most important.

Q. 14. Give four reasons why the final week of Jesus' life is the most important information for the believer.

5. Unlike most biographies, the Gospels give little chronological information of the life of Jesus. So there is little information how much time there was between the start of the ministry of John and the baptism of Jesus or the baptism of Jesus and when he started preaching in Galilee. Scholars even debate how long the public ministry of Jesus actually was. The Synoptic Gospels give so little information that the whole story could take place in one year's time. The Gospel of John can be interpreted to mean that Jesus ministered between two to three years. The Gospel writers' goal was to write the stories of Jesus' life which taught believers how to live as followers of Jesus, not to write a comprehensive, chronological story of Jesus' life.

6. The Gospels do not record their stories in chronological order. In ancient cultures, the authors had freedom to re-arrange the order of their stories to fit their purposes for writing the book. The Gospel writers followed this practice and did not write all of their stories in the order of how they took place in the life of Jesus. Rather the books are arranged according to topics which the author wanted to teach. So Matthew gathered all of Jesus' teaching into one section (Mt. 5-7), his parables in another section (Mt. 13), his prophecies of the end times in another section (Mt. 24) etc. Therefore, it is impossible to completely arrange the story of Jesus in chronological order. We can only guess about the order of some of the events mentioned.

7. Although the Gospel writers were careful to accurately tell the stories of Jesus, they followed the ancient practice of telling the stories in their own words. Many of the differences in Jesus' words from one Gospel to another reflect this practice. For instance, in Mt. 5:3, Matthew records Jesus as saying "blessed are the poor in spirit" but Luke records "blessed are the poor." (Lk. 6:20) The fact that many Jewish expressions of Jesus are seen in their writing, however, indicates that the authors were careful not to be too free with how they wrote their stories about Jesus. This gives us confidence to believe that what was written accurately reflects what Jesus said and did.

Q. 15. Read Jn. 20:30-31; 21:25. What did John say about the number of stories that were available which he did not include in his book?

8. There were many other stories about Jesus which the authors did not mention. The Apostle John said that if everything he and others knew about Jesus was written down, the world could not hold all of the books. From the many stories available to them, each author chose the stories which best taught what he wanted his readers to know. This means that there are many parts of the life of Jesus for which we have little or no information. For instance, what did Jesus do between his birth and when he was 30 years of age? Only Luke tells a story from this part of Jesus' life when he was 12 years old. Although we might want to know about this part of Jesus' life, it has not been recorded. But we do have enough information to get an accurate picture of the character and purposes of God as seen in Jesus. (See Heb. 1:1-3) And there are enough facts to know how God gives us salvation from our sins. We also have sufficient information to know how we are to follow Jesus. Rather than become curious about these unknown parts of Jesus' life, we should focus upon living according to what is clearly revealed to us.

THE REASON WHY THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN

We saw yesterday that the Gospels are a combination of historical writings and stories chosen to teach Jesus' followers and convince unbelievers to believe on Jesus. They were not trying to simply provide knowledge about Jesus like we often learn historical facts in school which do not apply to our lives. A careful study of the Gospels reveals the following reasons the authors wrote about the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Primarily, the writers wanted to inform people what the Gospel is which brings salvation. The Gospel message is based upon the facts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. So each of the Gospel writer is seeking to proclaim this truth. By sharing about the life of Jesus, they were asking non-Christians to leave their previous beliefs and choose to put their faith in Jesus. And they challenged believers to be faithful to Jesus. The Gospels seek to remind us that living in a proper relationship with God involves renewing our commitment to the one who died for our sins, even if it brings our death.

The writers wanted to preserve the true story about the life and death of Jesus. As Christianity quickly spread throughout the Roman Empire, it was important for Christians to have a clear understanding of who Jesus is. The apostles and missionaries could not visit each church to tell them about Jesus, so they wrote the story which could be copied and available in each church for teaching the church members.

The apostles were dying. The Apostle James, Paul, Peter and perhaps other apostles had given their lives for their faith. And so before all of the eyewitnesses died, it was important that the stories be accurately preserved.

The authors wanted to teach the believers to courageously follow Jesus, even if it meant dying for their faith. Just as obeying God caused Jesus' death, so also following Jesus could bring believers' deaths. But they were supposed to courageously follow Jesus anyway. It was not long after the Gospels were written that hundreds of Christians died for their faith. Some were eaten by lions or killed by soldiers. Others were lit on fire to provide light for the city of Rome. Some had their heads cut off by the sword or were crucified as enemies of the state. These believers needed to have the same courage that Jesus had when he prayed "Take this cup from me. But not my will but yours be done."

Perhaps the authors wanted to correct wrong stories about Jesus which were circulating throughout the church. We all know how easy it is for people to make up stories or have seen how stories change over time. So as Luke wrote to Theophilus, he wanted believers to know the true, verified facts about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

6. The authors probably wanted to provide a teaching resource for new believers. After the first few years, most believers in the churches would consist of people who had never personally seen Jesus and had little information about his life. The Gospel of John, written about 60 years after the death of Jesus, records how Jesus told Thomas "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (Jn. 20:29) The reality for all of us is that we are among those who have not physically seen the risen Lord but are called to place our faith in him. In order for us to do that, the Gospel writers provided the necessary facts about Jesus which would help us put our faith in Jesus. But Christianity is more than just putting our faith in facts about Jesus. To be "Christians" new believers need to commit themselves to following Jesus as his disciples. The Gospels tell us what following Jesus means.

Q. 16. Review these six reasons for the writing of the Gospels. a) Why are they important for us today? b) If the Gospels are a "teaching resource" for teaching new believers, why do you think so few churches today use them to teach believers? c) What ways do you think church leaders could better use the Gospels to teach each member who Jesus is and what it means to be his follower?

WHY WE CAN BELIEVE THE STORY OF JESUS FOUND IN THE GOSPELS IS ACCURATE

We read earlier how Getamesay struggled with his faith while studying at University when people began to challenge the truthfulness of the Gospel stories. There are some religions who teach that Christians have corrupted the stories of Jesus. Are their accusations true? Why should we maintain our faith in the Gospel teaching about Jesus?

1. The Gospels were written by eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and death or the information was given by those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus and still alive. There were not hundreds of years between the life of Jesus and the writings of the stories of Jesus. So there was no opportunity for these stories to be corrupted.

2. History teaches us that these eyewitnesses and early believers were willing to face persecution and die for what they believed about Jesus. People do not die for things that are fiction. Rather, they die for things they believe to be true. So we can be confident that these eyewitnesses and early writers believed these stories about Jesus were true.

3. Even the enemies of Christianity were not able to demonstrate how the stories were lies. For instance, Jesus died and the empty tomb was just outside the city of Jerusalem, so it should have been easy for the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to produce the body of Jesus and show that the resurrection was a lie. Or they could have found the people Jesus was supposed to have healed and proven that the stories were false. But they did not do it which shows that they knew that the stories were true.

4. Three of the four Gospel stories can be directly traced to one of the apostles of Jesus. Matthew and John were apostles who were with Jesus for the three years of his public ministry. And Mark knew Jesus when he was a young man, he knew the apostles when they first began to work, and he ministered with Peter, the most famous apostle of Jesus. Only Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus. However, he was able to interview many eyewitnesses and had traveled with Paul as well.

5. The copies of the Gospel which are available to us today is at least 97 percent similar to the original manuscript. Scholars who examine ancient manuscripts can demonstrate that the Gospels and the New Testament have been copied with great accuracy. As they compare the ancient copies of the Gospels (some written within a few generations of when originally written) found in Ethiopia, Egypt, Rome, or Syria, there are few differences between them. They are more accurate than any other ancient manuscript available today.

So how do we know that the copies we have today are accurate and have not been changed as some claim?

First, when we compare ancient manuscripts from all over the Christian world, there are few changes. There are over 5,000 ancient copies of the New Testament, including the Gospels. Copies of Matthew have been found dating to 150 AD, less than one hundred years after the writing of the Gospel.

Second, when we compare early Christian writers who quote from the Gospels, some from just a generation after the writing of John, their quotes are almost exactly the same as the copies we have today.

There are a few word changes or spelling differences in the various copies of the Gospels available today. But none of the places where there are slight differences between various manuscripts changes a major doctrine of Christianity. There are only two major passages of the Gospels which scholars debate today: Mk. 16:9-20 and Jn. 7:53-8:11. Although most scholars do not believe these two passages were part of the original manuscripts, they think these were true stories which ancient scribes inserted into the text.

Scholars today continue to search through the many copies of the New Testament to determine what is the most likely exact wording of the original Gospels written by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. But all agree that there are very few changes between the originals and the copies we have today. We can be very confident that all of the stories in our Bibles today accurately reflect the stories contained in the original Gospels. Don't believe what other religions are saying who claim that we have corrupted the Gospel. It is not true.

Q. 17. If you talked to Getamesay, explain how these truths would help you encourage him to have confidence in the stories about Jesus.

THIRD DAY

SUMMARY OF EACH GOSPEL BOOK

Earlier we studied earlier that each Gospel was written by a particular person for a specific audience. The Gospel writers were not writing impartial history. Rather, from thousands of stories about Jesus they chose those stories which best suited their desires in writing the Gospel. They selected "teaching stories." Now we will study some of the unique things found in each Gospel.

Q. 18. Read Lk. 5:27-32. a) What was Matthew's (Levi) occupation? b) What did Jesus ask him to do? c) What complaint did the religious leaders make against Jesus because he associated with Matthew?

1. THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

The most popular Gospel of the early church was the book of Matthew. Perhaps that is why the early church decided to place it as the first Gospel. Although the Gospel of Matthew does not list him as the author of the book, by 125 AD, early church writers claimed that Matthew, who was also called Levi, was the author of the first Gospel.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that Matthew was a tax collector. (Lk. 5:27) No doubt he was working for Herod Antipas and was responsible to collect taxes in Capernaum for Herod and for the Romans. For this job, he had to be well educated. Not only did he know accounting since he had to keep a record of who had paid their taxes, but he was fluent in the Greek language and not just Aramaic which was his mother tongue. Compared to other apostles, Matthew was probably rich. Tax collectors were known for cheating the people by charging more than they were supposed to and becoming rich quickly. But as a tax collector Matthew was despised both by the religious leaders and the common people for cheating people in their taxes and because they viewed him as working with their enemies, the Romans.

But Jesus wanted Matthew to be one of his 12 apostles. One day as Matthew was collecting taxes, Jesus asked him to follow him. Amazingly, Matthew immediately left his profitable business to become one of the poor followers of Jesus. What caused him to do this? We don't know. Obviously he had heard about Jesus before this. No doubt he wanted the peace that only Jesus can give.

Q. 19. What does this story teach us about what it means to become a follower of Jesus?

God never wastes our skills but turns them from being used for selfish reasons to tools to serve him. God used Matthew's training as a tax collector and ability to speak and write Greek to become one of the authors of the Gospels. Although he was no doubt hurt many times by the Jews' cruel comments about being a tax collector, Matthew had a deep burden for the salvation of the Jews and his Gospel is the most Jewish of the Gospels. His desire for their salvation is seen in his story of the life of Jesus in different ways:

a. Matthew focused his teaching to show how Jesus was the "king of the Jews" and the "son of David." For centuries the Jews had been waiting for the messiah to come and deliver them from political bondage and bring in the age of blessing as prophesied by Isaiah and the other prophets. But when Jesus did not come as a political deliverer, the Jews were confused. Matthew wanted to show the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah who brought spiritual deliverance.

But even though Matthew focused his book upon the Jews, he also wanted to show the Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Savior of all people. The Gospel was not to be limited to the Jews, but Christians were to take the Gospel message to all people. (See Mt. 28:19-20) It was Gentile wise men who worshipped Jesus (Mt. 2) and the person who best modeled the type of faith that Jesus praised was a Gentile woman. (Mt. 15:21-28) Matthew wanted to show that in the plan of God, the people of God were now made up of Jews and Gentiles.

b. Matthew proved that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. It was important to the Jews that Jesus fulfill the Old Testament promises which they knew were from God. So Matthew showed how Jesus was of the line of David, as prophesied in the Old Testament. And he showed how almost every facet of Jesus' life was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus' birth, fleeing to Egypt, moving to Galilee, teaching, healing, and dying are all foretold in the Old Testament.

c. No doubt the Jews were asking "If Jesus is the Messiah, why didn't the religious leaders accept him?" Matthew showed the Jews that the fault lay with the religious leaders who could no longer listen to God because of their hypocrisy. Because of their hardened hearts they could not recognize the Messiah and killed him. Matthew wanted to warn the Jews who were growing increasingly anti-Christian against falling into the same sin of those who crucified Jesus.

d. Many scholars think that the early Christians were struggling with why Jesus had not returned to start his rule on earth. Almost a generation had passed and Jesus had not come. Were they mistaken? Matthew teaches that the promised kingdom of God (called the kingdom of heaven according to the Jewish practices) had come in the person of Jesus Christ. He is now reigning in and through his followers, the church. But the culmination of that kingdom was not yet. It would come, but first the church had to spread throughout the world through the testimony of the followers of Jesus. And there would be times of persecution before the time of deliverance arrived.

e. Scholars also think that Matthew might have written his Gospel to be a training manual for new believers. He wanted to explain to the new believers what it means to be a follower of Jesus and what type of life they were supposed to live. He arranges his story topically so the believers could more easily remember the stories of Jesus and know who Jesus was and what he did. Matthew gives more of Jesus' teaching than the other three Synoptic Gospels. There are five major teaching sections (Mt. 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25) which some scholars think Matthew patterned after the five books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) to teach that Jesus gave a new "Law" for the new people of God, the Church.

Q. 20. Read Mt. 5. a) Make a list of teachings about following Jesus found in this section. b) How would you compare Jesus' teachings to the Old Testament laws?

Neither the book of Matthew nor church history clearly tell when the Gospel was written. Many scholars think the book reflects the time when church was changing from being made up of primarily Jews to when a lot of Gentiles believed. They think that perhaps Matthew wrote to the church in Syria Antioch, where both Jews and Gentiles worshipped together. Because they did not live in Palestine, these believers did not have direct access to the stories of Jesus from the eyewitnesses so Matthew wrote the Gospel for them. Most likely the Gospel of Matthew was written sometime between 50 to 70 AD, which would have been twenty to forty years after the death of Jesus.

2. THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Q. 21. a) Read Mk. 14:51-52. What happened to the young man? b) Read Acts 12:12-13; Acts 12:25-13:5; 13:13; 15:36-41. Summarize what we know about Mark from the book of Acts. c) Who did Peter call his son in 1 Peter 5:13?

Throughout the history of the church, the Gospel according to Mark was said to have been written by a man called John who was also known as Mark. We know very little about Mark since he was not one of the apostles or major church leaders of early Christianity. Mark probably saw Jesus when he was a boy and no doubt heard many stories about Jesus from the apostles as he grew up. Some scholars think that it was in John Mark family's home that Jesus and the disciples ate the last supper the night before Jesus was crucified. The fact that Jesus felt free to use the room in this house could reflect that Jesus often stayed there when he was in Jerusalem. We know that it was to his home that Peter went when he escaped from prison. This indicates that the home of John Mark's family was one of the major gathering places of the early Christians. His family was wealthier than others since they had a large upper room which the disciples could use and also had servants. Some scholars think that Mark was the young man described in Mk. 14:51-52 who followed Jesus after his capture and fled away naked when people tried to apprehend him as well.

Mark's cousin, Barnabas, invited Mark to join him in ministry in Antioch and he was part of the first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas. However, in the middle of the trip, things got too difficult for him and he returned home. Several years later, when Barnabas wanted to take him on the second missionary journey, Paul refused. Their disagreement led to Barnabas and Paul going separate ways. Barnabas took John Mark with him and Paul went a different road with Silas. Many years later we read that John Mark was with Peter in "Babylon." (1 Pet. 5:13) Most likely this is a secret name for the city of Rome. Toward the end of Paul's life, Mark joined Paul (Col. 4:10). In fact Paul and Mark became so close that Paul asked that John Mark join him in Rome just before he was put to death. (2 Tim. 4:11)

Some ancient church historians wrote that when Peter was getting old, realizing that one day the eyewitnesses of the faith would die, the church leaders came and asked Mark to write the stories of Jesus which he had heard Peter sharing in his sermons. (Some historians say Mark wrote while Peter was still alive, but other historians state that he wrote after the death of Peter.) Mark wrote the Gospel, no doubt using stories he heard as a young man and those which Peter told him. Many scholars think that Mark was in Rome at the time. Although the Gospel of Mark could have been written any time after 44 AD (just 14 years after the death of Jesus), most likely it was written about 60 AD, not too long before Peter died. Mark wrote for Romans who were interested in the story of what Jesus did more than in his teachings. He wanted to show the Romans who respected powerful people (like the great Ceasars) that Jesus was the one with ultimate power. And yet Jesus used his power as a servant, not as a master. (See Mk. 10:45)

Q. 22. Read Mk. 1:1. What does this verse show to be the purpose of Mark's Gospel?

Mark tells us that he was writing "*the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" Mark informs his readers that he is writing the "Good News" (Gospel) about Jesus Christ. Through his stories, he especially wanted to show that Jesus was "the Son of God," great than a human being, even Caesar. Mark called his Gospel the "beginning" since the story of Jesus continues both in the church but in history

when Jesus returns to reign. Mark was a skilled story teller. He moves quickly from one story about something in the life of Jesus to another story. We can see the following things from the book of Mark:

a. Mark is a book of "action." To keep his story moving quickly and show how Jesus was always busy, Mark would often move from story to story, introducing the new story with the word "immediately." His use of this word was not to put into chronological order the story of Jesus, but to show how Jesus was active in serving others. Rather than order his story chronologically, Mark organized his stories around common ideas. For instance, in Mk. 2:1-3:6 he lists different ways the scribes and Pharisees resisted Jesus even though these events took place in different times in Jesus' life. Unlike the Gospel of John, Mark includes few theological teachings explaining who Jesus was.

b. Mark focuses on the supernatural power of Jesus, especially in the first part of his story. Mark makes no reference to Jesus' birth and childhood, but starts his story with the ministry of John the Baptist. Through his story Mark shows that Jesus has full authority over demons who are forced to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. (Mk. 1:24, 3:11). Jesus also had power over every disease, over death, and over the forces of nature. So great was his power that he had the right to forgive sins just like God. (Mk. 2:5) Mark included only a few examples of Jesus' teachings, focusing primarily upon the parables which Jesus told.

c. One of the unique things about the book of Mark is that it tells how often Jesus wanted to keep quiet who he was and what he did. So when the demons shouted out that Jesus was God's Son, Jesus would tell them to be quiet. (Mk. 1:32-34; 3:11-12) No doubt he did not want them to be his witnesses. He even told people he healed not tell anyone. (Mk. 1:43-44) Jesus did not want to be known simply as a "miracle worker" because his major mission was to provide salvation for mankind. It might be that he told people to be quiet because he did not want people to misunderstand what type of messiah he was- he was not the messiah who had come to meet the physical needs of the Jews or start a political kingdom, but to bring their spiritual healing.

Q. 23. a) Why do you think Jesus did not want to be primarily known as a miracle worker? b) Explain how this is different from many people claiming to have the gift of healing in Ethiopia today. c) What can we learn about the priority Jesus put upon spiritual healing versus physical healing from this truth?

d. Mark's story focuses on the death of Jesus. It has been called a story of the death of Jesus with a long introduction. Even in his public ministry, Mark showed how Jesus often revealed that he was going to Jerusalem to die. The cross was not an accident. The death of Jesus did not happen because Jesus was overcome by the Jewish religious leaders or the Roman government. Instead, he chose to die on the cross because he had come to give his life as "a ransom for many." (Mk. 10:45)

e. The Gospel of Mark emphasizes the suffering that would come to those who follow Jesus. When they suffer, believers are following a pattern left for them by Jesus. On the one side the Gospel is a Gospel of victory. Just like Jesus was victorious over disease and demons, so also the followers of Jesus would enjoy victory. However, just like Jesus suffered what seemed to be defeat by his death on the cross, so also his followers should expect to suffer and perhaps die. Some scholars see the book of Mark as teaching believers that ultimate victory is not found in receiving material blessings on earth, but in the spiritual blessings which are ours now and the ultimate victory that will one day be ours when Jesus returns. Mark adds an interesting detail that when was tempted in the wilderness, he was with wild

animals. (Mk. 1:13) Not long after Mark wrote this Gospel, Christians would be taken into the sport stadiums where they often faced wild animals.

Q. 24. a) Describe how following Jesus is both a story of power and a story of suffering. b) Explain why few Christians today talk about suffering as followers of Jesus.

We do not know for sure when the book of Mark was written. From the little information we have in the book of Acts and church history, it would seem the book was written between 50-64 AD when Mark ministered with Peter. If the book was written after the death of Peter and Paul, it was probably written during a time of persecution by the Roman government around 64 AD.

3. The GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Q. 25. a) Read Lk. 1:1-4. a) What was the purpose of the first book which Luke wrote? b) How does he describe the process of verification of truthfulness which he went through in writing? b) Read Acts 1:1-10. What was the purpose of the second book which Luke wrote?

Luke was probably one of the most educated people in the early church. We are told that he was a "doctor" (Col. 4:14) and his education is reflected in his writing. The books of Luke and Acts are written in high quality Greek. Luke was also a historian who was very concerned that Christianity be based upon facts. We are indebted to Luke for much of our information about the early church. Most scholars think that Luke was part one describing Jesus' life on earth and Acts was part 2 of his history book, telling what Jesus did through the church as it spread throughout the Roman empire. Because Acts had to have been written before 62 AD when the story of Paul ends with Paul still in prison in Rome, most likely the Gospel of Luke would have been written between 59-62 AD. Luke could have written it in Palestine as he waited for the results of Paul's trial in Caesarea or in Rome as he waited for Paul's trial before the Roman emperor.

We are not sure whether Theophilus asked Luke to write the story about Jesus and the early church or whether Luke asked Theophilus to sponsor his project of writing the story. But Luke assured Theophilus that he had carefully researched the stories about Jesus. He talked to eyewitnesses who had seen and heard Jesus. He interviewed those who knew the eyewitnesses as well. And he had no doubt read other written accounts about the life of Jesus and verified their accuracy. Luke would have sent the first copy of his book to Theophilus and Theophilus would have then been responsible to have the book copied and distributed to others.

Luke is probably the only non-Jew who wrote a book of the New Testament. Some scholars think that Luke was from the city of Antioch in Syria. However, in the book of Acts, we first read about Luke on the second missionary journey of Paul when they met in Troas. Luke, the author of Acts, joined Paul on the trip to Philippi. (See Acts 16:6-12 notice that Luke writes "we" to show he is part of the team.) Luke did not travel with Paul during the end of his second and third missionary journeys. However, when Paul returned to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey, Luke joined him again. It seems that Luke was with Paul during two years of imprisonment in Caesarea and for the first two years of his imprisonment in Rome. (See the "we" passages from Acts 20:6 on.) Luke was with Paul at the end when he was executed. (2 Tim. 4:11)

It was probably during Paul's two years of imprisonment in Caesarea that Luke decided to research the facts of the Gospel. He might have heard stories about Jesus from Paul, but wanted to hear the stories from the people Jesus had healed or taught. He no doubt interviewed other living apostles, talked to Mary about the birth of Jesus as well as to people who had been healed. Luke was confident that his story of the life of Jesus was accurate. The Gospel of Luke is written in a more chronological order than the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, or John.

Luke's primary desire in writing the Gospel of Luke was to show the educated Gentile world that Jesus was a historical person and the stories about him were true, not stories made up by Christians. Therefore all people, no matter if they are Jews or Gentiles, should make a decision to follow Jesus, the Savior of all people.

Luke's story of Jesus was not just a historical account of Jesus' life. The Gospel of Luke reflects the following unique facts:

a. Luke emphasizes how the religion of Christianity is not only for a select group of people called "Jews." Rather, Jesus came to bring salvation for all people. Luke traces the line of Jesus not to Abraham, the father of the Jews, as does Matthew, but to Adam, the father of all people. (Lk. 3:38) After announcing the birth of Jesus, the angels sang to the shepherds that Jesus would bring peace to **all people**. (Lk. 2:14) Jesus' attitude towards the Samaritans and Gentiles, whom the Jews taught were not accepted by God, also reflects Luke's desire to show Christianity as a religion for all people.

Q. 26. a) Explain why it is important for Christians to remember that Jesus came to be the Savior of all people, no matter what their tribe is, or educational background, or economic level. b) Describe how Christians often forget this truth and tend to turn Christianity into a religion for their own tribe or economic level.

b. Luke had a special interest in the early years of Jesus' life. Most likely he personally interviewed Mary, the mother of Jesus and heard from her about Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary's relatives who were the parents of John the Baptist. Mary probably told him about the shepherds who worshipped Jesus on the night that he was born, Simeon and Anna who first recognized Jesus as the Messiah, and Jesus' experience at the age of 12 when he discussed theology with the religious leaders in the Temple.

c. Early Christianity brought major changes to the understanding of people on the role of women. Paul made sweeping statements like in Galatians that there was no "male or female" in the church (Gal. 3:28). Each person can equally be God's children. Luke demonstrates how Jesus showed unusual respect for women, something not found in Jewish culture and religion at that time. Luke honored women by showing how Anna was one of the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. He shows how it was women who expressed great love for Jesus (Lk. 7:36-50) and who were part of Jesus' traveling group and financial supporters of Jesus' ministry (Lk. 8:1-3). Jesus praised Mary because she wanted to be a learner from Jesus rather than just serve in the kitchen (Lk. 10:41-42). This was a role unheard of in Jewish society. Jesus often included women in his parables (Lk. 15:8-10). Luke's Gospel shows how faithful women stayed with Jesus as he carried his cross and then was crucified. (Lk. 23:27; 55-56) The men however deserted him (fled). And Luke shows how Jesus honored women by making them the first witnesses of his resurrection. (Lk. 24:1-11)

Q. 27. a) Explain how Christianity has changed your culture's view of women. b) What are ways that you think the understanding of women still needs to change to reflect the New Testament's teaching that men and women are equal in God's family?

Q. 28. Read the following verses: Lk. 1:52-53; 4:18; 5:29-32; 6:20-26; 7:22; 7:34-50; 10:30-37; 14:13-24; 17:11-19; 21:1-4. a) How do these verses emphasize the poor? b) How do they refer to people who are despised? c) What can we learn from this about Jesus' view of those whom the world often despises? d) List some of the despised people in your culture. Describe how the church treats them. e) What are ways your church could change its focus to show more honor to those who are despised in your community?

d. Luke also shows that Jesus was interested in other "outcasts" from society. So he emphasizes God's love for the poor and even for the Samaritans whom Jews hated. Jesus was willing to relate to the "sinners"- tax collectors and prostitutes- for he was their spiritual doctor seeking to heal them from their disease of sin. Unlike most of us, God has a special concern for those whom society usually treats with disrespect. He often chooses to use the uneducated more than the educated, the poor more than the rich, people from less respected tribes, etc. (See 1 Cor. 1:18-31 for an explanation of why God does this.) We do great damage in our churches when we forget this and only focus upon those whom society teaches are respectable.

Q. 29. Look at the following verses: Lk. 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25-26; 4:1; 10:21; 12:12. List ways the Holy Spirit was involved in peoples' lives.

e. Both in his Gospel and in the book of Acts, Luke emphasizes the important role which the Holy Spirit has in fulfilling the work of God. He shows that almost every great act of God took place because of the Holy Spirit. So Luke demonstrates how the Holy Spirit was with John the Baptist even before he was born. And it was the Holy Spirit who enabled Zechariah to prophesy about John the Baptist and Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit who caused Mary to become pregnant, came upon Jesus when he started his public ministry, led Jesus into the wilderness, and helped Jesus accomplish his ministry. Luke knew that if we followers of Jesus are to accomplishing anything of lasting value for God, it will have to come through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

f. Luke was fascinated by the parables which Jesus told. He includes more of Jesus' parables than any of the other Gospel writers.

4. THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

Q. 30. Look at the following verses and summarize things we know about John: Mt. 4:21-22; 10:2; 17:1; Mk. 5:37; 14:32-33; Jn. 13:22-25; 21:20-24; Acts 3:1-11; 4:1-4; 8:14.

From the time that he was young, John, the son of Zebedee, had a deep love for God. When John the Baptist was challenging people to get ready for the coming Messiah, John traveled all the way from Galilee to Judea (two to three days journey) to listen to him and soon became a disciple of John. But after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, young John became a follower of Jesus. John's father was fairly wealthy and owned several fishing boats and had servants. John and his brother James worked with him as a fisherman. But when Jesus called John to follow him, John immediately left it all to follow Jesus. Imagine the disappointment of their father when both James and John left him and the family business to follow

Jesus! James and his brother, John were chosen to be apostles. Although he was probably younger than the other disciples, it did not take long for John to be chosen by Jesus for special training. Along with Peter and his brother James, John was often selected by Jesus for special experiences. He saw Jesus raise a young girl from the dead, saw Jesus' glory on the mountain when Jesus met with Moses and Elijah, and was asked by Jesus to join him in prayer the night Jesus was betrayed to the Jews. But it seems that John had a special relationship with Jesus. In the later part of the Gospel of John, John calls himself "the one whom Jesus loved." He had the special place of honor on the last night of Jesus before his death, close to Jesus with his head next to Jesus' heart.

Q. 31. a) Why do you think John was called the disciple whom Jesus loved? b) Why do you think certain Christians enjoy a closer relationship to God than others? c) If you had been one of Jesus' disciples, do you think you would be known as the one whom Jesus loves? If not, why not?

How did John get this honor of being "the one whom Jesus loved?" We don't know. But usually those who are close to Jesus choose to make him a priority in their lives. We are told "*I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.*" (Prov. 8:17) "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart.*" (Jer. 29:13) God rewards those who make it the goal of their lives to grow close to God. Are you one of those special people?

When Christianity first started and the early church was planted, John, along with Peter, was one of the major leaders of the church. Because the book of Acts focuses upon Peter and Paul, we hear little about John after the early chapters of the book of Acts. Church history tells us that after the destruction of Jerusalem and the death of Peter and Paul, John went to Ephesus where he ministered as a spiritual advisor to the churches in Asia Minor. While there, as the last living apostle, he decided to write his account of Jesus.

Whereas the first three Gospels are similar to each other and present a similar view of the life of Jesus, the book of John, which was written last, presents a very different view of Jesus' life. It is estimated that 90% of John is different from the stories told about Jesus in the first three Gospels. Although John does not contradict the truths found in the Synoptic Gospels, he presents a very different view of Jesus.

About 60 years after Jesus' ascension, around 90 AD, the Apostle John wrote the Gospel of John. The church had grown from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and much of the rest of the known world. The church was no longer centered in Jerusalem and among the Jews. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, Jewish Christians had scattered throughout Palestine, and fewer and fewer Jews put their faith in Jesus Christ. But among the Gentiles, Christianity continued to spread rapidly. The Apostle John moved to Ephesus, which was the major center of Christianity in Asia Minor, and worked as a spiritual advisor (or bishop) for churches in the region. Peter, Paul, and the rest of the disciples had died, most of them having been martyred for their faith. The churches were being shepherded by those who had not been eyewitnesses of Jesus. Persecution by the Roman government was increasing, and false teachings were spreading through the churches, leading many away from true faith in Jesus. But still the Gospel continued to expand. The Apostle John decided to write his story of the life of Jesus. He was probably familiar with what Matthew, Mark, and Luke had written and did not want to repeat what they had written. So John presented another perspective of Jesus which the Synoptic Gospels had not focused on.

Q. 32. Read Jn. 20:30-31. a) What does John say was the reason why he wrote his Gospel? b) List some verses in the Gospel of John which indicate how John sought to use the story of Jesus to fulfill his purpose?

In the Gospel of John, we see the following truths:

1. John's primary purpose in writing his Gospel was to encourage people to believe in Jesus Christ and receive salvation and eternal life. (Jn. 20:30-31) John carefully chose stories and teachings of Jesus to reflect his desire that people everywhere would put their faith in Jesus. But John emphasizes that saving "faith" must include the following:

a. Faith must be based upon truth. John insists that Jesus came teaching "truth." (Jn. 1:14) Often we think that faith is an emotional experience where we "hope" for something. But John insists that saving faith (eternal life) is dependent upon the truthfulness of what or whom we put our faith in. Throughout his book, John seeks to show two major truths about Jesus.

1) Jesus is fully God, equal to God the Father. During the days of Jesus, there were false teachers who taught that Jesus was a created spiritual being, greater than the angels, perhaps the greatest of spiritual beings. But he was not God. In order to correct this false teaching that would later have a great impact upon the church after the death of the apostles, John wrote to show that Jesus is fully God. He is the one who both has life in himself and gives life to all things. (Jn. 1:4) Jesus is the true light (Jn. 1:5-9, 8:12) and radiates with the glory of God. (Jn. 1:14-18) He is the great "I Am" who revealed himself to Moses in the Old Testament. (Jn. 8:57-58) John's favorite name which he uses for Jesus Christ shows that he is unique as "God, the Son." (Jn. 1:34-49, Jn. 3:16-18) He also calls Jesus "God." (Jn. 1:1; 5:18; 10:30) Jesus was more than just a political messiah which the Jews expected, he was God himself who put on human flesh.

2) Jesus is fully man. The first major false teaching in the early church questioned whether or not Jesus was fully human. Some taught he was a spirit who temporarily indwelt a human body which left Jesus' temporary body on the cross. But John insisted that Jesus was fully human. God became "flesh" and lived with humans. (Jn. 1:14) Like all humans, Jesus had a mother and siblings (Jn. 2:12), a place where he grew up (Nazareth), needed a drink (Jn. 4:7), wept over the death of his friend (Jn. 11:35), washed the feet of his disciples (Jn. 13:5), died and was buried. (Jn. 19:30, 42)

Q. 33. a) Explain why it is important to believe that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. b) Which of these two natures of Jesus do most Christians focus on? c) Read Heb. 4:14-16. What does this verse insist we should do because Jesus was fully human?

Throughout history, Christians have had a difficult time keeping this amazing, unexplainable truth that Jesus is both fully God and fully man in balance. Sometimes Christians will focus totally upon the "deity" of Jesus. In their worship, they focus upon the greatness and power of Jesus and forget that Jesus is truly human. And so they turn to other angelic or "human" beings like Gabriel, Mary, or the saints who might help them somehow gain God's answers. God is too great and remote to bother with them. If we focus too much upon Jesus' deity, it will make Jesus seem distant and remote from us.

But other Christians focus too much upon Jesus' humanity. Jesus has become like an elder brother or a close human friend to them. But when we focus too much on Jesus' humanity, we no longer honor him as God. Just like we feel free to disagree with our friends and not do what they say, we think that we can disagree with Jesus and not obey him.

Although we will never be able to understand and explain how Jesus is both fully God and fully man, we must believe and live based upon this important truth. So when we approach Jesus in prayer, we can come knowing that he fully understands our humanness and our weaknesses and is very patient with us. But we must also remember that he is "a consuming fire" (See Heb. 12:28-29) and not someone to be treated disrespectfully or indifferently. As the righteous judge we must remember that God will punish us when we choose to disobey him.

b. There are different types of faith and only one of them gives eternal life. Faith or believe is mentioned over 98 times in John's Gospel. The book of John looks at "faith" in several different ways.

1) Faith which is based upon looking for things we can get from Jesus to meet our selfish needs. Many Christians are like the Jews who were willing to believe on Jesus because Jesus fed them. But when Jesus taught difficult truths, they all left Jesus. (See Jn. 6:60-69) Today there are many Christians who willingly follow Jesus as long as he does something good for them. If he gives them a job, or money, or heals them from their disease, they worship him and claim to be Christians. But if they do not get the job, or are sick or childless, or if they are threatened with persecution, they quickly abandon following Jesus. Their faith rests upon the blessings they want from Jesus rather than upon a conviction of who Jesus is.

Q. 34. a) Give an example of how you have seen this type of faith. b) Read Mt. 13:18-23. Describe what this parable teaches happens to those who follow Jesus for selfish reasons.

2) Faith that is based only on correct knowledge but no personal application of that faith in the person's life. There are many Christians, especially the children of believers, who know all of the stories about Jesus. If you ask them a question, they can give you the right answers. However, they only know "about" Jesus, they do not have a personal relationship with Jesus as their Savior. They are like the Jewish religious leaders who knew all of the truths of the Old Testament, but did not know the God of Abraham or Moses. Jesus accused them of having Satan as their father. (See Jn. 8:42-47) Many who follow the Christian religion believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, but never live as followers of Jesus. How they worship on Sunday and how they live during the week is very different. Their lives are similar to the non-Christians. As Paul said, they have a form of godliness, but don't know its power. (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

Q. 35. a) Describe how you have seen this type of faith, especially among children of believers. b) If you were a church leader, what could you do to help change these peoples' mental faith into personal faith?

3) Faith that brings eternal life. John's desire was that people have true saving faith which brings eternal life (Jn. 3:16), makes people the children of God (Jn. 1:12), and keeps them from condemnation. (Jn. 3:36) Saving faith is dependent upon knowing the true facts about Jesus and his death of our behalf. But it also involves committing ourselves to live out the truth of those facts. We can't claim to trust Jesus for our salvation and believe that we can earn our salvation by doing good things. Or we can't claim that Jesus is Lord and not obey him in every part of our lives. We can't claim to know God and yet not obey his

commands. Saving faith is always demonstrated by trusting in what God says which leads to living based upon God's truths. It is by trusting that Jesus died for our sins, that he is both Savior and Lord, and living our lives in a personal relationship of love and obedience to Jesus that we have the type of true faith which brings us the eternal life which Jesus promised.

Q. 36. Explain how saving faith includes both truth and correct living.

2. John organized his story of Jesus around the number 7 in his book: (Note: The number 7 had symbolic meaning to the Jews, symbolizing perfection.)

a. John lists seven miracles which Jesus did. He calls these miracles "signs" because they are "evidences" that Jesus is the Messiah. From the perspective of John, the miracles which Jesus did were not simply to help people when they were in trouble. Rather the miracles prove that Jesus is God's Son, the true Messiah, the one who brings eternal life. Could it be that Jesus continues to do miracles today primarily for this purpose? Could it be that miracles are not only given to help us, but God is seeking to increase our faith in him? In the Bible we see the following:

1) God often performed a lot of miracles during times of unbelief or when the Gospel was first preached in an area. But later God did fewer miracles. For example, God did many miracles during the times the Jews were in the wilderness, but few miracles during David's days. And he did lots of miracles during the days of the apostles, but less once the churches became established.

2) It is difficult to grow in our faith when there are miracles. Some of the times in the Bible and church history when faith was the weakest was when God did lots of miracles. We could name times like when Israel was in the wilderness and God led them with a pillar of fire, fed them every day, and gave them water from the rock. Or the time of Elijah when fire came down from heaven. Or the time of Jesus when he healed all who asked for healing and yet they abandoned Jesus when the time of the cross came. Miracles by themselves do not seem to promote strong faith and obedience to God.

3) Faith is primarily revealed in times of difficulty. As 1 Pet. 1:6-9 says, it is times of difficulty that refines faith. Miracles create props for our faith and we tend to depend upon those gifts of God to continue to trust and obey God. But God's greatest desire is that we trust him even when there are no clear miracles. As Job 13:15 says "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him." Or in Habakkuk 3:17-18, the author says that even if there are no physical blessings, he will still rejoice in God. Or the apostles who told Jesus after everyone else had left "You have the words of eternal life. Where else can we go?" (Jn. 6:66-69) John ends his book by sharing how it is better to hear God's Word and believe than it is to see Jesus and his miracles and believe. (Jn. 20:29) John shows that mature faith does not need signs. If we look for signs, we are like the religious leaders who always demanded signs from Jesus. (Mt. 12:38-39; Jn. 4:48)

Q. 37. a) Explain how many Christians are looking for miracles today. b) How have you seen these miracles cause people to believe in Jesus? c) How have you seen these miracles weaken faith as people begin to focus more on the miracles than following Jesus? d) Illustrate from your life how difficulties were God's tool to increase your faith.

b. John quoted Jesus of saying seven "I Am" statements. (Jn. 6:35; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1,5) When God revealed himself to Moses, he revealed a new name to the Jews. That name was "Yahweh" or "I Am". Although scholars debate the exact meaning of the name, through the name God revealed that he has life in himself. John is teaching us that Jesus is that "I AM" God whom Moses saw. Jesus has the spiritual light of salvation (Jn. 8:12), the power of resurrection life (Jn. 11:25), the source of spiritual nourishment like bread (Jn. 6:41,48,51), etc. Each of Jesus' seven claims reflect his power as God.

3. The Apostle John liked to express his truth in contrasts. He often used words like "light" and "darkness" (Jn. 1:5, 3:19; 12:46); "life and death;" (Jn. 5:24) "above" and "below" (Jn. 3:31; 8:23); etc.

4. Although the book of Luke focuses upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus, the Gospel of John gives the clearest teaching by Jesus about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers. If we want to have a balanced understanding of why God has given the Holy Spirit to believers, we must examine the teachings about the Holy Spirit in Jn. 14-16.

5. John provides some of the clearest examples which show that God is Trinity- both one and yet three. This unexplainable mysterious teaching is taught with no attempt to explain it. John shows how God the Father "sent" Jesus into the world (Jn. 3:16) and how Jesus always did what the Father wanted. (Jn. 14:10-11) And John shows how Jesus said that the Father and Son would send the Holy Spirit to believers. (Jn. 15:26) These words can only make sense if God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are somehow distinct from each other while at the same time are one.

FOURTH DAY

Although it would be good to study each of the four Gospels individually to see how each book presents the life of Christ, in this book we will look at the life of Christ in chronicle order. Today we will study a chart showing the chronological order of the life of Christ and the Gospels which refer to each event in Christ's life. As you study the chart, remember the following:

1. None of the Gospels give a clear, complete chronological story of the life of Christ. Often the story of Jesus is presented topically with similar teachings or stories grouped together rather than written in the order things happened. The book of Luke seems to have been written the closest to the chronology of Jesus' life. Because the Gospels make no attempt to put the story of Jesus chronologically, there are many events in the life of Christ about which scholars disagree when the event happened. Our chart below adapts the order of the life of Christ from the Life Application Study Bible and Gundry's Survey of the New Testament.

2. The Gospels give us general historical events which help us date the life of Christ, but not clearly enough to know exactly when Jesus was born or when he died. Scholars continue to debate about the year when Jesus was born, when he started his public ministry, and when he died. However, the following chronology of the life of Jesus best fits the view that Jesus was born when Herod the Great was alive, Jesus was about thirty when he started ministry (See Lk. 3:23), and Jesus ministered for about 3 ½ years.

- a. Jesus' birth and early years (5 BC-26 AD)
- b. Jesus' early public ministry (26-27 AD)
- c. Jesus' major Galilean ministry (27-29 AD)

- d. Jesus travels outside Galilee (29 AD)
- e. Jesus travels to Perea and Judea (29-30 AD)
- f. Jesus' Last Week and Crucifixion (April 30 AD)
- g. Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension (April – June 30 AD)

Q. 38. Slowly read through the chart below trying to remember the stories about Jesus' life which you have read before. Notice a) which Gospels teach which stories and don't teach other stories, and b) which stories took place in which stage of Jesus' ministry. c) Make a list of things which you had not realized about the life of Jesus from this chart.

JESUS' BIRTH AND YOUTH- 5 BC – 26 AD				
EVENT	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Purpose of writing			Lk. 1:1-4	Jn. 20:30-31
Theological introduction to Jesus: God became human				Jn. 1:1-18
Record of Jesus' ancestors	Mt. 1:1-17		Lk. 3:23-38	
Angel in Jerusalem foretells John's birth			Lk. 1:5-25	
Angel in Nazareth foretells Jesus' birth			Lk. 1:26-38	
Mary visits Elizabeth in Judea			Lk. 1:39-56	
John the Baptist's birth			Lk. 1:57-80	
Angel appears to Joseph	Mt. 1:18-25			
Jesus born in Bethlehem			Lk. 2:1-20	
Jesus taken to the Temple			Lk. 2:21-40	
Wise men visit Jesus	Mt. 2:1-12			
Jesus taken to Egypt for protection	Mt. 2:13-18			
Joseph, Mary, & Jesus return to Nazareth to live	Mt. 2:19-23			
Jesus, age 12, speaks to religious leaders			Lk. 2:41-52	
JESUS' EARLY PUBLIC MINISTRY: 26-27 AD				
John the Baptist's ministry	Mt. 3:1-12	Mk. 1:1-8	Lk. 3:1-18	
Baptism of Jesus east of Jordan River	Mt. 3:13-17	Mk. 1:9-11	Lk. 3:21-22	
Satan tempts Jesus in wilderness	Mt. 4:1-11	Mk. 1:12-13	Lk. 4:1-13	
John's first testimony about Jesus & Jesus' first disciples				Jn. 1:19-51
Jesus' first miracle- changing water to wine in Cana				Jn. 2:1-12
Jesus cleanses the Temple in Jerusalem				Jn. 2:13-25
Jesus talks with Nicodemus				Jn. 3:1-21
John the Baptist's second testimony concerning Jesus				Jn. 3:22-36
Herod imprisons John the Baptist			Lk. 3:19-20	
Jesus talks with Samaritan woman				Jn. 4:1-42

Jesus returns to Galilee to start major ministry	Mt. 4:12	Mk. 1:14	Lk. 4:14	Jn. 4:43-45
JESUS' MINISTRY IN GALILEE: 27-29 AD				
Jesus teaches throughout Galilee	Mt. 4:12-17	Mk. 1:14-15	Lk. 4:14-15	
Jesus heals nobleman's son				Jn. 4:46-54
Jesus rejected in Nazareth			Lk. 4:16-30	
Jesus calls first disciples	Mt. 4:18-22	Mk. 1:16-20	Lk. 5:1-11	
Jesus teaches with great authority		Mk. 1:21-28	Lk. 4:31-37	
Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law	Mt. 8:14-17	Mk. 1:29-34	Lk. 4:38-41	
Jesus preaches throughout Galilee	Mt. 4:23-25	Mk. 1:35-39	Lk. 4:42-44	
Jesus heals man with leprosy	Mt. 8:1-4	Mk. 1:40-45	Lk. 5:12-16	
Jesus heals paralyzed man	Mt. 9:1-8	Mk. 2:1-12	Lk. 5:17-26	
Jesus calls Matthew (Levi)	Mt. 9:9-13	Mk. 2:13-17	Lk. 5:27-32	
Religious leaders ask about fasting	Mt. 9:14-17	Mk. 2:18-22	Lk. 5:33-39	
Jesus heals lame man in Jerusalem, claims deity				Jn. 5:1-47
Disciples pick grain on Sabbath	Mt. 12:1-8	Mk. 2:23-28	Lk. 6:1-5	
Jesus heals man's hand on Sabbath	Mt. 12:9-14	Mk. 3:1-6	Lk. 6:6-11	
Large crowds follow Jesus	Mt. 12:15-21	Mk. 3:7-12		
Jesus chooses 12 apostles		Mk. 3:13-19	Lk. 6:12-16	
Jesus teaches the Sermon on the Mountain	Mt. 5:1-7:29		Lk. 6:17-49	
Healing Roman centurion's servant	Mt. 8:5-13		Lk. 7:1-10	
Jesus raises widow's son from dead			Lk. 7:11-17	
John the Baptists questions to Jesus	Mt. 11:2-19		Lk. 7:18-35	
Jesus denounces Galilean cities, offers rest for soul	Mt. 11:20-30			
Prostitute anoints Jesus feet with perfume			Lk. 7:36-50	
List of women who followed and helped Jesus			Lk. 8:1-3	
Jesus accused of using Satan's power for miracles	Mt. 12:22-37	Mk. 3:20-30		
Religious leaders ask for a miracle	Mt. 12:38-45			
Jesus describes his true spiritual family	Mt. 12:46-50	Mk. 3:31-35	Lk. 8:19-21	
Jesus' parables about the kingdom of God	Mt. 13:1-53	Mk. 4:1-34	Lk. 8:4-18	

Jesus stills the storm on Sea of Galilee	Mt. 8:23-27	Mk. 4:35-41	Lk. 8:22-25	
Jesus heals the demonized man & casts demons into pigs	Mt. 8:28-34	Mk. 5:1-20	Lk. 8:26-39	
Jesus heals bleeding women and raises Jairus' daughter	Mt. 9:18-26	Mk. 5:21-43	Lk. 8:40-56	
Jesus heals two blind people and mute person	Mt. 9:27-34			
Jesus rejected in Nazareth again	Mt. 13:53-58	Mk. 6:1-6		
Jesus sends out 12 apostles to testify	Mt. 9:35-11:1	Mk. 6:7-13	Lk. 9:1-6	
John the Baptist killed by Herod	Mt. 14:1-12	Mk. 6:14-29	Lk. 9:7-9	
Jesus feeds 5000 men	Mt. 14:13-23	Mk. 6:30-46	Lk. 9:10-17	Jn. 6:1-15
Jesus walks on water of Sea of Galilee	Mt. 14:24-33	Mk. 6:47-52		Jn. 6:16-21
Jesus heals those who touch him	Mt. 14:34-36	Mk. 6:53-56		
Jesus sermon on being the Bread of Life				Jn. 6:22-71
Jesus teaches about true purity	Mt. 15:1-20	Mk. 7:1-23		
JESUS TRAVELS OUTSIDE OF GALILEE: 29 AD				
Healing the daughter of Syro-Phoenician woman	Mt. 15:21-28	Mk. 7:24-30		
Jesus feeds 4000 and heals many people	Mt. 15:29-39	Mk. 7:31-8:9		
Religious leaders demand a miraculous sign	Mt. 16:1-4	Mk. 8:10-12		
Jesus warns people against Pharisees & Sadducees	Mt. 16:5-12	Mk. 8:13-21		
Jesus restores sight of blind man		Mk. 8:22-26		
Peter testifies that Jesus is the Messiah	Mt. 16:13-20	Mk. 8:27-30	Lk. 9:18-20	
Jesus' first prediction of his coming death	Mt. 16:21-28	Mk. 8:31-9:1	Lk. 9:21-27	
Jesus meets with Moses & Elijah	Mt. 17:1-13	Mk. 9:2-13	Lk. 9:28-36	
Jesus heals demon possessed boy	Mt. 17:14-21	Mk. 9:14-29	Lk. 9:37-43	
Jesus' second prediction of his coming death	Mt. 17:22-23	Mk. 9:30-32	Lk. 9:44-45	
Peter finds money in fish's mouth	Mt. 17:24-27			
Disciples argue who is the greatest	Mt. 18:1-5	Mk. 9:33-37	Lk. 9:46-48	
Jesus warns against temptation	Mt. 18:6-14	Mk. 9:42-50		

Teaching on forgiveness & reconciliation	Mt. 18:15-35			
Disciples rebuke others who use Jesus' name		Mk. 9:38-41	Lk. 9:49-50	
JESUS' MINISTRY IN PEREA AND JUDEA: 29-30 AD				
Jesus' journey to Jerusalem for Feast of Tabernacles				Jn. 7:1-9
Jesus teaches about the cost of discipleship	Mt. 8:18-22		Lk. 9:51-62	
Jesus teaches in the Temple				Jn. 7:10-31
Religious leaders seek to arrest Jesus				Jn. 7:32-52
Jesus tested with a woman caught in adultery				Jn. 8:1-11
Jesus claims to be light of the world				Jn. 8:12-59
Jesus heals blind man				Jn. 9:1-41
Jesus teaches about the Good Shepherd				Jn. 10:1-21
Jesus sends out 70 (72) disciples through Judea			Lk. 10:1-24	
Parable of Good Samaritan			Lk. 10:25-37	
Jesus visits Martha and Mary			Lk. 10:38-42	
Jesus teaches about prayer			Lk. 11:1-13	
Jesus defends himself & criticizes religious leaders			Lk. 11:14-54	
Jesus teaches about hypocrisy, trust in God, watchfulness			Lk. 12:1-59	
Jesus teaches about repentance & parable of fig tree			Lk. 13:1-9	
Jesus heals crippled woman			Lk. 13:10-17	
Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God			Lk. 13:18-21	
Jesus claims to be God				Jn. 10:22-42
Jesus predicts his coming death			Lk. 13:22-35	
Jesus heals man with swollen limbs			Lk. 14:1-6	
Jesus teaches about humility & the coming messiah's feast			Lk. 14:7-24	
Jesus teaches about discipleship			Lk. 14:25-35	
Jesus uses parables to explain salvation			Lk. 15:1-16:31	

Jesus teaches about giving offense, forgiveness, faith and obedience			Lk. 17:1-10	
Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead				Jn. 11:1-44
Jewish leaders plot to kill Jesus				Jn. 11:45-54
Jesus heals 10 lepers			Lk. 17:11-19	
Jesus teaches about his kingdom			Lk. 17:20-37	
Jesus teaches about prayer			Lk. 18:1-14	
Jesus teaches on divorce and remarriage	Mt. 19:1-12	Mk. 10:1-12		
Jesus teaches about children & God's kingdom	Mt. 19:13-15	Mk. 10:13-16	Lk. 18:15-17	
Jesus and the rich young man	Mt. 19:16-30	Mk. 10:17-31	Lk. 18:18-30	
Parable of workers in the vineyard	Mt. 20:1-16			
James & John ask to be rulers & Jesus third prediction of his death	Mt. 20:17-28	Mk. 10:32-34	Lk. 18:31-34	
Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus	Mt. 20:29-43	Mk. 10:46-52	Lk. 18:35-43	
Jesus eats with Zacchaeus			Lk. 19:1-10	
Jesus tells parable of a king's ten servants			Lk. 19:11-27	
JESUS' LAST WEEK ON EARTH AND CRUCIFIXION: APRIL 30 AD				
Jesus in Bethany, Religious leaders plot to kill Jesus				Jn. 11:55-12:1, 9-11
Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a donkey	Mt. 21:1-11	Mk. 11:1-11	Lk. 19:28-44	Jn. 12:12-19
Jesus curses the fig tree	Mt. 21:18-19	Mk. 11:12-14		
Jesus cleanses temple	Mt. 21:12-13	Mk. 11:15-18	Lk. 19:45-48	
Jesus explains why he must die				Jn. 12:20-50
The withered fig tree & prayer	Mt. 21:19-46	Mk. 11:19-25	Lk. 21:37-38	
Religious leaders ask Jesus source of his authority	Mt. 21:23-27	Mk. 11:27-33	Lk. 20:1-8	
Jesus teaches parables warning of his rejection and its consequences	Mt. 21:28-22:14	Mk. 12:1-12	Lk. 20:9-19	
Political leaders question Jesus about paying taxes	Mt. 22:15-22	Mk. 12:13-17	Lk. 20:20-26	
Sadducees question Jesus about the resurrection	Mt. 22:23-33	Mk. 12:18-27	Lk. 20:27-40	

Religious leaders question Jesus about greatest commandment	Mt. 22:34-40	Mk. 12:28-34		
Jesus asks religious leaders about David's son	Mt. 22:41-46	Mk. 12:35-37	Lk. 20:41-44	
Jesus warns against the scribes and Pharisees	Mt. 23:1-39	Mk. 12:38-40	Lk. 20:45-47	
The widow's offering		Mk. 12:41-44	Lk. 21:1-4	
Jesus teaches about the future and his second coming	Mt. 24-25	Mk. 13:1-37	Lk. 21:5-38	
Judas and religious leaders plot to kill Jesus	Mt. 26:1-5, 14-16	Mk. 14:1-2, 10-11	Lk. 22:1-6	
Mary anoints Jesus with perfume	Mt. 26:6-13	Mk. 14:3-9		Jn. 12:2-8
Disciples prepare for the Passover	Mt. 26:17-19	Mk. 14:12-16	Lk. 22:7-13	
Jesus washes disciples' feet				Jn. 13:1-20
Jesus shares the Lord's Supper with the 12	Mt. 26:20-30	Mk. 14:17-26	Lk. 22:14-30	Jn. 13:21-30
Jesus predicts Peter's denial	Mt. 26:31-35	Mk. 14:27-31	Lk. 22:31-38	Jn. 13:31-38
Jesus prepares the disciples for his return to heaven				Jn. 14-16
Jesus prays for himself and the disciples				Jn. 17
Jesus prays in Gethsemane	Mt. 26:30, 36-46	Mk. 14:26, 32-42	Lk. 22:39-46	
Jesus is arrested	Mt. 26:47-56	Mt. 14:43-52	Lk. 22:47-53	Jn. 18:1-12
Jesus' hearing before Annas				Jn. 18:12-14, 19-23
Jesus' hearing before Caiaphas & Sanhedrin	Mt. 26:57, 59-68	Mk. 14:53, 55-65	Lk. 22:54, 63-65	Jn. 18:24
Peter denies Jesus three times	Mt. 26:58, 69-75	Mk. 14:54, 66-72	Lk. 22:54-62	Jn. 18:15-18, 25-27
Sanhedrin pronounces Jesus worthy of death	Mt. 27:1-2	Mk. 15:1	Lk. 22:66-71	
Judas commits suicide	Mt. 27:3-10			
Jesus' first trial before Pilate	Mt. 27:2, 11-14	Mk. 15:1-5	Lk. 23:1-5	Jn. 18:28-38
Jesus tried before Herod Antipas			Lk. 23:6-12	Jn. 18:39-19:10
Jesus' second trial before Pilate	Mt. 27:15-26	Mk. 15:6-15	Lk. 23:13-25	Jn. 19:11-16
Roman soldiers mock & beat Jesus	Mt. 27:27-31	Mk. 15:16-20		

Jesus' journey to the cross	Mt. 27:32-34	Mk. 15:21-24	Lk. 23:26-31	Jn. 19:17
Jesus is crucified	Mt. 27:35-36	Mk. 15:25-26	Lk. 23:32-33	Jn. 19:18-19
Various events while Jesus on cross	Mt. 27:37-50	Mk. 15:27-37	Lk. 23:34-46	Jn. 19:19-37
Curtain in the Temple rips	Mt. 27:51-56	Mk. 15:38-41	Lk. 23:45, 47-49	
Jesus is buried	Mt. 27:57-66	Mk. 15:42-47	Lk. 23:50-56	Jn. 19:38-42

RESURRECTION & ASCENSION OF JESUS: APRIL-JUNE 30 AD

The empty tomb	Mt. 28:1-4	Mk. 16:1		
The women at the tomb	Mt. 28:5-8	Mk. 16:2-8	Lk. 24:1-8	Jn. 20:1
Peter and John visit the empty tomb			Lk. 24:9-12	Jn. 20:2-10
Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene				Jn. 20:11-18
Jesus appears to other women	Mt. 28:9-10			
Sanhedrin bribe Roman guards	Mt. 28:11-15			
Jesus appears to two disciple		Mk. 16:12-13	Lk. 24:13-34	
Jesus appears to Peter and others			Lk. 24:35-43	Jn. 20:19-23
Jesus appears to Thomas		Mk. 16:14		Jn. 20:24-29
Jesus appears to seven disciples in Galilee				Jn. 21:1-14
Jesus tells Peter to feed sheep				Jn. 21:15-25
Jesus gives great commission	Mt. 28:16-20	Mk. 16:15-18		
Jesus appears to disciples in Jerusalem			Lk. 24:44-49	
Jesus ascends to heaven		Mk. 16:19-20	Lk. 24:50-53	

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) Why do you think the Gospel writers insisted that the facts they wrote about Jesus were true and could be verified, not stories made up by the followers of Jesus? b) Do Christians today put enough emphasis on whether something is true or not? Discuss the reason for your answers. c) What are areas of Christianity that Christians today need to be more concerned to verify that something is true or not?

2. Suppose a person of another religion told you that the Gospels in the New Testament have been corrupted. Discuss how you would explain why Christians believe the Gospels give an accurate picture of Jesus and what he taught.

3. Each of the four Gospels present a different perspective on the life of Jesus, depending upon the audience they were written to. a) List the audience each Gospel was written to. b) Describe how each Gospel presents the life of Jesus in a way that people could best understand why they should follow Jesus? c) In 1 Cor. 9:19-23 Paul says that he changed according to the people group he witnessed to. Describe situations (people groups) we can face today where we can tell the Gospel story in a way that does not change the Gospel, but makes it more relevant to that particular people group. Discuss together what stories you would tell for each people group.

4. a) How well do you think the ordinary believer knows the story of Jesus and what he taught? b) Discuss how your church could do a better job using the Gospels to teach believers how to become true followers of Jesus.

5. Look at the chronological chart of the life of Christ. a) Pick out the major events from the life of Jesus. List what year of Jesus' ministry that event took place in. b) What things surprise you in the order of events from the life of Jesus? How does looking at a summary of the life of Jesus like this give you a better idea about Jesus' life on earth?

LESSON FOUR

FIRST DAY

JESUS BEFORE TIME BEGAN

"When did Jesus begin to exist?" I once asked a group of elders. "When he was born in Bethlehem by the virgin Mary." they answered. Were they right? Was the birth of Jesus the beginning of the existence of Jesus, our Savior?

Q. 1. Read Jn. 1:1-5; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3. a) Explain what these verses teach about the existence of Jesus before his birth in Bethlehem. b) What do these verses teach about the character of Jesus before he put on human flesh? c) On the basis of these verses, how would you answer my question which I asked the elders?

Where does the story of Jesus really begin? Is it like every other story on earth which begins with the birth of the person? Does the story of Jesus start when the angel visited Mary and told her that the Holy Spirit would make her pregnant with the Messiah? The Bible teaches that the story of Jesus starts long before creation. In fact, the story of Jesus has no beginning. In order to teach us that Jesus was not just a great man who did miracles and died, the Apostle John starts his story of the earthly life of Jesus with an explanation of who Jesus really is.

In the Bible there are some truths that defy understanding. One truth that is hard for humans to understand is how Jesus can be fully God and fully man. "How can God dwell in a human body?" we wonder. We are left with an unexplainable mystery. Churches have fought over their understanding of how the divine and human natures in Jesus interrelated. Did the human and divine natures get intermixed into one new nature? Or did the two natures exist side by side and at one point Jesus' human nature acted (e.g. "I am thirsty."- Jn. 19:28) and at another time Jesus' divine nature acted. (e.g. Jesus walks on water. (Jn. 6:16-21) The Ethiopia Orthodox Church uses the name "Tewahido" to reflect their unique understanding of how the divine and human natures interrelate. Their view is different from how the majority of Christendom has chosen to understand this mystery. The New Testament never tries to explain this truth. But it clearly teaches that Jesus is human, different from us only in the fact that he does not have a sin nature. (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16) But the New Testament teaches that Jesus is fully God. If we are to be accurate in our understandings to what the New Testament teaches, we must remember that Jesus is both God and human.

Before he tells about the human life of Jesus, the Apostle John wanted to make sure people understood that Jesus was fully God. So the Apostle John starts his book about Jesus from eternity past, before Adam and Eve were created. He wants all of us to remember as we are reading about Jesus' life on earth that Jesus is also the eternal God.

Q. 2. Read Jn. 1:1-5 again. a) What special name did John call Jesus? What do you think he meant by this name? b) List each major statement (phrase) which John uses to describe the Word. c) Explain what each statement teaches us about the character of the Word.

JESUS IS GOD, THE ETERNAL LOGOS (Jn. 1:1-5)

Almost 60 years had passed since the death of Jesus. By then Christianity had spread from the small Roman province of Judea throughout most of the Roman empire. It had started with Jews, the chosen people of God, with whom God had communicated his truth (found in the Old Testament) over the centuries. Although there were some Jewish believers in his church in Ephesus, the Apostle John was surrounded by Greeks and they were turning to Christ in increasing numbers. But the Greeks did not have the teachings of the Old Testament to help them understand who Jesus is. The Greeks grew up believing in many gods and with philosophies which bore little similarity to how God had revealed himself to the Jews. How was John going to share that Jesus was God without them misunderstanding what he said?

As John thought about this question, the Holy Spirit brought to his mind a unique term familiar both to the Jews and to the Gentiles. That was the term "Word" which in Greek is called "Logos." For the first time in the Bible God is called "the Word." Only John would use this special name for Jesus. (See also 1 Jn. 1:1) Scholars debate John's exact meaning for this word, but most likely John used the understanding found in two different people groups, the Jews and the Greeks, as the basis for his meaning for the term "Logos." In order for us to differentiate between what we understand by the title "Word" in our context and what John meant by the term, we will use the title "Logos" to refer to John's name for Jesus.

1. The Jewish understanding of the title "Logos"

Most of the Jews living during John's day understood Greek. They knew that the Greek word "logos" could have two meanings. It could mean "spoken word" just like we use it in Amharic. But it could also mean "reason" or the reasons for which we do things. Amazingly, in the Old Testament both interpretations of the word "logos" referred to God.

a. The spoken Word of God: From ancient times, the Jews had a deep respect for language. They knew that words tended to have special power. A king like David spoke and suddenly a war would start. Or God spoke a command and suddenly something was created. (Gen. 1) For the Jews, it was as if words took on a power of their own for good or evil once someone said something. And once spoken, words can never be taken back; their power continues to work. We have all experienced this. In anger, a parent insults his child. That parent might soon forget what he said, but the words keep working in the heart of the child, causing hurt which can last for years.

Frequently the Old Testament showed God's spoken command as having the power of accomplish something. For instance, in Gen. 1:3, 6, we are told that God spoke and creation happened. God did not work creation with his hands, he caused creation by his word. (Ps. 33:6) God's Word heals (Ps. 107:20) or brings judgment upon the world. (Ps. 147:15-18; Jer. 23:29) God's Word is so powerful that once God speaks it, it works to accomplish God's desires. (Is. 55:11) Eventually the Jews, seeking to honor God by not using his regular names (Elohim, El Shaddai, Yahweh), substituted the regular names for God with the title "Word." So in one of their translations of Ex. 19:17, rather than saying Moses went to meet with God, the Jews translated that Moses went to meet with the "Word of God." So when the Jews heard the title "Logos," their minds would immediately go to God's creative power and working among man.

Q. 3. Read Prov. 8:22-31; 3:19-20. Describe the relationship between God, creation, and wisdom.

b. The "reason" or wisdom of God: In the Old Testament, we also see "reason" or wisdom to be the guiding force through which God works. In the wisdom literature (e.g. Psalms, Proverbs) the word reason or "wisdom" became treated almost as if it was a person. For instance, in Prov. 8, Solomon pictured wisdom as a skilled workman. God created wisdom and then wisdom created the world on God's behalf. Eventually "wisdom" and "God" began to be used interchangeably.

By using the word "logos" to the Jews, John was saying "if you want to know who has God's power and was used to create the world, then you must look to Jesus. He is the one who has God's full creative power, the one through whom God created all things. He is the true 'Wisdom' to which the Old Testament referred. And he is the one who reveals the mind and will of God in a way greater than any prophet."

2. The Greek understanding of "Logos"

About 500 years before the birth of Jesus, in the town of Ephesus (where John was writing his Gospel), a philosopher began to teach that if there was no controlling "reason" behind the created world, the world would turn into chaos and destroy itself. There was something called "Logos" or reason which gave the world order and purpose. Other philosophers also taught that mankind's ability to know right from wrong meant that this "Logos" provided the moral standards for the world. To the Greeks, this Logos was impersonal, not a god. It was like gravity, a natural law that keeps things attracted to the earth rather than floating through space.

John agreed with the Greeks that there was something behind the created world which gives it purpose and teaches us what is right and wrong. But he insisted that rather than this Logos being impersonal, it is found in Jesus. Jesus is the one who created the world and continues to oversee it to produce order in our world. And he is the one who tells a person what is right and what is wrong. Amazingly, that Logos came to live among humans as a man.

Q. 4. Explain how this understanding of "Logos" is different from or similar to what the Amharic word "Word" means.

Jn. 1:1-18 is John's theological introduction to the story of Jesus Christ. Notice the following statements which John made in John 1:1-5 about Jesus before time began and before he put on human flesh:

1. In the beginning was the Word: What beginning did John mean? He is looking as far back in human history as he could, which is the time of creation. During the creation of our world in Genesis 1:1, John insists that Jesus was already there. John did not say the Word "began" but "was," which shows that Jesus already existed when creation happened. Jesus was in the beginning already existing in an uncreated state. It is easier for us to think about the future and realize that Jesus is eternal- living forever and ever. But John is saying that if we look to the past, Jesus also lived forever and ever as well.

2. The Word was with God: Jesus eternally lived with God the Father. The key word here is "with." We usually use this word to refer to being together with someone else. The fact that it says the Word was "with" God clearly indicates that Jesus and God the Father are in some way distinct personalities from each other. A person cannot be "with" himself- that does not make sense. The teachings of the Jesus Only go against the obvious understanding of this verse and are wrong in their belief that Jesus is just another name for God. The word "with" in Greek includes the idea that the Word and God were living together in full union and communion. (e.g. When we say a husband is "with" his wife, we usually assume that they

are not just living in the same house, but they are talking together, relating to each other as husband and wife.) John means that in eternity before there were any people, already there was a relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

3. The Word was God: This is the major idea that John was teaching. John did not say that Jesus was "a" god as if he was another god separate from God the Father. Rather, John said that Jesus was God, the same as God the Father in person. In the Greek language, John was saying that Jesus, the Word, has all of the attributes of God. Jesus is everything that defines what God is; he is fully and completely God. (e.g. Jesus has all power, all knowledge, exists everywhere at the same time, etc.) Notice also how John used the word "was" and not "became." This teaches that Jesus was always God, he did not somehow become a god when he was born or created, unlike some people claimed in John's day or like the Jehovah Witness believe today.

4. The Word was with God in the beginning: This statement restates that Jesus was already living "with" God the Father in an eternal intimate relationship in eternity past before the time we know as the "beginning" started.

5. The Word created all things: John clearly teaches that every created thing owes its existence to Jesus. It was through the Son that God created all things. Greeks thought that the created world was inherently evil; only the world of "spirit" was pure. They thought the created evil world existed permanently alongside of the good spirit world. In order to keep God from being the originator of this created world which they thought was evil, the Greeks believed God created lesser levels of spirit beings, one of which created the material world. But John taught four things. First, the created world was not permanent, but had a clear beginning. Second, God himself created all things and so there is nothing evil in what has been created. In fact the Bible says that God looked at everything he created and called it "very good." (Gen. 1:31) When a Holy God makes something, it is good. Third, the world belongs to God and he is intimately involved in it. Evil in the world is not God's fault, but because Satan and mankind chose to rebel against God. It is because of this rebellion that Jesus came and died. And since it is God's world, we are supposed to take care of it. We have no right to abuse it and destroy God's creation as if we own it and not God. Fourth, Jesus was the architect for the creation of everything outside of God, both things in the spirit world and in the physical world. (Col. 1:15-17)

Q. 5. a) Give examples of how many Christians think that God is primarily concerned about our spiritual lives and not our physical lives. b) Give an example of how this wrong idea leads to wrong actions.

6. In the Word was life: The word "life" is used over 35 times in the book of John. Throughout the book of John, the Apostle shows Jesus as the source and giver of all types of life. Throughout his book, John uses "life" in four different ways.

a. Jesus is the source of "physical life" because he gives life to all living things. As Paul said "In him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28)

b. Jesus is the source of "spiritual life." Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the **life**. No man comes to the Father except through me." (Jn. 14:6) To have spiritual life is to be free from God's condemnation, judgment, and death. It is to have forgiveness, to become the children of God, etc. Jesus is the one who gives this spiritual life to those who trust him for their salvation.

c. Jesus is the source of "abundant life." (Jn. 10:10) All people have life when we are alive. But John shows that it only after people believe on Jesus Christ that they have a quality of life that has meaning and is fruitful or full. Jesus is the one who gives purpose and deep joy, a peace that is not dependent upon circumstances and the world cannot take it away from us. (Jn. 14:27, 16:33)

d. Jesus is the giver of "eternal life." Rather than have a temporary life and then face death, the quality of life that Jesus gives is for ever. Even after the death of the body, Jesus promises eternal blessings not known in this life to those who trust him and submit to his Lordship.

Q. 6. Describe how putting faith in Jesus has changed your life from just existing to one of purpose and meaning and joy.

7. The Word brought light to mankind: John uses the word "light" 21 times in his book. Jesus is the light or source of moral truth and purity. He reveals to mankind what is true and good and in so doing reveals the evilness of man's life. Just as a flashlight reveals what is hidden in the dark night, Jesus reveals the hidden evilness of mankind's heart and culture so that people can address this evil by coming to him for forgiveness. As light, Jesus is the revealer of what God's will, the perfect will which brings true living. That is why Jesus said "I am the way." (Jn 14:6).

John said that as Jesus, the light, is shining, the darkness would fight against him but not overcome him. For John, darkness was another special word which he used seven times. John uses the word darkness to refer to anything that stands in opposition to God. It usually refers to the moral wickedness of the world. Mankind, without God in their hearts, is against the good that God wants to shine. Mankind's condition is also dark- filled with sin, rebellion, wars, and death. We might honor the technological advances of mankind; the ability to talk on cell phones, travel by planes long distances, etc. But as God looks at the world he sees terrible darkness. John explains that when God seeks to shine the light of good among men, they prefer the evil darkness of their lives.

John says that this darkness takes an active stance against any of the light that Jesus wants to shine, but cannot overcome it. The word overcome means that the world of people cannot ultimately defeat what God wants to do, or extinguish the light of the church in the world. When we do not have electricity we often light candles. When it is time for us to sleep, we extinguish the candle and its light is no more. John says that in the same way darkness (the evilness of a world against God) wants to extinguish the light- both the light of Christianity and the light of truth and moral living which followers of Jesus have. But this is impossible.

This helps us understand why non-Christians throughout history persecute Christians who don't commit crimes like murder or stealing or starting wars. They hate the "light" and want to put it out. But God's promise is that the world cannot put out the light, for God's kingdom of light will continue to work in and through his people. No matter how strongly the world seeks to put out the "light" of faith in Jesus Christ, it never can. Even our death, which seems like a defeat, is only the path of victory, for we go to be with Jesus forever. As we study the history of the church, we learn that frequently people tried to destroy Christianity. (e.g. like Mengistu) But instead of putting out the flame of true faith, the flame spreads and Christianity grows. China is a good example of this. For over 50 years communist rulers have tried to destroy Christianity. But today in China there are millions of followers of Jesus.

- Q. 7. a) Illustrate how you have seen this battle between light and darkness. b) Describe how you have seen darkness not being able to overcome the light.
- Q. 8. In your own words, describe what Jesus was like before he was born in Bethlehem.

SECOND DAY

- Q. 9. a) Read Jn. 1:14. What does this verse say about the Word? b) Name a song in Amharic which praises Jesus for becoming a man. c) Why do you think there are not many songs about the humanity of Jesus? d) List some reasons why Jesus' being human is an encouragement to you.

THE LOGOS BECAME HUMAN (Jn. 1:14)

How do you imagine the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you picture a great and fearsome God sitting on the throne in heaven? Do you think of Jesus controlling all things as the Lord of the earth? Yes, these pictures are accurate. But they are incomplete. Although the Bible clearly shows that Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16), it also describes Jesus as being fully man, just like us in every way except that he never sinned. (Heb. 4:14-16)

Most of us primarily think about the deity of Jesus. Our songs reflect this, for most of our songs are about the greatness of Jesus. We have few, if any, songs praising Jesus for being a man. It is easy for our view of Jesus to become imbalanced as we focus upon his deity and not on his humanity. The Apostle John did not want us to get the wrong view of Jesus. So in his introduction, he also wrote that Jesus became fully human.

The Logos became "flesh." John explains that the eternal Logos became human. The one who created the world became part of his creation. The one who made Adam and Eve became a child of Adam and Eve. What an amazing thought! God, who had all power and all knowledge suddenly had all of the limitations we have as humans. He no longer lived in all places. He no longer had all knowledge. He no longer had power to do all things without the help of God. And he could be tempted just like we are tempted, he could get hurt and bleed, and he could get sick.

John did not say that Jesus put on flesh as if to get something temporarily which he would take off again like we would put on a jacket and take off again when we do not want it. Some false teachings claimed that the spirit of Jesus was given a temporary body, but the spirit of Jesus left the body before the crucifixion. But John insisted that Jesus became fully human. John taught that if someone claimed that Jesus was not fully human, that person had no fellowship with God and is the spirit of the "antichrist." (1 Jn. 4:2-3)

The Bible does not teach that Jesus took on human flesh for a short period of time (33 years) and then went back to a "spirit" state. Rather, the Bible teaches that from the time when Jesus took on human flesh through eternity, Jesus will be the "God-man." That is why Paul clearly teaches that there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 2:5) Paul does not say that Jesus used to be a man, but that he is still a man.

- Q. 10. Read 1 Tim. 2:5; Mk. 10:45; Heb. 1:1-4; 2:14-18, 4:14-16. a) List different reasons why Jesus became a human. b) How does Jesus' being human help us today?

Why did Jesus, the eternal God, become a human? And why is he still a human? The New Testament gives different reasons why Jesus had to become a true human just like we are human:

1. Jesus had to have a "body" in order to die for our sins. (Heb. 10:5, 10) From the time of Adam and Eve, God established the principle that forgiveness of sins was only possible when something or someone died on behalf of the sinner. The book of Hebrews says "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Heb. 9:22) Shedding of blood symbolizes the death of the sacrifice. The Bible clearly teaches that forgiveness comes only after either an animal is sacrificed (Old Testament) or Jesus was sacrificed for our sins. As Jesus said, he had come to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mt. 20:28)

2. Jesus took on a human body so that he could always live as a "mediator" between God and man. When a person works as a mediator between two fighting parties, he has to be both independent from each party and respected by both parties. Jesus is the only one who fits these qualifications in the relationship between God and humans. As God he represents the matters of God to man, and as man he represents our issues to God.

3. When Jesus became human, as God he was able to more completely reveal to mankind what his character is like. (Heb. 1:1-4) God had revealed his nature through dreams and then through the written Word. But people have a difficult time understanding the character of God just by listening or reading. They need to see it. And so Jesus, God in the flesh, lived among mankind. Do we want to know what God is like? Then we should look at Jesus. To understand the level of God's love for us sinners, we only have to look at Jesus' death on the cross. Do we want to understand God's hatred for hypocrisy of leaders as they pretend to follow God but hinder people from coming to God through human regulation? We can read about Jesus' reactions to the Pharisees. Jesus clearly shows every major character of God as he walked the earth related to people.

4. Jesus is the eternal divine-human high priest. (Heb. 4:14-16) The writer of Hebrews explains that one of the biggest encouragements to sinners like us is that in heaven, seated next to God the Father, we have an eternal high priest who fully knows us. He is like us in every way except for being sinless. And therefore we can go to him and through him to God the Father (throne of grace) knowing that Jesus understands us and can therefore plead for us based upon his experience on earth.

5. One scholar says that one reason Jesus came to earth was so that we can never say to God "you don't understand my situation." We usually think this when some disaster strikes us. But since Jesus became human, we can no longer accuse God of this. Have we lost a child to death? So did God the Father. Are we an orphan who lost his parents? Jesus lost his adopted father Joseph and suddenly had the responsibility of taking care of his family. Are we so poor that we do not have a good house to live in? Jesus was born in a stable and later said that he did not have any place to stay. (Mt. 8:20) Have we been rejected by people because we follow Jesus? Jesus was rejected by those he had come to save, and even his close friends betrayed him and abandoned him when he needed them most. Since Jesus became human and experienced these things, he knows what we are going through and works on our behalf in heaven.

One of the reasons some Christians turn to the saints and Mary for help in heaven is because they have a difficult time believing God really understands them. They have forgotten that Jesus is really a human. "Mary knows how we feel and can pray for us" they think. But don't we already have someone in heaven who knows us? Why go to someone else when we can go directly to Jesus, the God-man?

Q. 11. List ways the fact that Jesus is human just like you and me should encourage us.

THE HISTORICAL ANCESTRY OF JESUS (Mt. 1:1-17; Lk. 3:21-38)

Q. 12. a) List your ancestors as far back as you can. b) Why do you think it is good to know your ancestor's names and stories? c) Read Mt. 1:1-17 & Lk. 3:21-38. (If possible use two Bibles so you can better compare the two passages.) List differences you see between the two lists of the ancestors of Jesus. What do you think these differences are trying to teach?

Many people can proudly list their ancestors back seven or more generations. This gives them a sense of history and keeps the memory of their ancestors alive. For the Jews, knowing their ancestors was very important. But rather than just knowing seven or ten generations, they traced their family's line back to the beginning of time. Knowing their ancestors affirmed that they were God's unique people and God had a loving covenant with them. The Jews kept records of their ancestors in the synagogues. And a major record of the families of Israel was kept in the Temple until it was destroyed in 70 AD. It was probably from these records that Matthew and Luke found their information about the family line of Jesus.

Both Matthew and Luke list the genealogy of Jesus. But each of them had a different purpose for including the genealogy of Jesus. Following are some of the major things we can see from the two genealogies about Jesus:

1. The purposes of the genealogies:

a. Matthew, writing primarily to the Jews, wanted to demonstrate to the Jews that Jesus fulfilled two major criteria which qualified him to be the Messiah.

First, Jesus was "the son of Abraham." To be the son of Abraham means to be a Jew. You will remember how in Genesis 12, God choose Abraham out from all of the nations of the world and God used Abraham to start the chosen nation of Israel. From Genesis 12 until the time of Jesus, one tribe, the people of Israel enjoyed special privileges from God. (See Rom. 9:3-5) After the time of the captivity, many Jews, especially those living in Galilee, intermarried with Gentiles, so they were no longer pure Jews. But the expected Messiah was to be a pure Jew from the line of Abraham. So this was important for the Jews to be confident that Jesus was a pure blooded Jew, untainted by intermarriage with the Gentiles.

Second, Jesus was the "son of David." Although all Jews needed to know if they were a son of Abraham, there were two tribes which had to clearly prove that they were from a specific clan of Israel. Anyone serving as a priest had to know and prove that he was a direct descendant of Aaron with no Gentile blood. If a priest could not demonstrate that he was a pure Jew from the line of Aaron, he was not allowed to serve in the Temple. (Neh. 7:64) The other clan that had to prove that a person was pure was the line of David, the kingly line of Israel. God had promised David that his descendants would have the right of rulership forever. (2 Sam. 7:16) And God had foretold that even though the tree of the line of David might have been cut down during the captivity, that stump would one day spout another king, the Messiah. (Is. 11) So Jews wanted to know that Jesus was a legitimate descendant of David and could therefore be qualified as the Messiah. Although most Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, they did acknowledge that he was the "son of David." (Mt. 9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31)

b. Luke wanted to focus upon Jesus not only being the "son of David" but the "son of Adam." Whereas Matthew only traced Jesus' line back to Abraham, Luke traced it back to the first human, Adam. The reason Luke did this was to show that although Jesus racially was a Jew, he was part of God's universal people as well, for he was a descendant of Adam just like the Greeks and all other people. So Jesus did not belong to only one people group like the Jew, but to all people.

Q. 13. Read Gen. 3:15. a) What prophecy is given here? b) Explain how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy.

Luke mentions that Adam was "the son of God." Probably Luke was making a play on words here. In Romans 5:12-19, the Apostle Paul speaks of two Adams, or two lines of people. The first Adam, the first human created by God, was God's son because he was created in God's image. But Adam brought sin and death into the world. Jesus was also God's son, but not by creation, but because of his eternal relationship with God the Father. From Jesus came salvation from all of the evil which the first Adam brought into the world.

2. The order of genealogy: Whereas Matthew followed the normal Jewish practice of genealogies by starting with the ancestor and tracing it down to the person (e.g. Gen. 11:10-27), Luke started with Jesus and traced it backwards. Matthew knowingly structured his genealogy into three groups of 14 generations. A careful study of the Old Testament will show that in order to do this, Matthew had to skip some generations. So not all of Jesus' ancestors are mentioned. (Luke also skipped some generations.) This was an acceptable practice by the Jews as they memorized the names of their ancestors. This means the word "son of" is used by both Luke and Matthew to mean "descendant of." It could be the direct father, but it could also be grandfather.

Q. 14. a) List the five women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. b) Give a short description of each woman's story. c) Would you want that woman to be mentioned in your genealogy? Explain why or why not.

3. The women listed in the genealogies: One of the unique things in Matthew's genealogy is his inclusion of five women in the line of Christ. Jews rarely mentioned a woman in their genealogy since they did not view women as having equal worth as men. The family line was always through the man. But Matthew not only lists important women, he specifically chose his women for a special teaching purpose. We can see the following about these women:

a. All five women had a negative stigma to their names. Tamar pretended to be a prostitute and had a child by her father-in-law, Judah, without being married to Judah. Rahab was a prostitute. Ruth was a Moabite and a widow when she got married. Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, committed adultery with David who later had Uriah murdered. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was viewed by Jews as having become pregnant before she was married to Joseph and therefore Jesus was seen as an illegitimate child.

Many scholars think that Matthew was hinting through listing five disreputable women that Jesus is the one who accepts those whom society might not like, even prostitutes, and forgives them and brings them into the family of God. In the New Testament we will see how Jesus often ministered to prostitutes and they responded not only by liking him, but pouring out their love for Jesus in unusual ways. (Lk. 7:36-

47) But the religious leaders had a hard time understanding this. Their understanding of holiness meant they kept away from sinners, not helping the sinners become children of God.

There are some people who struggle with the truth that Jesus has very bad sinners in his genealogy. "How can your Jesus be pure if his ancestors are bad that way?" they accuse Christians. They look at Jesus' line much like some of us would look at our family history if one of our ancestors was a slave. (e.g. Herod the Great was so concerned that his ancestry be "pure" (he wanted to hide the fact that he was not a pure Jew), he had many of the genealogical records destroyed so they could not prove that he was not a full Jew.) But Jesus has a different attitude towards family lines. He is the Savior who takes evil and turns it to beauty. He is the doctor who heals the souls of the worst sinners. (Mk. 2:15-17) So he is happy when a spiritually sick person comes to him for cleansing and spiritual healing. He is proud to have such a person in his family!

As Christians we must be careful we do not become like the Pharisees who sought to protect their holiness by not having any contact with those whom society does not approve of; the street children, the prostitutes, the potters, etc. Like our master, we must be the doctors who reach out to them with the medicine of salvation. Jesus will then change them from a Tamar or Rahab into someone glorified by being in the family line of Jesus.

Q. 15. a) Examine the attitude people in your church have towards those whom society considers "evil." Do they have the attitude of the Pharisees or the attitude of Jesus towards them? Explain your answer. b) How would our ministry in church change if we realized that all of us are sick with sin and equally "evil" and therefore we willingly reach out to the people of disrepute to bring them into the family of God?

b. Three of the women were Gentiles who were brought into the family of God. Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites and Ruth was a Moabite. They would normally have no hope of becoming part of the family of God since God's covenant people were the Jews. And yet God accepted them and even put them in the family line of Jesus, the Messiah. Matthew was teaching that God has always accepted Gentiles and they have always been able to become part of his family. So Jews should know that Jesus was interested not only in the Jews, but also in the Gentiles.

4. The two genealogies present different ancestral lines of Jesus: One of the things which puzzles scholars is the differences between Matthew's list of ancestors and Luke's list of ancestors. For instance, Matthew traces the lineage of Joseph through Solomon (Mt. 1:6) and Luke traces the lineage of Joseph through another son of David called Nathan. (Lk. 3:31) After the time of David, Luke lists almost none of the same people that Matthew lists. And finally, the names of the father of Joseph is different. Matthew calls him Jacob and Luke calls him Heli. Scholars have not been able to determine the reasons for these differences, but there are several theories:

a. Matthew traces Joseph's family line. Although Joseph was not the human father of Jesus, he was the legal father of Jesus and it was through his line that Jesus received the legal rights to rule as king on David's throne. Also people would have thought that Jesus was the son of Joseph even though we know that he was only the son of Mary. That is why Matthew lists the legal heirs to the throne of David through Solomon. Luke, however, traces Mary's family line, for she is the direct human parent of Jesus, not Joseph. Although it would have been unusual to use a woman's line to trace the Messiah, the fact of the virgin birth made this necessary. Mary was also a descendant of David, but through a different son of David, Nathan.

b. Joseph was the son of a levirate marriage. In the Old Testament times, if a wife died before having any children, the dead man's brother (or another close relative) had to marry her and produce children through her on behalf of his brother. (Deut. 25:5-10) Joseph's mother's first husband was called Jacob. But since he died before Joseph was born, Joseph's mother married Jacob's relative, Heli. When Joseph was born, he could be called the son of either man. So Matthew calls him the son of Jacob since he was born to continue the line of Jacob and Luke calls the father Heli since he was Joseph's physical father. Both Jacob and Heli were descendants of David, Jacob through Solomon and Heli through Nathan.

c. Mary's father, Heli, only had girl children of which Mary was the oldest. Heli did not want his inheritance to go to his brother's family as was normal practice among the Jews. In order to keep the inheritance with his daughter, Heli adopted Joseph as his legal son and then had him marry Mary. Matthew traces Joseph's true father and Luke traces Mary's line, the line of Joseph's adopted father.

d. Luke used the word "son" figuratively to mean "son-in-law." Luke was only saying that Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli.

Although the first theory has been held most often by Christians, ultimately we do not know why there are differences in the two genealogies. But the major teaching of both genealogies is clear. Jesus fulfills all of the legal requirements to be the Messiah, for he is both a true son of Abraham (a Jew) and a true son of David. But Jesus is not just a "Jewish Messiah" for the Jews. He is the Savior of all mankind, and therefore he is the true son of Adam.

Q. 16. What can we learn about God's faithfulness from these genealogies? b) Explain why this truth that God faithfully keeps the Gospel and his chosen people from generation to generation should encourage us today.

THIRD DAY

THE CONCEPTION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Luke 1:5-25)

Q. 17. Read Lk. 1:5-25. a) From what tribe were Zechariah and Elizabeth? b) How are they described? c) Where was Zechariah when he saw the angel? d) What did the angel tell Zechariah would be the ministry of his son? e) What judgment did God give Zechariah because of lack of belief?

All of the Gospels begin the story of Jesus with John the Baptist. God's call upon the life of John the Baptist is related to his ministry for Jesus for he is called "the forerunner" or the one who was to precede Jesus and prepare people for Jesus' kingdom. In Luke 2 and 3 Luke compares the birth of two miracle babies; John the Baptist and Jesus. Both start with the announcement of Gabriel and a miracle from God. Both involve the special work of the Holy Spirit. But there would be no competition between these two great servants of God. Although Luke shares about the greatness of the birth of John, the focus of his story is upon Jesus, the Savior, the one for whom John prepared the way. In his story of the two miracle children, Luke always shows how Jesus is greater than John the Baptist in various ways.

Four hundred years earlier the last inspired writing prophet wrote "I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord." (Mal. 4:5-6) After that the prophetic voice of God was silent. Centuries went by as Jews waited for the prophet like Elijah and for the Messiah. The Jews became

frustrated with the fact that there was no prophet. Eventually, rather than look to the future coming of a prophet, the majority of Jews focused upon Moses and the law, back to their past. False messiah's came, were defeated by the Gentiles, and disappeared. But the Jews never gave up their hope that the Messiah would come and deliver his people from political domination.

One day the silence of God was broken. When the time arrived for the promised Messiah, God sent a prophet called John. But because God did not do what people expected, the Jews were confused. For instance, who would imagine that God would choose a prophet from an unknown, unimportant priestly family from a small country town? There were important, educated, rich priests- why not choose someone from one of their families? And God chose a childless old couple who had given up hope of ever having children. How different are the ways of God than what we expect! God is not impressed with education, riches, or worldly power. The story of Jesus reveals God's tendency to use those whom the world rejects as unimportant and unable to do anything worthwhile and misuses them instead.

Q. 18. Read 1 Cor. 1:18-31. a) Describe how you have seen God often choose to work through people (e.g. who are uneducated, poor, etc.) whom the world would not think as being important. b) Explain how this is a warning in our generation not to place too much emphasis upon the standards of the world.

The year was around 5 or 6 BC. King Herod was old and daily growing more insane and insecure in his rulership. Many people, even family members, were thrown into prison and killed as King Herod sought to keep people from taking away his kingdom. Little did he know that there was soon to come a king, the long awaited Messiah, who would one day destroy all earthly kingdoms and establish a kingdom that would never be taken away. About eight kilometers southwest of Jerusalem, in a small town lived a priestly couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth. Luke gives us the following information about Zechariah and Elizabeth:

a. They were both from the priestly line of Aaron. From this we can learn several things about Zechariah and Elizabeth.

First, they could trace their priestly line directly back to Aaron with no taint of Gentile blood. Any priest who could not trace his ancestors back to Aaron was not allowed to minister in the Temple.

Second, they were both from priestly families. Although priests were allowed to marry Jews from other tribes, it was seen as a special honor for a priest to also marry a woman from a priestly family.

Third, Zechariah belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. During the days of David, the priests were divided into 24 divisions and each division was given its own name based upon its ancestor. (1 Chron. 24:1-19) When the priests returned to Jerusalem after the captivity, only four divisions returned. However, the Jews re-divided the priests into 24 divisions, using the original divisional names. Zechariah belonged to one of these divisions named after a priest called Abijah.

It is estimated that during the days of Zechariah there were about 20,000 priests living in Palestine. So there would have been about 800 priests in Zechariah's group. Each division was responsible to cover all of the services in the Temple for one week (eight days- Saturday through Saturday) every six months.

Although it was an honor to be a priest, the priests in Jerusalem would have looked at Zechariah with disdain. He would have been seen as a "country person." No doubt he farmed to make a living since few priests who lived in the countryside received enough money from tithes. And he would not have had any of the formal education that the important priests in Jerusalem would have received. And yet Zechariah, the "country person," was the one whom God chose to be the father of the forerunner of the Messiah.

b. Zechariah and Elizabeth's spiritual condition was exemplary. They were both "*upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly*." Like Noah and other great men of old, Zechariah had chosen to obey the Word of God. He was not sinless, but he lived his life according to the commands of God. It could be that they were part of or supporters of the Pharisees who carefully followed the laws of the Old Testament as well as the regulations passed on from the ancient scholars. No doubt their hearts were pained by the actions of the priests in Jerusalem who were more concerned with wealth and political power than in leading people to follow God in holiness. But rather than be like their leaders, Zechariah and Elizabeth knowingly chose to live in a way that honored God.

Q. 19. a) Give examples of how it is more difficult to faithfully serve God when other Christians openly walk in ways that do not honor God. b) Describe how you have seen evangelists or pastors begin to copy leaders who do not closely walk with God. c) What does it mean to be "blameless" as an evangelist when other evangelists do things which do not bring honor to God?

c. Zechariah and Elizabeth were childless. They were similar to Abraham and Sarah, the parents of Samson, and the parents of Samuel. This statement would have surprised the readers. "How could a righteous person be childless? Wasn't childlessness because of punishment of some sin?" they would have thought. Like many in Africa, being childless was viewed by the Jews as punishment from God for some sin. To be childless was such a stigma in Judaism that some Jewish teachers taught that being childless was one of seven things which could cause a person to be cast out of the society of the Jews (i.e. excommunicated). Sometimes priests who had no children were not allowed to minister in the Temple.

Q. 20. a) Describe the shame childless couples face in Ethiopia. b) Why is there such a stigma? c) Do Christians also have the same view towards childlessness? d) What do some Christians do to avoid this embarrassment?

In Jewish society, when a couple did not have children, it was assumed that the wife was to blame, not the husband. Usually when a couple did not have a child, the husband would divorce his wife and marry another woman. Or he would marry a second wife. No doubt Zechariah's family repeatedly told Zechariah to get rid of his wife and marry someone else who could produce children for him. Elizabeth would have lived in great dread that one day Zechariah would listen to his relatives and divorce her. Even if he did not divorce her, as a childless woman she would live the rest of her life with great shame.

d. Zechariah and Elizabeth were "aged." In Jewish teachings, a person was called elderly once they reached the age of 60. So by the time of this story, Zechariah and Elizabeth would have physically reached the age where it was unlikely they could have children.

Imagine what their life had been like. If they followed the normal pattern of Jewish marriages, Elizabeth would have been married about the time she was 13 and Zechariah was perhaps 19. Year after

year, they hoped to have children. Many people would have offered advice about what to do to have children, and they kept praying for a miracle. Every day they saw their friends with their children, and now with grand children and their hearts would have been pained as they repeatedly felt their loss. They would have wondered "Who will take care of us when we are old?" And if they were like most childless couples, they would have wondered "What sin in our life brought this judgment?" Eventually, after more than 40 years of praying, their expectation to have a baby died and they stopped praying for children. But the pain was always there.

Could Luke be teaching Christian couples who do not have children some important lessons through this event in the life of Zechariah and Elizabeth? Throughout history there are always couples who, for unknown reasons, do not have children. So what was Luke teaching?

First, childlessness is a condition that can come upon godly couples. It usually has nothing to do with sin. As Christians we should never assume that a couple who has no children is in that condition because of sin or lack of faith in God. Zechariah and Elizabeth were "righteous" just as were Abraham and Sarah and thousands of others throughout history. Great hurt is caused by well-meaning Christians when they accuse childless couples of not having enough faith in God so that God does not answer their prayers for a baby or of having sin in their lives and therefore God is judging them. They become a tool of Satan to bring doubt and added pain in the lives of godly people.

Second, God's solution to childlessness is never "divorce your wife and take another wife." Luke hints that one of the reasons Zechariah was considered righteous was the fact that he chose to keep his wife. If Zechariah had divorced Elizabeth, not only would he have not been able to witness God's miracle of the birth of John, but God probably would not have chosen him to be the father of the forerunner of the Messiah. Who knows what plan God has for the childless couple which they cannot fulfill if they try cultural solutions of divorce or marrying another woman? Another reason why taking another wife is useless is because scientists have found that about 50% of the time the reason why a couple cannot bear a child is because of the man, not only the woman. Should the woman divorce her husband and look for another man if her husband is the reason for no children? None of us would accept this, so why should we assume that a man is free to divorce his wife and marry another woman just to have a baby?

Third, Luke is not saying that God guarantees all childless couples that they will have children. Just because God chose to give Elizabeth a child is no guarantee to us today that he will give us a child. This story only teaches that God is able to work miracles when all others say it is impossible. There is no verse in the New Testament that teaches that God will always give a couple a child. Ministers of the Gospel must be very careful not to make this claim. Throughout history there have been godly couples who never had a child, but God used them greatly. They prayed in faith for a child and they renounced all sin in their lives, but they still did not have children. For them it was God's plan to serve God together faithfully without having children. At other times, like Zechariah and Elizabeth, God will answer years of prayers and give the couple a child.

God gives or withholds children for his hidden purposes. Those who do not have children should carefully guard their hearts from bitterness against God or each other. They should trust God that his ways are best and seek to serve God by ministering to those who face similar situations but don't have the spiritual maturity to withstand the cultural pressure and the hurt of being childless. (2. Cor. 1:3-7) Who

can comfort another childless couple better than a couple who have no children but who still trust God's ways? Perhaps God desires the childless couple to adopt orphans and give them a godly home.

If God has chosen not to give you children (or any other blessing you were expecting), remember the following:

a. God desires righteousness. To be righteous means we align our lives with God's desires, even if things do not work out as we want. That means we must keep our vows to be faithful to our wives no matter if our desires to have children works out or not. We must not allow the pressure of our families or our culture determine how we are going to react to our situation. Being righteousness does not bring us a guarantee that all of our desires will work out. It means trusting God in spite of unfulfilled dreams.

b. Be careful not to blame each other. Neither the husband nor the wife chose to not have children, this was the choice of God. Doctors tell us that it can be equally the problem of the husband as well as the wife. And if you wanted male children and only got female children, remember that it is God who gives a child. We are to accept God's choice, rejoicing in it rather than wishing for something different. There are many women who feel they are useless because their parents expressed that they had wanted a boy.

c. Do not allow yourselves to get bitter about the situation. Bitterness is a sign of lack of trust in the love of God. It is saying to God that we know what is best for our lives rather than let God determine what he thinks is best for us and for his glory. To become bitter in this matter will be like a poison which will destroy the loving relationship between husband and wife, and take away the joy of the Lord from our hearts.

d. Look for God's purposes by finding something positive in the situation. For instance, to not have children allows a couple to spend more of their time and money for God's kingdom. (Parents know how much time and money it takes to properly raise children for God's glory.) The couple can channel the natural desire for children to become spiritual parents to those in the church and community who do not have a loving family. There is a saying, "When God closes a door, he opens the window." If the door of having children has been closed to you, what is the window that God has opened? Many people become so bitter about the closed door that they do not see the window that God has opened for them.

Q. 21. a) List some couples in your church who do not have children, or only have girl children. b) What is your church doing to help them through the pain of not having children? c) How can the church and other couples encourage these childless couples to stay faithful to each other, to maintain a joyous trust in God, and overcome the hurt in their hearts?

When it came time for God to start the miracle of sending his Son, he chose an unusual place. Rather than announcing the birth in their home like he did for Mary, God waited until Zechariah was in the Temple ministering. When the 800 priests responsible to minister in the Temple gathered, they cast lots to determine who was to perform each ministry. One of the most honorable ministries was the right to be able to burn incense on the golden altar. (Note: Inside the holy place in the Temple were three worship instruments. On the right side of the room was a table where special bread was placed. On the left side of the room was the golden lamp with seven lights burning before the Lord. And straight ahead, up some steps just in front of the curtain outside of the most holy place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept was a golden altar where incense was burned.) The honor of burning incense before God, symbolizing the

prayers of God's people, happened at most once in the life of a priest. Not only was Zechariah responsible to burn incense, but after the burning of incense, he was the one responsible to pronounce the official blessing upon the worshippers who had gathered. So when the lot fell for Zechariah to burn incense, this was the greatest day of his life.

There were two times during the day for offering sacrifices and burning incense, 9 AM and 3 PM. We do not know which time Zechariah was ministering. Zechariah chose two assistants to help him. One of the assistants removed the ashes from the golden altar. The other assistant brought in live coals from the brass altar outside where the animals were sacrificed and put the coals on the golden altar. The two assistants would then leave the Holy Place and join the other priests outside who were bowed low in worship and prayer. A priest would blow his trumpet and Zechariah would then take the incense and make sure it was burning well. He would bow low in front of the altar and offer a prayer on behalf of the people. It was just after he did this that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah. The angel stood on the right side of the golden altar, the place of blessing for the Jews.

Notice the following things which the angel tells Zechariah:

a. The child would be a boy and should be called "John" which means "God has been gracious." It was now time for God's grace to be revealed to people as God gives them the gift of his Son who would die for their sins bringing them salvation.

b. John would bring great joy to his childless parents as well as to many in Israel. In the Old Testament, the times of the Messiah were seen as a time of great joy. (Is. 9:1-3, 12:4-6)

c. John would be great. However, his greatness would not be the greatness of doing miracles like Elijah or Elisha. John did not perform any miracles. Rather, his greatness would be in how he unselfishly served God by preparing people for the coming Messiah., challenging people to get ready for the kingdom of God. Above all his greatness was that he was the one who introduced Jesus to the people of Israel.

d. John was not to drink any alcohol. In this way he was similar to Samson (Judg. 13:4-7). It seems that John was to take the Nazarite oath. (See Num. 6:1-4) In the Old Testament, those who wanted to enter a special time of relationship with God would take the Nazarite vow. They were not allowed to drink any alcohol, or cut their hair, or touch dead bodies. Usually this was a temporary vow, lasting 30 or 100 days. However, in the case of Samson, Samuel, and John, this seems to have been a permanent vow demonstrating their life-long consecration to God. Whereas the focus of the Nazarite vow for Samson was his hair, here the focus is not drinking alcoholic drink.

e. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from conception, much like Samson and Jeremiah. (Judg.13:24-25; Jer. 1:5) In the New Testament, the filling of the Holy Spirit has different meanings. Here it does not refer to special power to do miracles because John did not work miracles. Rather, it was the filling of the Holy Spirit indicating that he was set apart by God for a special ministry of serving the Messiah. Probably Luke is showing that from the time of John's conception, the Holy Spirit would continue to work in the new kingdom which Jesus would start. John, then Jesus, then the disciples, and then all Christians would have the constant abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to help them.

f. John was to have the ministry of "Elijah." Although there were some Jews during those days who thought that Elijah, who never died, would physically return to Israel before the coming of the Messiah, this is a reference to the Elijah mentioned in Mal. 4:5-6. The prophet was to have a ministry similar to Elijah of seeking to return the spiritual lives of people to God. (1 Kings 17; 19:21; 21 2 Kings 1-2)

John would work to restore the basic relation of developing godly families. Sin in the lives of God's people always leads to the breakdown of the family and the work of God leads to restoration of family relationships. Perhaps the phrase "turn hearts of fathers" was symbolically used to mean that John was to turn the hearts of evil Jews, called "children" back to the ways of their "fathers" meaning the "righteous" Jews. The angel summarizes the ministry of John as being one which would "prepare people for the Lord." (Is. 40:3-5).

Having waited over 40 years for a baby and facing many disappointments and knowing that Elizabeth was at the age of life when it was unlikely to have a baby, this promise was too much for Zechariah to believe. He had forgotten the miracle God did for Abraham and Sarah. Even though God had clearly sent his angel with the message, Zechariah could not believe the angel. Instead he wanted a "sign" as proof.

The angel now gives his name and position as a reprimand for Zechariah's lack of faith. He is Gabriel, the great angel who stands in God's presence. There are only two angels whose names are listed in the Bible, Gabriel and Michael. The Jews saw Michael as the warrior against evil, the agent of God the Judge. Gabriel was the messenger of peace and restoration, the agent of God the Savior. The only sign (also a punishment for unbelief) Gabriel granted Zechariah was not being able to speak until the birth of the baby.

The sign of muteness was for two reasons.

First, it was so that Zechariah could not tell people about what God was going to do. God wanted the news of John and the coming of the Messiah to be kept silent until he was ready for the news to go out.

Second, it was punishment for unbelief. Why did God punish Zechariah this way? When Mary asked a similar question, why was she not punished?

1. Zechariah refused to believe a specific promise from God. God had already given Zechariah a sign, the presence of a great angel, and he should not have needed another sign. To ask for a sign when we have a clear promise from God demonstrates lack of faith. In contrast, Mary's question did not reveal lack of faith, but confusion about how a virgin could have a child without a human father.

In the Bible, "faith" is believing what God has promised is true and living based upon that truth. Faith is different from human hope where we desire something but have no specific promise from God that he will give it. Faith has two major ingredients to it. First, it must have a specific promise of God behind it. So Abraham received a promise to be a great nation. (Gen. 12:1-3) Without a specific promise when we want something from God, we can ask humbly for it, but should never treat our desire like a promise from God which we claim by faith. Second, faith always results in changed actions on our part. So Abraham had to leave Canaan for it to be classified as faith. And we have to renounce all other ways of salvation and commit ourselves to following Jesus. We demonstrate "faith" in God when we do not have a specific promise (e.g. healing) in knowing that he can heal us, in praying with expectation in God's powerful work, and in letting God choose how to answer our prayers. We must be careful not to claim a promise for

healing or a job when we do not have that specific promise from God. That is not faith as the Bible shows it, but presumption.

2. The Bible teaches that growth in maturity brings greater accountability. As an old man, Zechariah should have known how to apply God's Word to his situation in a greater way than Mary. He had walked with God for over sixty years. But Mary was just a teenager who did not have the advantage of age to help her understand God better. So God punished Zechariah since his lack of faith went against the level of spiritual maturity that was expected of him.

3. The Bible also teaches that the greater our level of ministry, the more strictly he holds us accountable to live up to his standards. Zechariah was a priest. He had been carefully trained in the Old Testament. He ministered before God in the Temple. He was to be a model of how to follow God and trust him in impossible situations. Mary, however, was an ordinary Jewish girl. As a girl she had few opportunities to formally study about God. So God judged Zechariah more severely than he did Mary.

Q. 22 Explain how the principle of "to whom much is given, much is required" (See Lk. 12:47-48) applies to church leaders and church members today. b) What warning does James 3:1 provide for church leaders, evangelists and pastors?

During this time when Zechariah and Gabriel were talking, the priests and worshippers were outside the Temple building, prostrate on the ground waiting for Zechariah to come out and pronounce the blessing. When he did not come, they became worried. What had happened? Had he done something wrong in the way that he lit the incense or was there sin in his life leading to God's judgment upon him? Eventually Zechariah came out. But because he could not speak he could not pronounce the priestly blessing. Through his gestures, he told people he was unable to speak. People realized that something great had happened in the Temple, but they would have to wait for nine months before they understood what it was.

Zechariah returned home and soon afterwards Elizabeth become pregnant. Luke says that Elizabeth went into seclusion for five months and would not go out among the people. We do not know why she did this since there is nothing in Jewish culture that stated a woman was to seclude herself for five months when she was pregnant. Perhaps she wanted to wait until her pregnant clearly revealed to all that she was pregnant.

Q. 23. List some principles about following God that we can learn from the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

FOURTH DAY

THE CONCEPTION OF JESUS THE MESSIAH (Luke 1:26-56; Matthew 1:18-25)

Tigist was a popular 16 year old girl who sang in the choir. She had a friend who was in the first year of university. One night as they were alone in her house, they allowed their passion to overtake them and committed sexual sin. Tigist was filled with guilt, but she told no one, hoping that no one would find out. A month later, Tigist knew she was pregnant. Still she kept it quiet from her friends and family. "Should I get an abortion?" she wondered. But she knew that killing her baby just because she had sinned was not what

God wanted. You don't undo a sin by committing another sin. So she kept the baby. By the time she was four months pregnant, she no longer could keep her secret hidden. Her friends, her parents, and eventually the church elders discovered the truth. She was expelled from the choir. Too embarrassed to be seen in public, she left school, she no longer met with her friends, and stayed alone in her parents' home. They were very angry with her so even her relationship with her parents was harmed. Tigist knew that for the rest of her life she would be known as the woman who had a child before she was married. And since no one would want to marry a girl who was not a virgin, she knew her chance to get married would be very small. What a terrible price to pay for a moment of pleasure!

*** Unless indicated, all stories in this book are stories which I have made up to reflect common situations in the church. They are not taken from real people.*

Q. 24. a) Describe how you have seen a similar situation happen to a young girl in your church. b) What do you think the church could have done to ease the guilt that Tigist felt and remove some of the pain she felt for her sin?

Q. 25. Read Lk. 1:26-56. a) What did Gabriel tell Mary would happen to her? b) What miracle happened in the conception of Jesus? c) What was Mary's response? d) How would Mary's situation have become similar to what Tigist would have experienced? e) Read Jn. 8:41. What did the people tell Jesus they were not? What do you think they meant by this?

GABRIEL MEETS WITH MARY (Lk. 1:26-56)

The historian Luke was interested in the events surrounding the birth of Jesus which he might have heard from Mary. Like John the Baptist, Jesus too was a miracle baby. He was born of a virgin teenage girl, but without the involvement of a human father. In his story, Luke compares and contrasts John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, with Jesus. Knowing how the Jews honored John (when Luke wrote there were still disciples of John spread throughout the world- see Acts 19:1-7), Luke carefully showed how even though John had a miraculous start and was mightily used of God, Jesus was greater.

Most of us have read the story of the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary so often that it is no longer amazing to us. As we study the story of the conception of Jesus today, we will try to take away some of the familiarity and describe how difficult such a miracle would have been to those who participated in it.

Six months had passed since the conception of John the Baptist. Elizabeth was now clearly showing her pregnancy and no longer in seclusion. But far away to the north, another miracle was about to happen. The story of Jesus' earthly life begins in a small town in Galilee called Nazareth. Nazareth was about 85 kilometers away from the small town where Zechariah and Elizabeth were living. In the eyes of the Jews, although Zechariah and Elizabeth were "country" people, at least they were living in Judea, the land of the Jews, and in the center of Jewish life and religion. But Galilee was seen as a distant land where people were lax in their worship of God since they did not follow the traditions of the teachers in Judea. And they would question whether Jews living there had pure Jewish blood since throughout history the Jews living in Galilee had intermingled with the Gentiles. Nathaniel reflected the Jewish thinking about Galilee when hearing that Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee he said, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (Jn. 1:46) What a strange place for the Son of God to receive his human parents! Backward, far away from political prominence, filled with poor, untaught, common people. Truly God works in ways very different from what we would do. (Note: The idea that a Messiah would come out of Galilee was as strange to the

Jews as imagining that the president of Ethiopia would come out a remote part of Ethiopia like Southern Omo or Beneshengul from someone who had only a fifth grade education.)

Nazareth was a small town. Some scholars estimate that there were between 1600 and 2000 people living there. Most of the people were farmers, but some, like Joseph, were simple carpenters. About five kilometers away was the town of Sepphoris, the major political center for Galilee. Not too far from the town of Nazareth were major trade routes where traders would transport goods from Egypt to Babylon, and from Judea to places east of the Sea of Galilee.

Joseph and Mary were descendants of David and probably Joseph's and Mary's parents or grandparents had moved from Judea into Nazareth sometime after the Jews in Judea conquered and annexed Galilee about 100 years earlier. Nazareth was a town which strongly followed Judaism, refusing to compromise with the Gentiles around them.

Joseph and Mary grew up learning to worship the God of Abraham and David. It is clear from Mary's song that she had a good knowledge of the teachings of the Old Testament. It is also clear from the Gospel story that Joseph and Mary were from very poor families. How embarrassing for the Son of God to be born into a family that was this poor! Weren't there any rich families in Judea who could provide the Messiah with a better home? Yes there were. But God wanted his Son to experience life at its hardest. No one would accuse God of making life easy for his Son so that Jesus would not understand the pain of their poverty.

Q. 26. a) Describe how people sometimes think that God does not understand their situation when something bad happens to them. b) How does the story of Jesus prove that God has experienced painful situations and fully understands us?

One day Mary was working around her home. Perhaps she was thinking about her recent engagement to Joseph and about the wedding that would take place within the year. The Jewish custom was that often when small children, parents would verbally agree to marry their children when they got older, so perhaps Mary and Joseph had been "engaged" from childhood. It was Jewish culture that when Mary was somewhere between 12 and 14, she was to get married. Culturally Joseph would have been around 18 to 20. (Note: There are some indications in early church writings that Joseph was an older man. Perhaps his first wife died without bearing children and Mary was his second wife. Or this could have been a story circulated by the early church to support the view of some Christians that Mary never had sexual relationships with Joseph and the children mentioned in the Gospels were from Joseph's first marriage.) In order to formalize the engagement, Joseph's father and relatives would have gone to Mary's house to agreed how much money Joseph's father would have to pay Mary's parents and set the day for the wedding. Since both were from the small town of Nazareth they most likely would have known each other. Jewish culture said that they were to get married about one year after the formal betrothal. In the eyes of people, Joseph and Mary were now "married." However they were not allowed to have sexual relations until the formal marriage celebration. To break the agreement would demand a "divorce" and sexual relationships with others would be classified as adultery. And if either of them died during this year's period, they would be classified as a widow. Mary would stay in her parents house until the night of her formal wedding. Perhaps this betrothal had just happened and Mary was excitedly thinking about it and making plans for her wedding and new home.

Suddenly her thoughts were interrupted with the appearance of the angel Gabriel, the same angel who six months earlier had appeared to Zechariah. The angel came not to the great Temple, but into the home of a simple peasant teenage girl. For emphasis three times in his story of these events Luke mentions that Mary was a virgin. Clearly this birth was to be unusual, not the result of a human sexual act.

From the very beginning, the words of the angel were unusual. Gabriel called her "highly favored" and he told her "the Lord is with you." Jews did not greet one another like this. Such an unusual greeting startled Mary. Interestingly, there is nothing in the story which indicates that Mary was especially holy and that is why God chose her. She is not called holy or righteous, unlike Zechariah or Joseph. Rather, the angel calls her "favored" to indicate that God's choice of Mary was one of grace. But it is clear from the attitude of Mary that she was a godly teenager.

The angel then tells Mary that she is going to have a son, not later, after marriage to Joseph, but a son now- out of wedlock. Notice the details which the angel gives about this special child:

a) It will be a son.

b) The son's name was to be called Jesus. The name Jesus is a Greek translation of the Hebrew name Joshua. Both of these names mean "Yahweh is salvation." The angel does not explain to Mary, but later to Joseph the angel would explain that the reason this unique child was to be called Jesus was to reflect his major work of providing salvation for the sins of people.

c) The child would be great. Probably Luke was making a play on words here. Previously the angel had shared that John would be "great in the sight of the Lord." John's greatness would come from God. But Jesus would be great. This means that Jesus, in his character and person as the Son of God, would be great.

d) Jesus would be called the Son of the Most High. In the Gospel of John, the Apostle emphasizes that Jesus is the unique Son of God because of his eternal relationship with God the Father. But to Mary this name would have had a different understanding. The title "son of God" was given to Davidic kings when they were enthroned to show their special relationship to God. (See 1 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7) The greatest son of David, the Messiah, would have this special relationship as well. Mary would have understood this to mean that she would be the mother of the promised Messiah. Whereas John was to be known to all as a great prophet, Jesus was to be known by the people as "the Son of God."

e) God will give him the throne of David. The angel makes it clear that Jesus would be the special son of David whom the Jews had been waiting for over 500 years. Jesus would not fight to gain this throne as many false messiah's and Herod had done. Rather, God would give it to him.

f) Jesus would reign over the house of Jacob forever. The house of Jacob is another term for the whole Jewish nation, the 12 tribes. And rather than being a temporary rulership like David's, it would be an eternal rulership. Although the Jews believed that the Messiah would come, it was not expected that this person reign forever. However, Old Testament prophets hinted of his eternal reign. (e.g. Is. 9:6)

g) His kingdom would never end. Many scholars see here a hint of Daniel 7:13-14 where Daniel sees in a vision God giving to one "like a son of man" the eternal kingdom.

Mary would have clearly understood this prophecy to mean that she would bear the Messiah. But there was nothing in Jewish teachings saying that the Messiah was to be born by a "virgin." The Jews understood Is. 7:14 to refer to Isaiah's time, not to the Messiah. And nowhere in Jewish history was a birth ever recorded by someone who had no sexual relationships with a man. Imagine the confusion Mary felt at this time. How could a virgin bear a son without a human father? Rather than doubting God's ability to give a son like Zechariah did, Mary expressed her confusion by asking the angel how this could happen.

Gabriel reassured Mary that her pregnancy would come from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the mention of the Holy Spirit reminded Mary of the creative power of God in Gen. 1:1 where the Holy Spirit is shown as preparing to assist in creation. The mention of the Holy Spirit would also remind Mary of the promises of the Old Testament that when the new age arrived, the Holy Spirit would play a unique role. (See Joel 2:28-29) The angel clearly told Mary that in a creative miracle, God would cause her to become pregnant without any man's involvement. In this way he would be uniquely "the Son of God."

It is important that we understand what happened. Science tells us that pregnancy happens when the man's sperm joins the woman's egg. That egg begins to divide and then grow into a baby. But the Holy Spirit started Mary's egg to divide without any sperm. There are some religions which misunderstand what Christians believe and claim we teach that God had a sexual act with Mary. This is very offensive to them, just like it should be offensive to us. God did not have any sexual act with Mary. Rather, the creator who formed Mary and formed her egg, created life in the egg so that it began to divide and grow. Amazingly, the Logos who created the world was now found in the egg of a woman so small that it would be hard to see with human eyes! In his human nature, Jesus, like all humans, started his human existence as an egg which kept growing for nine months until he was born. Oh the miracle of the birth of Jesus!

Unlike Zechariah, Mary did not ask for a sign to verify the angel's word. Whereas Zechariah showed his doubt in God, Mary showed her faith in God. But the angel gave her a sign anyway. He told her that already God had been doing a miracle, for her relative Elizabeth, probably her mother's sister whom Mary would have known, was pregnant. This would have been amazing news to Mary who would have known about her aunt's painful experience of childlessness. The angel probably encouraged Mary to go visit her.

Mary's next words "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" seem easy to say. But we need to understand the implications of her saying this. In obeying God, Mary was willing to face being ostracized by her new fiancée, by her parents, and by the whole community. At the least, she would face the same situation Tigest would have faced. A woman with a child outside of marriage would not be allowed to freely participate in community life. As she went to the well to get water, or washed her clothes, people would look at her, snicker, or point their fingers. Do you think Joseph or her parents would have believed her if she went to them and said "I am pregnant by the Holy Spirit?" No one would believe her. Even though she was later married, all of the people in Nazareth would have known that Jesus was born at least three months too early for it to be Joseph's child after their marriage ceremony. As Jesus grew up he would face the same mockery that all children who are "illegitimate" face. In fact, John 8:41 hints that the Jews all knew that Jesus' birth was not proper. The leaders were probably insulting Jesus, saying that they were not illegitimate like he was. (Note: In later Jewish writings, the Jews wrote that Mary had Jesus was a result of an adulterous relationship with another man besides Joseph. Some enemies of Christianity claimed she had a child by a Roman soldier. This accusation would grow and is the assumption of most Jews today who find the idea of a virgin conception too difficult to believe.)

Knowing all of this, Mary still said "If this is the will of God for me, I will agree to all of the pain for the sake of God's plans." Luke is using Mary as an example of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Following Jesus will also cause us to face difficult decisions. We can be made fun of by our friends, kicked out of our families, persecuted, and perhaps even killed. But if we are to obey God, our response should always be "I am your servant. Do with me as you will." Have you ever made this type of decision to follow Jesus and accept the suffering that comes as a result?

Q. 27. a) Describe how being a follower of Jesus often brings uncomfortable results. b) Explain how you have faced such difficulties for following Jesus. c) Explain how following Jesus can be classified as responding "I am your servant. May it be to me as you want."

THE MEETING OF THE TWO MIRACLE CHILDREN

In response to the prompting of Gabriel, and perhaps to give herself time to think through the implications of being pregnant, Mary quickly traveled to Judea. Boldly, this teenage girl traveled the three to five day journey to her relative's home. Little did she expect what happened next.

As Mary entered the house where Elizabeth, now six months pregnant, was living, she called out greetings to Elizabeth. Luke describes not so much the meeting of the two women, but the meeting of the two miracle children, John and Jesus. Suddenly, John the Baptist, in the womb of Elizabeth, began to jump with joy. Although just a six month old fetus, John, who already had the Holy Spirit upon him, recognized that the child in Mary (now just a few weeks old) was his master, the Messiah. No matter how great John would become, he would always remember that his cousin, Jesus, was his Master.

(Note: This story is a clear indication that unborn children, no matter how small, are important to God. If a six month old fetus can recognize Jesus, they should not be considered non-human and aborted. There is no evidence in Scripture that God ever treats a fetus like a non-person to be destroyed at will. God's answer to an unwanted pregnancy is never "kill the fetus" but raise the baby for the glory of God. One person, writing about Jesus, said that if Mary had lived in many western countries today, society would have demanded that Mary abort Jesus, who became the Savior of the world. Not only was she a teenager, but she was pregnant out of wedlock, and she was very poor with little hope to raise the child in a way that would bring him a life many would consider meaningful.)

Elizabeth, empowered by the same Holy Spirit, recognized without being told what was happening. She knew that the small fetus in Mary was "her Lord." Elizabeth went against all cultural norms in her greetings to Mary. She was an old woman and Mary was just a young teenager. Mary should have honored Elizabeth, but Elizabeth honored Mary. Interestingly, Elizabeth recognized the greatness of Mary. But that greatness was not because Mary was sinless, or more holy or more righteous than she was. Mary's greatness was because she was "the mother of my Lord." (Elizabeth's honor was focused on the child more than Mary.) The Jews measured a woman's greatness by the greatness of her children. The greater the child, the greater the mother. That is why one day a woman following Jesus cried out "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." (Lk. 11:27) Elizabeth knew that Mary was greater than she because Mary would bear a son that would be greater than her son. Giving birth to the "Lord" would make Mary the greatest woman who would ever live. The first people to recognize the Messiah was the six month old fetus, John, and his old mother, Elizabeth!

Mary had been thinking about the implications of what the angel had told her. And now her aunt Elizabeth had miraculously determined that she was pregnant and that her fetus was the Messiah. Overwhelmed, Mary burst out in a song.

1. Mary praises God for choosing her: (Lk. 1:46-50) Mary knew that she was not chosen because she was the greatest virgin in Israel. Rather, God's choice of her was because of his grace. So she praises God that in spite of all of the pain that would await her by have a child outside of wedlock, she was honored. Mary praises God that he was willing to choose her in spite of her "humble state." Most likely this reflects her awareness that she is very poor with little honor in the eyes of people. She and her son would both be among the "humble," despised, common, poor people. She also recognizes that God was her "Savior," a clear reference that Mary was sinful and needed a Savior just like all of us do.

2. Mary praises God for what he is about to do because of her son: (Lk. 1:51-55) With the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary recognized what her child would one day accomplish. Mary was part of the poor, downtrodden, abused class of society. She recognized that the Messiah would one day change things. There would be a "revolution." Mary listed three relationships that her son would change:

a. Her son would humble the proud. The Old Testament refers to the proud as those who were in active resistance to God, those who lived without depending upon God. They did not live in obedience to God's Word, proudly thinking that they could live in any way they want without being punished by God. Mary's son would one day change the moral situation, so those who seemed to get away with an immoral life would be judged, and those who chose to obey God would be honored.

b. Her son would lower the rulers and lift up the humble. In Jerusalem, just a few kilometers away from Elizabeth and Mary, lived the rulers of power. There was Herod the Great, the king who ruled over Israel with great cruelty. And there were the high priests who used religion to become more powerful and rich. Mary was part of the people seen as of no consequence. And Jesus would be born among those the world considers as insignificant. But her child would one day change things so that the poor (humble) would be on top as the rulers. Her son would honor those people whom the world despised and lower those rulers whom the world honors.

c. Her son would reverse the economic conditions of the world. The rich who have so much and do not share with the poor would be lowered; and the poor, like Mary and Joseph and Jesus, would one day have enough to eat.

Not only Mary, but most of the believers when Luke was writing, found themselves in a similar situation. Most early believers were from the poor sections of society. Some were slaves with no rights. And they were often abused by the rich merchants, the governors, or the wealthy religious rulers. (Note: The Bible shows that mankind's major problem is not the rulers or wealthy. Rather, sin turns people into oppressive rulers and selfishly wealthy, thinking only about themselves rather than others.) Luke is telling them that one day Jesus will change everything. Jesus did not right inequalities when he first came to earth. Jesus came to die for sins, which is the root of all problems mankind face. But Jesus did start the revolution. First in the church, he undid all divisions. (See Gal. 3:26-29) But one day when he returns to rule he will undo the inequalities of life. Mary's prophecy was accurate, but it would not be fulfilled when her son came to die, but will be true at his second coming.)

Mary ended her song reflecting the Jewish hope for the Messiah. Through her son, Abraham's descendants (Jews) would be blessed forever.

Q. 28. a) Describe how many Christians tend to be from parts of society that are despised by the rich and the famous. b) Explain how it is an encouragement that one day God will reverse things so that the downtrodden will be honored and not always despised.

Q. 29. Read Mt. 1:18-25. a) What did Joseph plan to do once he found out that Mary was pregnant? b) What did God tell him to do instead? c) What would the reaction of people have been to Joseph because he married Mary who had a baby less than six months after the wedding?

THE ANGEL MEETS WITH JOSEPH (Mt. 1:18-25)

Luke tells us that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months. Although it is not clear, perhaps Mary stayed with Elizabeth until John was born and then returned home. During this time the fetus in Mary continued to grow until at three months she was beginning to show her pregnancy to those who looked carefully. Mary walked the long way back up to Nazareth. There were difficult choices ahead of her. What would she tell her parents? Would they expel her from the home? And what would she tell Joseph? Would Joseph still marry her or would she be abandoned by him? How much easier to hide with Elizabeth than to face the implications of pregnancy with her family and fiancée, but God's desire was for her to return home.

Whereas Luke tells the story of the conception of Jesus from the perspective of Mary, Matthew tells the story from the perspective of Joseph. Both stories agree that the child was not natural but the result of the creative ministry of the Holy Spirit.

When Mary got back to Nazareth, the days of her wedding were close. Did Mary go to Joseph and tell him about being pregnant? It does not seem so. Matthew says that Mary "was found to be with child." This seems to indicate that eventually the physical evidence that Mary was pregnant was so clear that she could not deny the truth. Joseph would have been devastated. He knew that Mary's child was not his, so the obvious implication was that Mary had been unfaithful to him. Imagine his hurt and anger when he met with Mary to accuse her of unfaithfulness. Did she remain quiet knowing that no one would believe the truth that she was still a virgin and was not unfaithful? Did she try to reason with him? We do not know, but it must have been painful for Mary to realize that her willingness to obey God would now cost her the option of marriage. What respectable person would marry her thinking that she had been unfaithful and also had a child as evidence of her perceived sin? She was looking at the bitter reality of bearing the Son of God without any father around, struggling with raising him alone just like Tigist had to.

Jewish culture demanded that if an engaged or married woman became pregnant from someone else, the husband was obligated to divorce her. The man had three choices. First, he could ask for a public trial and demand that she be stoned according to the Old Testament laws. (Deut. 22:23-24) This rarely happened, however. (This is what the religious leaders were asking Jesus to do in Jn. 8:1-11) Second, the man could go before the judge, give his evidence, and the judge would publicly rule that the woman was an adulteress and he would not have to repay the anything to the woman and her family for divorcing her. Third, the man could quietly gather two or three witnesses. He would privately meet with the woman and her family and give her a written divorce paper and send her back home. Her family was obligated to return his gifts. Joseph was making plans to do this final type of divorce. He did not want to get revenge against

Mary. He demonstrated his "righteous" or compassionate character by trying to spare Mary the embarrassment of the whole situation being handled publicly.

Before Joseph could finalize his plans, however, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. Only a dramatic encounter like this would convince Joseph that Mary's pregnancy was not because she was unfaithful. The angel explained that the child was the result of the Holy Spirit's creative power, not because Mary had sex with another man. He told Joseph to go ahead with the marriage and take Mary home as his wife. In doing so, he would be considered the legal father of Jesus, passing on to Jesus the right to be the "son of David" who would rule on the throne of David. And he would also provide Mary and Jesus the security needed as the child grew.

When the child was born, Joseph was to name the child "Jesus," to indicate that Jesus would be the Savior. But he would not be the political-type Savior that all of the Jews were looking for. Rather, Jesus would be the Savior of sins, addressing the root problem of mankind. There was no expectation among the Jews of Jesus day that the Messiah would die as a ransom for sins.

Although Joseph would have been reassured that Mary was innocent of sin, this did not mean his choice was easy. By going ahead with his marriage to Mary he was willing to accept all of the assumptions of people that he and Mary had sex before they were married. When the baby was born, everyone would be talking about the fact that it was at least three months early. Joseph could not go anywhere without people talking behind his back of his supposed sinful relationship with Mary. He couldn't tell them the child was not his, for who would believe him? But, like Mary, Joseph was willing to accept whatever dishonor came to his name to obey God's plan.

Joseph went ahead with the marriage. Mary was clearly pregnant by now. He would have gone to her home and completed the payment of the bride price. They would have drunk together the symbolic cup of wine which finalized their marriage. Although normally people would celebrate for a week or two, it is doubtful Joseph and Mary did this. Not only did they not have the money necessary for a celebration, but with Mary being clearly pregnant, this would have been too embarrassing. Joseph would have taken Mary home as people wondered "Why was there no marriage celebration?" And everyone in town would have said "Do you know that Mary is already pregnant? Shame on Joseph and Mary!"

Matthew adds that although Joseph formalized the marriage and took Mary home as his wife, he had no sexual relationships with her until after Jesus was born. Why? We don't know. Perhaps Joseph wanted no doubt that this was the miracle child and not his child. Some Christian denominations teach that Mary was eternally a virgin, so she and Joseph never consummated their marriage. But this verse and the evidence of Scripture seems to indicate that after the birth of Jesus they did have normal sexual relationships and bore other children. (Mt. 12:46-47; 13:55)

One writer writes "Imagine the 'risk' which God took. Who would entrust God's special Son, the Savior of the world, to two teenagers?" Would they bear up under the mockery of others? Would Joseph dissent Mary as many men do when their friend becomes pregnant unexpectedly? We don't often trust teenagers with such difficult circumstances. And yet God trusted Mary and Joseph with his Son.

WHAT WAS GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE VIRGIN CONCEPTION?

So what was God's purpose in the virgin conception? (Note: Protestants prefer to call this miracle the "virgin conception" and not the "virgin birth." The miracle is in the fact that Mary got pregnant by the Holy Spirit without a human father (and therefore stayed a virgin until after the birth of Jesus), not that the physical birth of Jesus happened in an unusual way.) The New Testament carefully explains why Jesus died on the cross. But, although it mentions the fact that Jesus was not born of natural sexual relationships between a man and woman, it never clearly explains why God chose this method to bring his Son into the world. Scholars point to the following reasons for Jesus being born only from Mary and not from Joseph and Mary:

1. The combined role of the Holy Spirit and Mary indicated that Jesus had two natures, divine and human. From the Holy Spirit, Jesus' divine nature somehow passed on to the seed in Mary's womb. And from Mary, Jesus received his fully human nature. As the angel told Joseph, only in Jesus could Immanuel, "God with us," really happen. Only in Jesus would the prophecy in Is. 7:14 be fully fulfilled. So the virgin conception indicated that Jesus had both natures. As fully God, Jesus could pay the penalty not just for one other person, but since his divine life had infinite value, his death was sufficient for all people who ever lived. And as fully man, he was able to be both a sacrifice for sin and their priestly representative in heaven.

2. The virgin conception was important in showing that Jesus, although fully human, did not inherit the legal guilt and moral corruption that is passed on to all humans since Adam and Eve. (See Rom. 5:12-19) Paul cites as his proof that all people are sinners and legally guilty before God the fact that in Adam all have sinned. And from Adam all receive a sin nature, a nature that moves all of us to sin against God. But in Lk. 1:35, Gabriel insists that Jesus was to be "holy" which indicates that Jesus had no sin nature that sought to rebel against God. He was more like Adam before he fell into sin. So what kept Jesus from getting this sin nature and legal guilt? God kept Jesus from inheriting the legal guilt from Adam by not having Jesus have a human father. Although Mary did have a sin nature, the Holy Spirit kept her sin nature from passing on to Jesus as well.

(Note: Protestants differ from some other Christians in two views related to the virgin birth. First, some Christian denominations teach that Mary was also sinless and therefore did not pass any sin nature on to Jesus. However, how did Mary not have a sin nature since she had natural parents? Protestants insist that Jesus' sinlessness does not come from Mary, but from the Holy Spirit. Second, some denominations teach that Mary remained a perpetual virgin even after the birth of Jesus. They teach that Jesus was not born through the birth canal which would destroy her mark of virginity, but came out of the womb directly (similar to when a baby is born by operation). This kept her virginity intact. Also, they teach that Mary and Joseph never had sexual relationships or children. They say that the children mentioned in the Gospels are either Joseph's children from a previous wife or cousins of Jesus. Protestants would insist that nothing in the Bible says that Mary was sinless or that she remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus. The most natural reading of the New Testament would seem to be that Joseph and Mary had other children after the birth of Jesus.)

Q. 30. List the lessons that we can learn about following Jesus from the story of Joseph and Mary.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) Read John 1:1-14. a) What did John mean by calling Jesus the "Logos?" b) Discuss what these verses teach about Jesus' divine nature. c) Discuss what these verses teach about Jesus' human nature. d) List ways in which Jesus being fully human should encourage us today.

2. Suppose someone said "Look at the sinful people who are in the ancestry of Jesus. Your Jesus was not very pure." a) List the undesirable people in the ancestry of Jesus. b) What do you think Matthew was trying to teach by listing these people in Jesus' genealogies? c) What would you say to explain to the person why Jesus has undesirable people in his genealogy? d) What should this genealogy teach us about how we are to view people whom society classifies as undesirable?

3. a) "God gave Zechariah and Elizabeth a child even when old. He will give you a child." said a pastor. Using the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, what can we learn about what a pastor should and should not say to a childless couple. b) Many believers consider childlessness a sign of sin or lack of faith. What do you think the Biblical view to childlessness is? c) Discuss things a church can do to encourage those who are childless or have a disease which has not been cured.

4. a) Describe how Luke's story of John the Baptist's conception demonstrate his greatness. b) Describe how Luke shows Jesus as being greater than John the Baptist. c) Why is it difficult to be famous, but less famous than someone else? How has this caused trouble in your church? d) What does getting angry over someone else's greater popularity demonstrate about a wrong view of God, the wrong view of abilities people have, and the purpose for why we are serving?

5. a) What can we learn about God and his ways from his choice of Zechariah and Elizabeth to give birth to a great prophet? b) What can we learn about God and his ways from his choice of Joseph and Mary to give birth to and raise his Son? c) Discuss the difference between the people God often chooses to use and those we want to choose for ministry in our church. How are they usually different? What should be our criteria for choosing people to minister in the church?

6. a) Describe the difficulties Mary brought upon herself by saying "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." b) Describe the difficulties Joseph brought upon himself by being willing to marry Mary and raise Jesus as his own child. c) From this story, what can we learn about the proper attitude towards following Jesus?

7. a) Why did God discipline Zechariah for his question, but not Mary? b) What does this story teach us about God holding some people more responsible for their actions than others?

LESSON FIVE

FIRST DAY

THE BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST & JESUS THE SON OF GOD (5/6 BC-26 AD)

Mihiritu was an unmarried teenage girl who had been raped and became pregnant. Embarrassed, and because she had little loving support from her family, she left her home and went to live in Addis Ababa. At first she stayed with distant relatives, but as her pregnant state showed too much, embarrassing her relatives, they did not want her and the baby living in their house. So they asked her to leave. With nowhere to go, she was forced to start begging by one of the busy streets. One night, with another beggar lady to help her, she gave birth to a boy child. As she lay in pain with her new born baby, she wondered "Where is God? Does he understand all of the pain that I am going through and the embarrassment of having a child in such conditions? What will every happen to my child?"

- Q. 1. a) If you were a pastor or evangelist, what could you say to Mihiritu to encourage her? b) How was the birth of Jesus similar to the birth of Mihiritu's child? c) What can we learn about the character of God that he would allow his son to be born in such desperate conditions?
- Q. 2. Read Luke 1:57-80. a) Describe the birth of John the Baptist. b) List the prophecies that Zechariah made concerning Jesus. c) List the prophecies that Zechariah made concerning John the Baptist.

Does God understand when we are faced with a difficult situation like Mihiritu or when life does not seem fair to us? The story of the birth of Jesus tells us that "yes" God does understand. God did not send his son to be born in a castle in pleasant conditions. Rather, like many who live on the streets, Mary gave birth to the Son of God in a stable. Jesus lowered himself to the lowest of the lowest position. What an amazing God we have- one who is not only great and powerful, but fully understands our humble situation. God is the God of the poor- for he understands them more completely than we ever realize.

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Lk. 1:57-80)

Luke had a deep interest in the beginnings of Christianity. Those beginnings centered upon the birth of two important individuals. First, there was the birth of John the Baptist, the one chosen by God to get people ready for the coming of the Messiah. Second, there was the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, the King of the Jews. In his description of what happened, Luke is careful to show that from the beginning, John the Baptist is seen as the lesser of two great individuals. Although great, John the Baptist was the servant of Jesus. No one was supposed to follow John the Baptist; rather they needed to become the followers of Jesus. In the same way, Christians are to be careful to not follow famous preachers or healers, but only Jesus. All ministers, no matter how famous, are only servants of Jesus, unworthy to even tie Jesus' sandals.

For nine months, Elizabeth waited and then the day came for her to give birth. Jewish customs was that when someone in the small town was about to give birth, the relatives and friends would gather at the house. Because Zechariah was well known and this was a special baby in their old age, no doubt there were many who gathered. Often the town musicians would play music and at the birth of the son, there

would be great cries of joy and much singing and dancing and celebration. We can only imagine the joy of Elizabeth and Zechariah when their baby was born.

Eight days passed and the time for the ancient rite of circumcision arrived. For the Jews, this was a very sacred time. To be circumcised was a sign that the child was a son of Abraham and therefore the recipient of the covenant which God had made with Abraham. It was also a sign that the parents promised to raise the child according to the Old Testament laws.

The rite of circumcision was a time for celebration. A priest in town was called to perform the ritual and friends and neighbors gathered to celebrate. Although often children were named at birth, it was also common for the parents to wait until the circumcision before they named the child. After the rite of circumcision, because Zechariah still could not speak, the people gathered around and asked Elizabeth what the boy was to be called. Jews often gave their children names which described something they wanted to praise God for, after a great person in Jewish history, to describe something (e.g. Jacob named because he tried to "trip" his brother), or after a close relative like a grandparent or even after the name of the father. Since Zechariah was old with no other children, everyone expected them to name the child "Zechariah." But when Elizabeth said "John" this caused confusion. The people looked to Zechariah to see if he approved with the name. He took out a board covered with wax and wrote on it "John" to show that he agreed with the name. John means "God is gracious." Probably God wanted to indicate through this name not only that God had given a gracious gift of a son to Zechariah and Elizabeth, but the time of "grace" where God would send his Son to die for the sins of mankind had arrived. John was to prepare people to receive the forgiveness which that gift would bring.

As soon as he wrote the name "John" God opened Zechariah's mouth. Immediately the Holy Spirit empowered him and Zechariah broke out in prophetic praise. Like Elizabeth, Zechariah knew that the time of the Messiah had arrived. He knew that even though his son would be great, he would be the servant of the Messiah who would be born six months later. Zechariah's words reflected his understanding of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Like all of the Jews living during the times of Jesus, his expectation was that Jesus would initiate a great and powerful kingdom.

Zechariah starts his prophecy by reflecting on the role of the greater child, the Messiah. That child, coming not from his tribe of Aaron, but from the tribe of David, would bring "salvation" or political deliverance to the Jews. (Although Zechariah no doubt thought in terms of political deliverance, Luke is hinting that true spiritual salvation would also come from the Messiah.)

Zechariah then turns to the role his son, John, would have in this time of deliverance. Rather than focus upon a political role for John, Zechariah mentions that John would have the job of spiritually preparing people for the Messiah's kingdom. He would challenge people to repent from their rebellion against God and his covenant and return them to obedience of God and they would receive God's forgiveness.

Zechariah and later John realized that John was never going to be the leader, the one whom everyone would honor. And yet Zechariah was happy that his son was privileged to serve God. And John was willing to let Jesus become more popular than he. Often the sign of greatness is revealed in our being able to serve God faithfully and with joy and with no jealousy when others receive more glory and honor than us.

It demonstrates that we are only seeking the benefit of the kingdom of God, not our own kingdom. As long as God is honored and glorified, we do not care whether we or our children are honored.

Q. 3. a) Illustrate how many parents, especially church leaders, want their children to be honored above other children. b) Explain why it is a sign of true greatness to rejoice when someone else receives the peoples' honor without become jealous.

The people gathered around Zechariah knew that something was different in the birth of John the Baptist. They began to talk to each other saying "What will this child become?" Luke adds that John spent much of his time in the desert until the time when he began his public ministry. Why the desert? There are different thoughts. Some people think that Zechariah and Elizabeth died when John was still young and John did not have an easy life, forced to live in the desert. Some people even think that since he had no parents, John went to live in a religious sect called the Qumran community (or Essenes) who had a monastery in the desert by the Dead Sea. This sect would sometimes take children who did not have any parents into the sect after they were 10 years old. If this is true, John must have later left the sect. Although his teaching showed some similarity to the Essenes, there were many differences to show that he was not totally part of this Jewish religious group. Others think John was following the pattern set for prophets established by Elijah many years earlier when he too lived in the desert. (1 Ki. 19) Still others see in this a picture that through John and Jesus, a new "exodus" was about to begin. Just like the Jews under Moses went through the wilderness before they came to the promised land, so also John and Jesus would both start in the wilderness and then lead people into a new spiritual promised land.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS, THE MESSIAH (Lk. 2:1-20, Mt. 2:1-12)

Q. 4. Read Luke 2:1-20. a) Who was the leader of the Roman Empire when Jesus was born? b) Why did Joseph and Mary leave Nazareth and go to Bethlehem? (Look at the map in Appendix A in the back of the book to see where these two towns are located.) c) Where was Jesus born? How was Jesus' birth similar to the situation Mihiritu faced? d) Who were the first humans to honor and worship Jesus? g) What can we learn about God and Jesus from the birth of his son and the honor of those who recognized him?

Nothing happens by accident. Everything in the world and in our government is known by and determined by God. Thousands of miles away from Palestine, in Rome, after years of civil war, a great king called Augustus came to power. His reign was heralded as the dawn of a new era. He was proclaimed as the king of peace with great celebration and he brought previously unknown peace and prosperity to the ancient world. Yearly his birthday was celebrated throughout the Roman empire and as they celebrated people would cry out in loud voices "Lord" and "Savior."

Little did he or other famous people realize that the true "Lord and Savior" was about to be born in a remote part of the vast Roman Empire. As part of his administration of the huge empire, Augustus determined that all people throughout the Roman empire would have to be registered so that they could be assessed taxes. Little did he know that his administrative decision was going to be used by God to move Joseph and Mary from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem, the birthplace of great King David so that Jesus could be born there in fulfillment of prophecy. Augustus thought he was making his own decision. But in reality it was God who was controlling Augustus so that the true king of peace could be born in Bethlehem. Just as God controlled history and kings in those days, he is controlling it today. Christians are not at the

mercy of the decisions of government officials or world events. Rather we are in the hands of the Almighty God who controls all things to fulfill his plans.

Q. 5. Explain why is it important for Christians to remember that God is controlling all things according to his determined plan.

The Roman Empire normally took a census of adult men in the empire every 14 years. There were two reasons why people were counted. First, people were counted so that the Romans knew how many people they could force into military service. Because Jews were exempt by law from serving in the Roman army, this was not the reason why Joseph had to be counted. Second, people were registered so that they could be assessed taxes based upon their property value which was why Joseph and Mary had to go down to Bethlehem to register. Although Herod the Great was the king of Palestine, the Jews were officially under the Roman region of Syria. Luke tells us that the one who commanded the census was a governor called Quirinius.

Most likely King Herod and his officials were responsible to oversee the registration ordered by Augustus and Quirinius. Rather than use the system of registering people where they lived, it was decided that the Jews had to go back to the place where their ancestors came from. Jews often viewed the place where their ancestors came from as their place of origin. Since Joseph was of the tribe of Judah and the clan of David, he had to go back to the historical town of David. That was not Jerusalem, the capital city of David, but Bethlehem where David was born. (Some scholars think that since Joseph had to return to Bethlehem it indicates that Joseph had some property in Bethlehem for which he had to pay taxes. Perhaps this was why he was planning to resettle in Bethlehem rather than live in Nazareth. Or it could be that it was in Bethlehem that Joseph's and Mary's family registrar was kept in the synagogue.)

Luke says that Mary was "pledged to be married." It is clear from the story of Matthew that they were already legally married. Luke is saying this to indicate that the marriage was never fully consummated since Joseph did not have any sexual union with Mary until after the birth of Jesus.

It is interesting that Joseph took Mary with him. Nazareth was about 120 kilometers from Bethlehem and to travel to Bethlehem it took three to five days of walking. By now Mary was probably close to nine months pregnant, so the journey would have been very difficult and slow. Although Syria sometimes required that women register as well, there is no evidence that this was demanded in Palestine. So most likely Mary did not have to make this long journey. So why did Joseph take her? We can't be sure. Perhaps Joseph did not want Mary to face the awkward situation alone of giving birth to what people thought was an illegitimate baby where all would make fun of her. Normally Mary's mother would have helped with the delivery. Could it be that they had severed relationship with Mary since they thought she was pregnant out of wedlock? Had things become so difficult in Nazareth that Joseph and Mary decided to move from Nazareth where Joseph was working and resettle back in Bethlehem area? Matthew's story hints that Joseph was planning to stay in Bethlehem and not return to Nazareth. (Mt. 2:21-23)

When Joseph and Mary finally got to Bethlehem, a small town of about 1000 people, the town was crowded with others who had also returned to Bethlehem for the registration. No doubt Joseph and Mary first went to places where visitors could stay. The word "inn" in Greek could refer to either a hotel where many people stayed or to guest rooms in peoples' homes which they rented to visitors. During Jesus' time, there were no hotels like we have today. Rather, a rich person who had a large yard would build small stalls

along one side of the yard. Travelers would come with their animals into the enclosed yard. The innkeeper was responsible to provide food for the animals and the fire to cook. People had to carry their own mat to sleep on and their food to eat. The animals were tied on one side or in some of the stalls and the people slept where they could find room. Was this what happened to Joseph and Mary? Since the courtyard was full of people, did they and their animals take one of the small stalls and that is where Jesus was born? Or it is possible that not only the courtyard, but also the guestrooms were full. Ancient Jewish houses often had two levels to them. The lower level was where the animals were kept and the upper level was where the people lived. Could it be that since there was no guest room available, someone allowed them to use the lower part of their house where the animals were kept? Ancient church legends state that Jesus was born in a cave which were common around Bethlehem and used as stables for cattle. We might not know the details, but we can be sure that the birth of the Son of God was not convenient. He did not have a bed, but was placed in a feed box for cattle. And Mary gave birth alone with only strangers around her. Mary's mother was not around, nor any of the midwives who knew her. Rather, either Joseph himself had to help deliver the baby or some stranger was found to assist her. How inconvenient for God's Son to be born in such a place!

As soon as a baby was born, Jewish customs was to first place a piece of clothing on the new baby and then take long trips of cloth and tie up the baby to keep its arms and legs straight. They thought that this helped the baby develop straight arms and legs. This is what Mary did for Jesus.

Could it be that Luke is using this story to teach believers a spiritual lesson that most people would never make "room" in their hearts for Jesus? Their hearts are filled with relatives, friends, plans, money, comfort, other religions- and so there is no room for them to put their faith in Jesus. Even among Christians, the tendency is to fill our hearts with other things besides Jesus and so when Jesus comes to fellowship with us, we don't have room or time. How about you, is your heart too full to receive the Son of God?

Q. 6. a) Describe how you have seen non-Christians so fill their hearts with other things that they have no room for Jesus. b) Describe how you have seen Christians fill their hearts with the things of the world so that they do not have room to fellowship with Jesus.

Whereas John's birth was met with friends and family and with great joy, the birth of Jesus was hidden. Rather than the rejoicing of family and friends, for Jesus there was only the rejoicing of a few strangers. Luke tells of three type of people who understood that the small peasant baby was the Messiah that they had waiting for, for hundreds of years.

1. The shepherds

God's ways are very different from our ways. Whereas we honor the rich and the famous, God honors the poor. We want the praise of famous religious people or political people. But not God. He is honored by the praise of all people, but especially the praise of the poor. And so the first people whom God called to see and worship his Son were the poor and socially despised shepherds. Jesus welcomes the rich and powerful to come honor him, but rarely do they do it. Instead church history is filled with people who, like the shepherds, are poor and despised. They are the ones who most easily recognize their need for Jesus and so God uses them.

Bethlehem was located in a part of Judea that was fertile. That is why its' name means "the house of bread." But not only were there many farmers in this region, many people shepherds who tended flocks as a living. In Jewish culture during the days of Jesus, shepherds were despised because they lived outside much of the time and were dirty and smelly.

It could be that these were special shepherds. The temple of Jerusalem was only 8 kilometers away to the north. Every day worship in the Temple required many sheep and goats for sacrifice which were without defect. Rather than buy those they needed every day, the priests purchased many sheep and goats at one time and shepherds kept them around Bethlehem until they were needed for sacrifice. This was especially true around special holy days when thousands of sheep were needed by the people for sacrifices. Could it be that it was these shepherds watching over the sacrifice animals who first got the honor of worshipping the Lamb of God who would be the sacrifice for their sins?

Unlike Ethiopia where animals go back to their homes at night, Jewish shepherds lived outside with their sheep and goats. Usually one shepherd was awake and the others slept. Suddenly the shepherds were startled by a bright light as an angel standing before them. This angel told them that the Messiah was born that night. He was not born in the one of the castles of Herod which was just a kilometer or two away. Nor was he born in the home of the chief priest who was located 8 kilometers away. Rather, he was born in a stable. No doubt this fact would have caused them great amazement. Who would expect the Messiah to come from the poor like them? One of the most unique truths about Christianity is that the mighty God lowered himself to the position of the poorest of the poor.

Suddenly, no longer was there just one angel, but thousands of angels. Whereas John the Baptist was welcomed by human musicians, Jesus was welcomed by a choir from heaven! This choir praised God for his grace upon humans. Angels have never experientially understood grace, for angels (i.e. Satan and his angels) have never had the opportunity to be forgiven of their sins. Only humans have this unique privilege of understanding God's unmerited favor and forgiveness. The angels insisted that this grace was not limited to just the Jews. Jesus was not just the Messiah of the Jews. He was God's gift to all tribes. Christianity is not the religion of just the select few, but God's way of blessing for all people.

Following the instructions of the angel, the shepherds hurried off to Bethlehem to find the child-Messiah. They were the first ones to bow their knees in humble worship to their King. He might not have looked like a king for he was only a small baby wrapped in rages in a manger. But in faith they believed that he was their king. And when they returned to their fields, they become the first "evangelists," spreading the word to people that the Messiah had been born.

Starting with the shepherds, Mary was faced with unusual circumstances which she could not fully understand until after the death and resurrection of her son. First the shepherds, then Simeon, then Anna, and finally the wise men- all of these were so unexpected. All she could do was to remember them and think about them until eventually the events became clear to her.

It was common knowledge among the Jews that the Messiah would be a great political ruler who would deliver them from Gentile dominance. But few Jews had an understanding that Jesus was to be the one who would bring deliverance from sin, mankind's greatest bondage. Most Jews thought that their problems were found in circumstances. But Jesus insisted that the source of all of mankind's problems is their hearts, their bondage to sin. It was this bondage that Jesus came to deliver people from. But because

the Jews were so concerned with physical blessings, they forgot the most important deliverance they needed. In the same way it is possible for us to focus upon the problems of circumstances so that we do not recognize the major problem of the evilness of men's hearts. And we can so focus upon external blessings that we fail to recognize the major blessing Jesus offers, deliverance from the penalty and bondage of sin on our lives.

Q. 7. Read Luke 2:21-40. a) Who was the second individual listed as waiting for the Messiah? How is he described? b) Who is the third person listed as honoring Jesus? How is she described? c) Read Ex. 13:2; Num. 18:16. What requirement was there upon the parents when they gave birth to a son? d) Read Lev. 5:7-10; 12:1-8. What requirements were there upon the mother following the birth of a son?

Jesus was born a Jew and as a Jew he had to fulfill all of the requirements of the Old Testament laws. Following the birth of a baby, there were four ceremonies which Jesus and his mother had to go through.

a. Circumcision: Like John the Baptist, Jesus had to be circumcised on the eighth day. It was on this day that the child was often named. So it was on this day that Joseph and Mary named their son "Jesus" (Greek) or "Joshua" which in Hebrew has the same meaning. Jesus' name indicated what he had been chosen by God to do. It means "God is salvation" to show that God sent Jesus to bring salvation to people from every tribe and nation on earth. (Note: The Orthodox, Catholic, and some Protestant denominations follow some of these traditions. However, they replace the traditions with baptizing the infant and giving it a Christian name.)

b. Redemption of the first born son: In the Old Testament, God claimed that all firstborn things (animals and humans) belonged to him. The firstborn animals had to be given to him in sacrifice. But the firstborn son of humans had to be "redeemed" or "bought back." Each parent had to pay God 5 shekels (about 21 Ethiopian birr) for their son. This ceremony was to take place about 30 days after the birth of the boy. Often it was paid at the same time as the next ceremony. So one of the reasons Joseph and Mary traveled the 8 kilometers from Bethlehem to Jerusalem was to pay this redemption fee.

c. Purification of the mother from becoming ceremonially unclean by childbirth: In the Old Testament God often used unusual circumstances as object lessons to teach his people of the need for holiness. And so anything unusual became an illustration for sin. (e.g. unusual skin disease, unusual spots on the walls, monthly menstrual cycle, etc.) One of these object lessons was the birth of a child. About forty days after the birth of a son, the mother was supposed to travel to the temple and offer a sin offering. (Those mothers living far away were allowed to send the offering with others to be offered on their behalf.) This sacrifice would change her from the position of being ritually unclean where she could not go into the Temple to worship, to ritually clean and able to join others in worship. The ceremony demanded two offerings. First, there was the sin offering and second there was a burnt offering. Although it was expected that people offer lambs as their sacrifice, God allowed the poor to sacrifice two pigeons, one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering. Because Joseph and Mary were so poor, all they could afford was two pigeons. (Two pigeons costs about 1.40 Ethiopian birr and a lamb cost about 17 Ethiopian birr.) The priests would break the neck of the first pigeon and sprinkle its blood at the base of the brass altar. They would set it aside to be later eaten by the priests. The second pigeon was burnt upon the altar.) Usually the poor who needed ritual cleansing would put the assigned amount of money for the two pigeons or doves into a special offering box in the Temple. At a set time, the priests would take the money from the

box, buy the pigeons, and sacrifice all of the pigeons at once. The poor just had to put the money into the box and then they could go home.

d. Presentation of the child: Although not specifically required in the Old Testament laws, there was a tradition perhaps started by Hannah, the mother of Samuel, to formally present the child to God as a gift. In this ceremony the parents recognized that the child did not belong to them but to God. They were committing themselves to raise the child in a way that caused him to honor God and obey the commandments God had given to them. (Note: Some churches practice this today. The parents bring their child to the front of the church where the parents and the congregation promise to raise the child to live in God's ways.

Q. 8. a) Do you think such a practice is good or not? Explain your answer. b) What is dangerous about this ritual if it causes children to think that they are saved by the ritual and that they don't have to personally follow Christ in practice?

2. Jesus is honored by Simeon, a righteous old Jew

Luke continues his story of different people who recognized that Jesus was the Messiah when he was born by telling about two other individuals who met baby Jesus in the Temple. Although Mary could have sent the redemption money and sacrifice money in to the Temple with someone else, Joseph and Mary decided to go to the Temple themselves. This is a sign that Joseph and Mary were pious Jews. Having completed the offering of purification, Joseph and Mary were most likely on their way out of the Temple. Suddenly an old man appeared before them and asked to hold the child.

Luke shared that Simeon was an old man who deeply loved God and had chosen to carefully obey the laws of God. He was the ideal believer. He was "just," living his life in a correct relationship to God's law and to people. He "feared God" which led to his humble service and obedience to God. And he "longed for the coming of the Messiah;" he wanted God's kingdom to come. Somehow the Holy Spirit had impressed upon him that he would not die before he saw the Messiah. (This deliverer is called "the consolation of Israel" to show that with the coming of the Messiah the suffering of the Jews by the Gentiles was about to end.) And the Holy Spirit had also told him that the Messiah would come to the Temple on that specific day. So, although very old, with great eagerness he must have made his way to the Temple.

Q. 9. Simeon is an "ideal" believer. How do the words "just," "fear God," and "long for the Messiah" describe what we are to be like as we follow Jesus.

Suddenly a poor couple walked by him speaking in a Galilean accent, a part of the country which people from Judea despised. Simeon would not have expected the Messiah to come from such a poor couple, but the Holy Spirit told him that the 40 day old baby was the great Messiah. Simeon stopped Joseph and Mary and asked to hold their child. How this must have surprised Joseph and Mary, for mothers usually do not like to give their small babies to strangers. But aware that God was in it, they passed baby Jesus over to Simeon. Looking at the small baby, the Holy Spirit enabled Simeon to prophecy. He had a message about the baby and a message to Mary.

a. The prophecy about the Messiah:

1) Jesus was the one who would bring deliverance and salvation for God's people.

2) Jesus was to be the "light for the Gentiles." Not only would he bring the light of salvation to the Jews, but the Gentiles as well would receive salvation through him.

3) Jesus would cause great division between people. Some who refused to believe ("*those who fall*") would stumble over him. Throughout history most people have not believed that the man who died on the cross is God in the flesh, the only way for salvation. Refusing to believe, they bring the judgment of God upon themselves. But there would be others ("*those who rise*") who recognize Jesus as God's gift of salvation, trust him and follow him in obedience. Jesus delivers them from their sin problems. The Bible does not allow mankind the option of being neutral towards Jesus. Either a person is for Jesus or he is against Jesus. What people believe about Jesus reflect their inner heart condition. It reveals their opposition to God and his ways or it reveals their submission to God.

4) Jesus would face opposition from people. Although Jesus and his followers would be the gentle and submissive to governments, they would face the opposition of people throughout history. For Jesus, that opposition would lead him to the cross. For us, it will lead to people making fun of us, denying us work or education opportunities, and often persecution. No believer should be surprised by the anger of the world. Jesus said, "Just as the master is treated poorly, his followers would be treated harshly as well." (Jn. 15:18-21)

b. The prophecy about Mary: Her soul would be pierced with a sword. The Greek word for "sword" is a large sword similar to a machete to show how great this hurt would be. It would be 30 years before Mary understood this prophecy. She thought that her son would become a great and powerful leader, the political deliverer of the Jews. It is doubtful she realized that her Son was born to die on the cross. But Simeon knew that because of what would happen to Jesus on the cross, Mary, who was now rejoicing at the birth of her firstborn son, would one day suffer greatly as she watched Jesus die on the cross. It is interesting that Simeon only mentions Mary and not Joseph. Did he somehow realize that she had the unique role of being the mother of Jesus and that Joseph was not the father of Jesus? Or did he know that Joseph would die before Jesus grew up and was crucified and so only Mary would suffer? We don't know.

3. Jesus is honored by Anna, the prophetess

Probably while Simeon was still speaking, a very old lady shuffled up to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. It could be that Anna was about 105 years old. If she was 14 when she got married (the normal age for Jewish girls to get married), if she was married for seven years and then a widow for 84 years, this would make her 105 years old. Anna too was known for her religious piety. She had the gift of "prophecy," which means that God gave her messages to pass on to other people, both about her times and perhaps about future events. Plus Anna spent most of her day in the Temple worshipping God. The Jews did not allow people to live in the Temple, especially women. Only the high priest had a room to sleep in. What Luke was saying was that every day Anna would go to the Temple where she would spend the day in worship of God. When she saw the baby Jesus, the Holy Spirit helped her recognize Jesus as the Messiah who would bring the "redemption of Jerusalem."

In his story of the birth of Jesus, Luke is emphasizing the unusualness of those who recognized the Messiah and those who did not recognize the Messiah. The majority of people had "no room" for Jesus in their lives. Not only in Bethlehem, but in the Temple, not one religious leader or rich person recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Instead, the despised, uneducated, rough shepherds; an old man about ready to die; and an old widow lady could look at a baby just 40 days old and recognize the Messiah. Isn't it the

same today? Those who put their faith in Jesus, recognizing him as their Savior and Lord are often the poor and the despised. The rich and the religious still have a difficult time recognizing their need for Jesus.

Q. 10. a) Illustrate how today the rich, famous, and religious leaders often have the most difficulty recognizing who Jesus is. b) Illustrate how the "common people" seem most able to recognize their need for Jesus as their Savior. c) What should this teach evangelists and church leaders about where they should expect God to call people to salvation?

Joseph and Mary then returned to Bethlehem, expecting to live there. But God was not finished with his plans for baby Jesus. There was still another special group to come and recognize the Messiah, the King of the Jews.

SECOND DAY

THE WISE MEN VISIT JESUS (Mt. 2:1-23)

Q. 11. Read Mt. 2:1-23. a) Who came to honor Jesus? From where did they come? b) Where did the religious leaders say Jesus was to be born? c) What led these people to where Jesus was living? d) To where did Joseph, Mary and Jesus flee? e) Where did they eventually go to live?

Rather than return to Nazareth, Joseph and Mary decided to stay in Bethlehem. Did they want to get away from the gossip that would greet them upon their return to Nazareth? Or did Joseph want the Son of David to be raised in the city of David? We don't know.

Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus took place up to two years after Luke's description of the birth of Jesus. By then Joseph, Mary and Jesus were living in a house. But God was still organizing that people come and worship his Son.

Hundreds of kilometers away from Bethlehem there was a group of people called "Magi." Ancient writings show that there were three types of people who were called magi.

First, there were religious priests from the kingdom of Persia. Some scholars believe that they were from the tribe of Mede. From the time of Daniel on, these special religious priests were known for their unique ability to study the stars and predict events in nations. They were also known for their ability to interpret dreams.

Second, there were religious wise men who became famous for their wisdom and were called "magi." They were not from one tribe, but found in several eastern countries like Arabia, Babylon, etc.

Third, there were powerful people called magi who were like witchdoctors and used magic to curse people. (It seems that Simon Magus in Acts 8 was one of these.)

Clearly the ones who came to see Jesus were not witchdoctors. However, they could have been either the special religious priests from the region of Persia or they could have been religious wise men from one of the countries east or northeast of Jerusalem. What we do know about them is:

1. They were Gentiles. They were not from the chosen people of the Jews who should have been among the first to recognize their king. (Note: Throughout this book, we use the name "Gentile" to refer to those who were ethnically not Jews, which is how the New Testament usually uses the term. It does not mean "unbelievers" as we frequently use the word Gentile.)

2. They were not followers of the true God. Most likely these wise men were similar to Balaam in Numbers 22. They knew about the great creator God, but they also worshipped other gods.

3. They were astrologers who believed the stars influenced the events upon the earth. This was a common belief in ancient times. (Even today in many magazines in western countries, people use the "stars" to predict whether or not good things will happen to them.) These men believed that special stars would appear to announce a great event, like when Augustus was born. During those days, there was a wide spread belief that one day a special star would arise announcing the birth of a great king in Judea. The Egyptians even had a name for a special star, calling it "Birth of a Prince."

4. We don't know how many wise men there were. Church tradition often says three because there were three gifts. But Matthew does not say a number.

5. These men were not "kings" of nations, but religious wise men. So church tradition that they were kings from the east is not accurate.

One day these men were looking into the stars to see if there was anything new being accomplished in the history of mankind. Much to their amazement, they saw a new star, or a special star. We do not know what this star was, but these men who spent much of their time studying and tracking the stars recognized that something unique had taken place in the world. Somehow they knew that this star was linked with events in Judea. Did they know the ancient prophecy that a star would come out of Israel? (Num. 24:17) Or did the star "move" in a unique way to direct them toward Jerusalem? We don't know, but these wise men, following the story, started their long journey towards Judea.

"Where would a king be born but in the capital city?" they thought. So these wise men arrived in Jerusalem and began asking questions about the birth of a new king. Such questions would have caused much speculation in Jerusalem for many Jews were hoping for the king to deliver them from Herod and Rome. But it also caused them fear, for they knew that Rome and especially King Herod would react in great anger to the news that there was a rival king.

Eventually King Herod heard about the wise men and brought them to his palace. By now King Herod was about 70 years old and had been the king of Palestine for over thirty years. He was a strong supporter of Rome. As a gifted administrator, he turned Palestine from an unknown part of the Roman Empire to one respected by all nations. He was famous for building new cities like Caesarea and for his fabulous Temple which he built in Jerusalem. Because he was a half-Jew (his family was from Idumea where the descendants of Edom used to live) and finances for his great building projects came through heavy taxation, he was hated by the Jews.

As Herod got old, he became increasingly afraid that someone would come and take away his kingdom. Thinking that his favorite wife and her children were planning to kill him and take over the kingdom, Herod had them killed. Shortly before he died in 4 BC, he had his son who was supposed to

inherit the kingdom imprisoned and executed because of his belief that his son wanted to take over his rule. When it was clear that he was about to die, Herod had most of the important heads of families imprisoned and left orders that on the day of his death they were to be executed. He knew the Jews would not mourn for his death, so he thought he could force them to mourn by killing hundreds of key leaders. It was at this time of his life when he was filled with fear, just months before his death, that the true King of the Jews was born. No doubt Herod's heart was filled with fear at the news.

King Herod wanted to find out where the true King of the Jews was to be born, so he called in two groups of religious leaders who should know the answer. First, there were the "chief priests." These were the high priests who had the most influence over the worship of the Jews and were members of the Sadducee party. Second, there were the "teachers of the law" or the religious scholars who were most likely Pharisees. It was probably these religious scholars who were able to tell Herod that Micah 5:2 prophesied that the Messiah would be born in David's ancient city of Bethlehem.

King Herod knew about the reputation of the magi and their ability to read the stars. So he asked the wise men for details about when they had first seen the star. This helped him determine how old the King of the Jews should be. It was using this information that Herod determined to kill all the infants in Bethlehem and its vicinity under the age of two. Herod also instructed that upon finding the child King, the magi should tell him so he could "worship" him. Of course Herod only wanted to know who the infant was so that he could kill him.

The wise men left Jerusalem at night and seeing the star, they followed it to Bethlehem 8 kilometers away. Eventually they found the house where Joseph, Mary and Jesus were staying. They were used to glory and honor and riches which kings and famous people had. But all they saw was a poor family who were barely able to survive. And yet they bowed to honor Jesus. It is doubtful they would have understood at this time that Jesus was God and not just a human king, so it is doubtful that they were actually worshipping Jesus. No doubt Luke understood that just as the Gentile magi bowed to honor the new born king, other Gentiles like them would bow in worship of Jesus throughout history.

In ancient cultures one always brought a gift when visiting an important person. And so these wise men gave expensive gifts to Jesus, gifts often given to honor kings: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Throughout history Christians have given meanings to these three gifts. Some teach that gold is one of the most precious things on earth, a sign that Jesus is a king. Frankincense was the major ingredient in worship in the temple and represented that Jesus was worthy of worship and honor and the fact that he is also our High Priest. Myrrh was one of the major ingredients in the spices which people used in the burial of bodies and represents the fact that Jesus would die for the sins of the world. Although it is doubtful that the three wise men understood their gifts this way, it could be the Holy Spirit was showing how through these acts they were predicting that the child Jesus would be the King, Priest, and Savior.

The birth of Jesus was part of the struggle which Jesus would have against Satan throughout his life and reveals how God the Father worked to protect his Son from Satan. Satan's first attempt to stop the Savior from dying for sins was to try to have Jesus killed by King Herod. Later he would try to discredit Jesus by tempting him to sin. Eventually he would use political and religious leaders to crucify Jesus. So in the birth of Jesus, a spiritual battle between God and Satan began. Who would win?

To protect Jesus from Satan's attempt to kill him, God sent a series of three dreams to protect and guide people so that his Son would fulfill his purpose for coming to earth, which was to die for the sins of mankind. Amazingly, each thing which happened to Jesus was a fulfillment of what God had directly or indirectly prophesied in the Old Testament.

1. The wise men have a dream telling them to not tell King Herod about Jesus. That very night they got up and quickly started their long journey home. Although the best road to their home went through Jerusalem, they took the more difficult road around the Dead Sea or to the east along the coast of Palestine so that they would not have to tell Herod about Jesus.

2. Joseph has a dream: Probably at the same time that the wise men had their dream, God gave Joseph a dream and told him to quickly take his family and flee to Egypt because evil King Herod would try to kill Jesus. Egypt was the traditional place where Jews would flee whenever they had problems. During those days there were thousands of Jews living in Egypt. In fact, the city of Alexandria had over one million Jews. So Joseph and his family would have found refuge with one of these Jewish families. Joseph also got up and immediately started the journey towards Egypt with Mary and baby Jesus. Although they would have normally traveled through Jerusalem, they probably took the much more difficult road through Hebron. The fact that Jesus had to go to Egypt fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy. Although Hosea 11:1 was talking about how God brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt, Matthew recognized that Israel's most famous son, Jesus, was also to come out of Egypt to deliver his people.

For the next day or two King Herod waited impatiently for the wise men to report back on what they had found. But when they did not come, he probably sent people to Bethlehem to look for the wise men. Finding out that they had disobeyed him and left without reporting to him, King Herod ordered that all infants in Bethlehem under the age of two to be killed. He no doubt picked age two because that is when the star first appeared to the wise men. Herod died in 4 BC, so it was probably around 5 or 6 BC that Jesus was born. Bethlehem was a small town of about 1000 people, so scholars estimate that there would have been about 20 to 30 infants who were killed. This cruel act also fulfilled a prophecy in Jer. 31:15 stating that a day of great sorrow would come to the region around Bethlehem, known as Ramah.

Now the Son of God was no longer in his own nation. Like thousands of people throughout the world today (e.g. Darfur people in Sudan, Ethiopians, Eritreans) Jesus became a refugee, and like most refugees, life would have been very difficult for Joseph and Mary. No refugee can ever claim that God does not understand what it means to be a refugee, a stranger in a strange land.

3. Joseph has a second dream telling him to go to Nazareth

Eventually, in 4 BC, King Herod died. Just days before his death, King Herod killed his oldest son and changed his will. Rather than leaving the kingdom to one son, he said that his kingdom was to be divided into three major sections. The oldest living son called Archelaus was given the provinces of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria. His next son, Antipas, was given Galilee and Perea. Another son, Philip, was given the territory north and east of Galilee. With the death of Herod, however, many different groups started arguing over who really should rule. The descendants of Herod, the elders of Israel, and the religious leaders all traveled to Rome to ask that Rome support their desires to rule over Israel. Rome decided to honor Herod's will.

Archelaus was even more cruel than King Herod. He began his rule by killing 3000 key Jewish leaders. Antipas, the leader of Galilee, however, was not as cruel. Hearing that King Herod was dead, Joseph was making plans to return to Bethlehem to live. Perhaps he wanted the King of the Jews to grow up in the city of David and in Judea where he would receive more honor than in Galilee. But God wanted to protect his Son. So in another dream, an angel of God told Joseph to return to Nazareth where he and Mary had lived before. So once again Joseph, Mary, and Jesus travelled the long journey of at least 380 kilometers from Egypt back to Nazareth. (The distance is greater than Addis Ababa to Awassa.) Ten years later Archelaus was deposed by the Romans and sent into exile in a remote province (in France) where he died. This allowed Jesus and his parents to visit Jerusalem when he was twelve. Archeological evidence in Nazareth shows that during this time there were many Jews from Judea who resettled in the Nazareth area.

Matthew claimed that Jesus' living in Nazareth also fulfilled prophecy. However there is no prophecy like Matthew specified in the Old Testament. The fact that Matthew used the general word "prophets" seems to indicate that he understood that there was no specific prophecy saying the Messiah was a "Nazarene." Rather, the general spirit of the prophets indicated that Jesus would be a Nazarene. Scholars do not know for sure what Matthew meant by the word "Nazarene." There are three interpretations:

1) The word Nazarene refers to those who took the Nazirite vow (Num. 6), similar to what John the Baptist had where he was not able to drink alcohol or touch dead bodies. But Jesus clearly did not follow the Nazirine vow, so this interpretation is unlikely.

2) The word "Nazarene" was a term used for someone who is despised, backward, similar to how we might say country bumkin. Verses like Psalm. 22:6-8 and Isaiah 53:2-3 indicate that the Messiah would be despised. Being called a Nazarene was perhaps an insult. Perhaps this is what Philip meant when he said "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 1:45-46)

3) The meaning of "Nazareth" means "shoot." Matthew might be making a play on words here from an ancient prophecy. In Is. 11:1, it says that "a shoot will come from the root of Jesse (David's father)" referring to the coming Messiah. So Matthew is saying that Jesus was the fulfillment of this great prophecy; he is the shoot from the family of David which God had prophesied in the past. This seems the most likely interpretation.

Hidden in this amazing story of the visit of the wise men is an important teaching which Matthew wanted to show believers. The King of kings is always met with three types of responses.

First, there is "hatred." Like Herod, history is filled with people who hate Jesus and they will do anything they can to "kill" Jesus and his followers. In many ways, the history of the church is the history of killing Christians. Scholars say that more believers have been killed for following Jesus during this century than in all of the previous 19 centuries.

Second, there are those who are "indifferent" to Jesus. The religious leaders knew exactly where the Messiah was to be born. And the wise men told them they had seen his star. But they did not even make the effort to travel 8 kilometers to see for themselves. More than any other group, the religious leaders should have been anxious to see the Messiah. But to them religion had become a tradition with little personal commitment. In fact, they saw the Messiah as one who would destroy their personal plans of selfishly leading God's people. Throughout history, the majority of people would be indifferent to the

Messiah. If they wanted, they could ask Christians about Jesus and learn the truth. But they are so busy in their private worlds that they ignore the Savior and King.

Third, there are the few who recognize Jesus and follow him. These people are usually from unexpected groups. Who would have believed that Gentile wise men would recognize the Messiah and not Jewish wise men! These Gentiles were willing to travel hundreds of miles to see the King of the Jews. But the Jewish religious leaders were not even willing to travel the 8 kilometers. Matthew is warning the Jews of his day not to be like their religious leaders and ignore Jesus. He was also telling them that God has opened the door for Gentiles to worship Jesus the King of the Jews. In fact, the Gentiles were more eager to follow Jesus than the Jews. (Note: Scholars also think that these wise men represent the Gentile world whom prophets had foretold would come to worship the Messiah. Ps. 72:10-11; Is. 60:1-6)

Q. 12. Illustrate how you have seen these same three responses among people in Ethiopia.

JESUS' FIRST APPEARANCE IN THE TEMPLE AS A BOY (Luke 2:41-52)

Q. 13. Read Luke 2:41-52. a) What feast did Jesus and his parents attend in Jerusalem? b) What was Jesus doing when he was left behind by his parents? c) What did Jesus say when Mary reprimanded him for causing them concern? d) What does this show about his understanding about himself in his relationship to his parents and to God?

Most of the time between when Jesus was born and when he began his public ministry is hidden from us. We would like to know more about these years. As a child did Jesus do any miracles as some books written many years later claim? Was he liked by other boys or was he always made fun of because of his being more holy than they were or because everyone knew that he was illegitimate? We have no idea. Probably Jesus was just like any other boy, but without the natural tendency to rebel and get into trouble. There were no signs of the great miracles which he would do later. The people in the small town of Nazareth would later be very surprised when their "son" became famous for the miracles which he would do. (See Lk. 4:16-29; Mt. 13:53-58)

It is unlikely that these years would have been easy for Jesus. His parents were poor and Joseph probably just made enough from his carpentry work to make a living. The political situation was also not very stable. In 6 AD, when Jesus was about 10, the Roman government asked for another census of people. Some people in Galilee believed this undermined the Jew's unique relationship to God, so they rebelled and captured Sepphoris, the major government city just a few kilometers away from Nazareth. The Roman response was swift and violent. The city was destroyed, thousands of men crucified, and thousands of families taken into slavery and shipped to far away places in the Roman empire like Greece or Rome. It is likely that Jesus knew some of those who were killed in the resistance and the families who were taken as slaves. So during these years as Jesus was growing up there was little political peace among the people. It could be that Joseph and Jesus worked as carpenters to rebuild the city of Sepphoris.

These were also years when Jesus was "growing in knowledge." (Lk. 2:52) In Jewish culture, it was Mary's role to tell the stories of the Old Testament to Jesus when he was a small child. Later, it was Joseph's responsibility as father to make sure Jesus received formal teaching about the Old Testament in the synagogue. Joseph taught Jesus the ancient hymns, the many Jewish prayers, how to follow Jewish customs, etc. Every family was strongly encouraged to send their sons to school in the synagogue. From

age five to ten, the boys would spend each day at the synagogue being taught the history of the Jews, the stories of the Old Testament, and the Laws which were part of the covenant between God and the Jews. The teacher was the caretaker of the synagogue. Jesus was no doubt one of these students and it was there that he was introduced to the Old Testament Law. It was there that he would have memorized Scriptures like those in Deuteronomy which he quoted to Satan when Jesus was tempted. (Mt. 4) Jesus would also have attended the synagogue every Saturday, the Jewish day of worship, and listened to the readings of God's Word as well as heard the sermons by the religious teachers. So from the time Jesus was born, from his mother, then his father, and later religious teachers, and also weekly in the synagogue he was surrounded by religious instruction.

Q. 14. a) Do most mothers knowingly seek to teach their small children the Bible? If not, why not? b) Do most fathers take an active role in teaching their children about God and the Bible? If not why not? c) Do most churches do a good job providing teaching the children of the church in what it means to follow Jesus? If not, why not? d) Write down several recommendations for parents and the church to better teach children how to follow God.

A father was expected to teach his son the same trade he had. So Jesus learned to be a carpenter like Joseph. He would have helped Joseph with carpentry jobs in his shop and gone with Joseph to various work sites to work as well.

The Bible only mentions one other incident in the childhood of Jesus. That is the time when Jesus was taken to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. The feast of Passover was the most important feast in the Jewish religious year. Although all males were supposed to go to the Temple three times a year to celebrate the Feast of Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, and Pentecost, they were strongly encouraged to at least attend the Passover. Any Jewish male living within 25 kilometers of Jerusalem had to attend this feast which celebrated the deliverance of the Jews from bondage to Egypt. And all Jewish males, no matter how far away they lived from Jerusalem, tried to attend the Passover at least once in their lives.

People living a long way from Jerusalem like Joseph and Mary would usually travel together in groups. So all those in the Nazareth area would travel together to Jerusalem, a journey of three to four days. Because the Jews hated the Samaritans, they usually would not take the short route through Samaria to Jerusalem. Rather, they would cross the Jordan River just below the Sea of Galilee, travel on the eastern side of the river, and then cross the Jordan River again near Jericho and travel up the steep hill to Jerusalem. (See the map in Appendix A at the back of the book.)

We don't know if Joseph and Mary regularly attended the Passover in Jerusalem, but at least this year they went. Jesus was 12 years old, a very important year in Jewish tradition. It was the year of preparation for him to become a man. The Jews had a special ceremony for Jewish boys at age 13 when the boy was now considered a man and obligated to keep the Old Testament laws. Although only males were required to attend, Mary loved God greatly as well, so she went with Joseph to celebrate, something only very religious Jewish women would do. Most likely this was the first Passover for Jesus to attend, and the first time he saw the large city of Jerusalem and the great Temple which was famous throughout the Roman Empire. As a small country boy, he must have been very excited.

Although the Jews were allowed to go home after the second day of celebration, because they were zealous for the Old Testament laws, Joseph and Mary probably stayed for the full 8 day celebration. At the

end of the celebration, everyone got ready to go home. Usually the women and children would leave first in one group and the men would come later since they walked faster than the women. Since all of the people from Nazareth would be traveling together, it was natural for boys of Jesus' age to travel together rather than stay close to their parents. Perhaps as a 12 year old boy, Jesus was at an age where he could travel either with the women or with the men. Maybe Joseph thought Jesus was with Mary and Mary thought Jesus was with Joseph. The first day's journey was usually only about 10 kilometers. That night when Joseph and Mary met each other they discovered that Jesus was missing. We can only imagine their fear when they realized that they had left their 12 year old boy in the large city of Jerusalem where he knew no one. Early the next day they traveled back to Jerusalem (the second day) and looked all over the city but could not find Jesus. Their fear turned to panic. Eventually on the third day, they found Jesus in the Temple.

It was Jewish custom for the religious teachers to gather daily at the Temple. After the morning sacrifice, they would sit in a circle discussing religious issues with their students. Anyone was invited to come and listen and even ask questions. Jesus had joined this group. Normal Jewish style of education was for the teacher to ask a question and for the students to give answers and then they could ask questions back to the teachers. So Jesus was asking theological questions of these theological teachers, called Rabbi. And when they asked him questions from the Law, he answered them. Jesus' depth of knowledge of the Law amazed these Rabbis. Could he have also raised issues or applications from the Law which these religious teachers had never considered? Again, we do not know what they were discussing, but we are told that all of the religious leaders were amazed. (Note: Jesus was not arguing with them, but learning from them.)

Mary's fear turned to anger and she sharply reprimanded Jesus for being so inconsiderate to them as parents by not traveling with them. This was so out of character for Jesus to act this way that she must have been confused. For the first time in the story of Jesus, Jesus begins to play an active role. Jesus' answer probably surprised them. More than anyone, Mary and Joseph should have known that he was unique in having two fathers, an adopted human father and a real divine Father. Sometime before this Jesus must have learned that Joseph was not his natural father and that God was his Father. As a 12 year old soon to be considered by Jews to be a man, Jesus was transferring his allegiance from his human family to his divine father. God had guided him to stay in the Temple, so he was not being disobedient at all. He was obeying God and Joseph and Mary should realize that from now on his divine Father was to control his destiny. Plus they should realize that until he fulfilled God's plan for his life, he was safe in God's care. They should trust God just as he was. For the rest of his life, Jesus would face this tension between obligations to his human family and God. When he started his public ministry, Jesus would focus his attention more on obedience to God the Father and teaching his spiritual brothers and sisters, the disciples. (See Mk. 3:31-34)

Luke including this story of Jesus to show two truths. First, it shows that Jesus was not "uneducated" in Jewish laws as some would have expected. Rather, he was wise beyond his years in understanding God's Word and how it applies to God's people. Knowing God's Word and applying it were important to him. In the same way, all disciples must seek to grow in their knowledge of God's Word. No follower of Jesus has an excuse of being Biblically uneducated or being uninterested in learning God's Word. Second, it shows that Jesus was now aware of his true identity. He was not like any of the other boys with which he played for he had a divine Father, not a human father.

Jesus' answer must have shocked Joseph and Mary. Like the disciples, they had a difficult time understanding Jesus and his unique role. It would not be until after the resurrection that Mary fully understood what type of a son she had given birth to. All she could do until then was to remember these unique incidences in Jesus life and think about them.

The story of the childhood of Jesus closes again. All we know is that Jesus went back to Nazareth and continued to grow. Jesus was the ideal human, one who kept growing in every part of his life. He did not allow his growing awareness that he was unique to change his personality. He returned and lived in submission to his parents.

We know nothing about the next eighteen years of Jesus' life. Only after he reached the age 30 and started his public ministry does the story of Jesus continue. No doubt people in Nazareth would have thought Jesus unusual since he did not marry like every other boy in the community who married between the ages of 18-20. But there was one other event which happened during these seventeen years. It is likely that sometime during these years, Joseph died because he is not mentioned again. As the firstborn, Jesus was obligated to take over the carpentry work and provide for his mother and brothers and sister. God did not even spare Jesus from the pain of death of a close loved one. Again we see that God did not protect Jesus from the harshness of life on earth.

Q. 15. a) Why do you think God did not protect Jesus from the harsh realities of life like death and poverty? b) What does this teach us about God protecting us from the harsh realities of life as well?

THIRD DAY

JESUS' EARLY PUBLIC MINISTRY: 26-27 AD

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Mt. 3:1-12, Mk. 1:1-8, Lk. 3:1-18)*

*From now on we will list all of the similar passages in the Gospels. However, the passage that we study is marked in underlined.

Sintiyu had been the head elder of a large urban church for many years. During the communist years, he had suffered greatly for openly working for God in his church. One day a more educated person joined his church. This person had a very exciting personality and it was not long until he was elected onto the elder's board. Because he was very articulate and intelligent, soon the other elders were listening more to his perspective than to Sintiyu's. Sintiyu began to become jealous thinking "What has this man done for Christ. I am the one who suffered to keep this church going during the communist times." At the next election, the other man was elected as head elder. When Sintiyu's name was put forward to be one of the other elders, he angrily stormed out of church.

Q. 16. a) Describe why it is hard for someone to step down from a leadership position for someone who is more popular than he is? b) How have you seen someone becoming more popular than the leader cause jealousy and lead to division in the church? c) What do such attitudes reveal about our hidden purposes for leadership?

One of the most difficult situations a leader will face is to see someone become more popular than he is. We all tend to jealously guard our positions of power. But when we do this, it reveals that in our hearts we are actually serving for our own glory and honor, not for the glory and honor of Jesus. The Bible teaches that God's has the right to put anyone he likes in leadership. And he is not obligated to keep us in leadership for the rest of our lives. God is also allowed to give greater gifts to someone else and use them more powerfully than he chooses to use us. If God is the one who chooses a leader (using the choice of people, see Deut. 17:14-15) and if God is the one who gives spiritual gifts and determines the effectiveness of a person (see 1 Cor. 12:4-11), then none of us have a right to get jealous when we are replaced as leaders or when God brings someone else along who is more gifted. God called Sintiyeu to serve him during the days of communism. But now God was moving another person into leadership for his own purposes.

Greatness in spirituality is often seen in how we react when we lose our popularity. John the Baptist is one of the best examples in the Bible of a minister who graciously stepped aside and let someone else become more popular than he was. As soon as John the Baptist began his ministry, he became very popular in Palestine. He became so popular that people even wondered if he was the Messiah. But throughout his ministry John was careful to share that he was only a "servant" of the Messiah, getting people ready for him. John understood his unique role- as the "greatest prophet" who ever lived who had been called by God to prepare people for the Messiah. (Mt. 11:7-11) When Jesus came, John immediately stepped aside. He told his followers "He is the Lamb of God. Follow him." (Jn. 1:35-40) When other disciples of John complained that most of John's disciples were leaving him and following Jesus, John graciously said "Jesus must grow in popularity and I must decrease in popularity." (Jn. 3:22-36) John was truly a great individual. He served with a desire to faithfully fulfill his role to get people ready for Jesus, not so that he would be popular. May we too have a heart like John and be willing for God to use anyone to build up the kingdom of Jesus!

Q. 17. Read Lk. 3:1-18. a) List the various leaders who were ruling when John the Baptist began his ministry. b) What was the major message John had for people? (vs 3) c) Describe John's role according to the Old Testament prophecy. d) What warning did John give people? e) List the three different groups of people who asked John what they should do to get ready for God's kingdom. What did John say each group needed to do to demonstrate the reality of their repentance?

After the great initial excitement around 5/6 BC of the birth of John and Jesus silence descended upon Palestine. No doubt the rumors that a great prophet and the Messiah had been born died out. John quietly moved into the desert to live like a hermit, perhaps as part of some religious group like the Essenes. And Jesus disappeared into far off Galilee. But this did not mean that the desire of people for a Messiah to deliver them from political enslavement to Rome stopped. Their longing for a Messiah was kept alive during these years as various false messiahs tried to form a resistance movement against Rome. People would quickly join the resistance only to be disappointed when the Romans defeated these false messiahs.

But suddenly the time arrived for God to continue the story of salvation started thirty years early. John moved from the desert between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea up to the more populated area along the Jordan River, north of the Dead Sea. (See the map in Appendix A at the back of the book.) For the New Testament believers, the Gospel story did not begin with Jesus, but with John, the forerunner of the Messiah. Therefore, all of the Gospel writers wrote about John the Baptist.

1. THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHEN JOHN AND JESUS BEGAN THEIR MINISTRIES

Luke was concerned to list the exact period of history when the story of salvation began. So he lists various political and religious leaders who were ruling the world when John and Jesus ministered. All of the leaders mentioned in Luke 3 were in authority throughout the public ministries of John and Jesus. Since we have studied about these leaders earlier, we will only summarize specific things about them.

a. Tiberius (14-37 AD): Luke recognized that the story of salvation was set within the context of the mighty Roman empire. So he starts his list of leaders with the Roman emperor ruling at that time. He specifically shares that the emperor Tiberius had been reigning for 15 years when John the Baptist began his ministry in Palestine. Augustus, who reigned before Tiberius, had been one of the greatest emperors of the Roman empire. In 11 AD, a few years before he died, he brought Tiberius alongside to help him rule. Augustus died in 14 AD and Tiberius became the official emperor. If Luke started counting the reign of Tiberius from when he first reigned with Augustus, then John started his ministry sometime between 26-27 AD. If Luke referred to when Tiberius started reigning alone, then John's ministry would have started between 28-29 AD. Most likely John and Jesus began their ministries sometime between late 26 to early 28 AD.

b. Pilate (25-37 AD): When John and Jesus began their ministry, Pilate was the new governor of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria. In 6 AD, Archelaus, the son of Herod, was deposed by Rome and these regions put under the direct rule of a Roman governor. Pilate began his governorship in 25 AD. He was a very ineffective leader who, from the beginning of his governorship, angered the Jews with his policies. He was ruling not just when John and Jesus lived, but he was the Roman leader who authorized the crucifixion of Jesus.

c. Herod Antipas (4 BC-39 AD): When Herod the Great died, Herod Antipas was given Galilee and Perea to administer. Herod Antipas, like his father, was known for building great buildings and cities. He rebuilt Sepphoris, a Greek styled city just a few kilometers to the north of Nazareth which the Romans had destroyed in 6 AD. He also built a large city called Tiberias. He did not reign with as much cruelty as his father Herod the Great or his brother Archelaus. Perhaps this is why both John the Baptist and Jesus performed most of their ministries in his political areas. John usually worked in Perea and Jesus in Galilee. Antipas would later imprison and execute John the Baptist for speaking out against his marriage. Herod did not meet Jesus until just before Jesus was crucified.

d. Annas and Caiaphas, the chief priests: As we studied earlier, the high priest functioned both as the political and religious leader of Judea. He not only controlled all religious happenings at the Temple, but he was the leader of the Jewish ruling council called the Sanhedrin which the Romans allowed to administer most political affairs in Palestine. During the days of Jesus, one family controlled the high priesthood, the family of Annas. Annas was formally high priest from 7 AD to 14 AD when he was replaced by the Romans and his son-in-law was put into the position. Although not the formal high priest, the Jews still treated Annas like the high priest. When John and Jesus began their ministry, Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, was the legal high priest. He ruled from 18-36 AD.

2. THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

a. The place of baptism: along the Jordan River

Thirty years earlier, John the Baptist's father had predicted that his son would become a great prophet. But for thirty years there was no evidence that this would happen. Instead, John was hidden away

in the desert south of Jerusalem. But God was preparing John for his important role as the herald of the coming king. One day the Holy Spirit told John it was time to start work. Luke says that "the word of the Lord came to John" just like the prophets of the Old Testament who received their call from God and spoke on his behalf. (See Jer. 1:2, 4; Hos. 1:1; Micah 1:1) So John left his desert area and moved north to the Jordan River area. It seems that John ministered in different sites along the Jordan River rather than in Jerusalem for three reasons.

First, it was close enough to where most of the Jews lived that people could come and listen to his message. It was just a couple of hours walk from Jerusalem, and people from Galilee could also reach him easily. The places where John chose to baptize tended to be the river crossings where travelers would come.

Second, it was close to water so that people could be baptized. John did not only tell people to repent and get ready for the coming king, but he told them to be baptized as an external sign of their repentance.

Third, it was far enough away from political centers that he did not get drawn into political issues which would arise as he got more popular. There is no evidence that John ever traveled into Jerusalem to preach.

b. The purpose of John's ministry: Getting people ready for the coming king

From the very beginning, the purpose of John's ministry was clear. He was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Is. 40:3-5, the one who was called "*to prepare the way for the Lord, to make straight paths for him.*" This prophecy uses the image of what ancient kings used to do when visiting an area. They would send a "herald" who would tell everyone to clean up their houses and cities for the king. And the people would have to go out and fill in any ruts in the road so that as the king rode along, his journey would be smooth. In the same way, Jesus, the King of kings was about to come. But rather than get the road ready for him, John was sent to get the people's hearts ready for the king.

Matthew says that John's message was "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Mt. 3:2) This cry would have caused great excitement among the Jews. Every time there was someone who came and said he was the messiah, people would quickly gather around him. So when word spread that John was teaching that the kingdom of the Messiah was about to come, people throughout Palestine quickly gathered to hear him. But they were surprised when they listened to John. There was nothing in John's teaching that resembled the political rebellion and deliverance which they thought the Messiah was supposed to bring. There was no call to get ready to fight, that God would help them overcome the Romans. Instead, John's teaching focused upon inner purity in preparation for the Messiah. John did not wear clothes that people would have thought respectable, not like messengers from a king would normally wear. He was not dressed in kingly colorful clothes like the religious teachers or even the rich wore. Instead he wore the clothes of the very poor. Made out of camel hair, John's clothes must have reminded the Jews of the prophets of the Old Testament times. And he did not eat respectable food, but the food of the desert person, wild honey and locusts. Instead of a diplomat who sought to please people by saying nice words, the Jews met a man who openly spoke the truth, accusing people of sin no matter whether they got angry with him or not. In fact, John's boldness in speaking the truth soon landed him in prison where he would be killed. John was like the bold prophets of the Old Testament accusing God's people of sin and begging them to repent before God's judgment came.

Usually when we think of a kingdom, our minds think about a geographical country with borders over which a king or ruler rules. But for the Jews the idea of a kingdom focuses upon the reigning of a king. Anywhere a king was reigning, that was his kingdom. So when God reigns over the hearts of people, their hearts are his kingdom. John said that soon God's reign over mankind was about to begin. That kingdom is called "the kingdom of God" or "the kingdom of heaven" as Matthew called it. (Most Jews were reluctant to say the name of God, so instead of saying "God" they would often say "heaven". So the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven mean the same thing.) John was saying that in and through the Messiah, God would begin his expected reign. John probably thought that the reign would include the political rulership over Israel. Later when Jesus was not the political type Messiah that John expected, he became confused and asked Jesus if he was really the Messiah. (Mt. 11:2-7) He did not know that in God's plans, Jesus would begin to rule in the hearts of people, in the church, and in heaven. Only eventually when Jesus the Messiah returns again will God actually reign over all people.

Q. 18. a) Using the definition above, explain how the "church" represents the kingdom of God. b) Describe how your heart is also the kingdom of God. c) What are things you do which show that Jesus is ruling over your life?

c. The way of preparation for the king: baptize those who had repented and received God's forgiveness

Luke summarizes John's message as "*preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin.*" (Both Jesus and the early church would also preach repentance as the basis for their Gospel. [See Mt. 4:17; Acts 2:38; 13:24]) It is important to understand what this message meant:

1) Repentance: Often when we think of the word "repent" we have two images in our mind.

First, we think of "confession" as stating that we have done something wrong. For us repentance often means saying "I have sinned." Unfortunately most of us wait until our sin is found out before we "repent." This demonstrates that we are often not truly repentant, only sorry that we have been caught in our sin.

Q. 19. a) Why do most people not "repent" until they are caught in their sin? b) What does this demonstrate of their being truly repentant about their sin?

Second, we often think of "sorrow," with tears over what we have done. Although these two ideas are included in the Biblical understanding of repentance, they are not the most important ideas. In the Greek language, the meaning of the word repent is "a change of mind," "to turn around from the way which we have been traveling." Repentance is a change of mind which leads to a change in how we relate to God and how we live.

Luke said that the Gospel which John preached was one of repentance. However, in our presentation of the Gospel today, we rarely use this word. But before preaching "believe on Jesus," the apostles preached "repent in order to be saved." To ask people to repent is to ask them to change from walking in rebellion to God to obedience to God. It is to ask them to stop living their lives independently of God and form a relationship with God where they are dependent upon him. Part of repentance is understanding that we have no right to be forgiven by God for all of the sins we have committed. We know that we deserve punishment. The wages of sin is death, and we know that is what we deserve from God. But we ask God in

his mercy and grace to forgive us our sins and not punish us. Repentance is not a "work" we do in order to be saved, but an acknowledgment that we are sinners who deserve eternal damnation. We acknowledge that what we have done is wrong in the eyes of God. We commit to changing our relationship with God from being one of rebellion and indifference to being one of submission, obedience and dependence. And we commit to changing how we are living so that we obey God.

It is because we do not share this part of the Gospel that we often have people claiming to be believers who come to church with no commitment to obey Jesus and do what he says. Jesus once stated "Why do you call me Lord and not do the things I say?" (Lk. 6:46) In the same way, we have churches full of people who loudly shout "Jesus is Lord" but throughout the week make no attempt to submit their lives and everything they do to Jesus in obedience. There are even some people who knowingly take a second wife before they believe so that they can follow this anti-biblical cultural practice without receiving church discipline.

Q. 20. a) Describe ways that you have seen people "believe" without first repenting in the Biblical sense. b) Illustrate ways many church attendees shout "Jesus is Lord" but make little effort to live in obedience to Jesus. c) Illustrate how we could change how we share with people wanting to believe so that the Biblical idea of "repentance" is included.

2) Forgiveness: Luke said that John's preaching included the promise that God would forgive the person who truly repents. The Biblical idea of "forgiveness" is that God will not punish us because the punishment has been paid by something or someone else. There are several ideas which are part of a Biblical idea of forgiveness:

a) Forgiveness first demands that someone pay the price for sin. God never "forgives" without someone paying the punishment for the sin. If he did, that would mean he is not "just." He would be like a judge who tells a murderer "I know you killed so and so. But I will release you from prison and you can go back without being punished." None of us would be happy with a judge who did that. God always demands punishment for sin. He does not say "Let us forget it." Rather, in the Old Testament, God demanded the death of an animal on behalf of the sinner. The animal died in place of the sinner allowing forgiveness to happen. In the New Testament, the Gospel is that Jesus has died in our place so that we would not be punished. It is for our lies, our anger, our pride in our tribe, our prejudice, our cheating in school, etc. that Jesus died on the cross!

b) There are two levels of forgiveness. First, there is "general" forgiveness which we need in order to enter into a relationship with God. This is the forgiveness John the Baptist was preaching. He was encouraging the Jews to return into a relationship with God and stop their rebellious attitude towards God. This is the forgiveness we need when we first come to Jesus for salvation. We confess that we are rebellious sinners and we seek to restore our relationship with God.

Second, there is "specific" forgiveness. These are specific sins we know that we have committed against God. These are the sins which come after we are saved. (See 1 Jn. 1:9) When we have a certain sin in our life, we are supposed to ask God's forgiveness for that particular sin. We are no longer to say "forgive me for my sinfulness" but "forgive me for lying;" "forgive me for that lustful thought;" "forgive me for my gossip against so and so, etc." This specific act of forgiveness not only acknowledges that what we have done is a sin in God's eyes, but it comes with our commitment to change what we have been doing.

Specific forgiveness is not meant to restore salvation, but to restore a harmonious relationship with God. When we do something against our father which he does not like, it does not take away the fact that we are still his son. Rather, our relationship with our father is hindered, and forgiveness restores a good relationship with him.

c) In order for forgiveness to take place, there must be "repentance." The sinner must acknowledge his sinfulness and commit to changing his pattern of life to walking in obedience to God.

d) Forgiveness is always because of God's grace. God is not obligated to forgive. Rather he forgives because in love, because of his grace, he chooses not to give us the punishment that we deserve.

e) Once forgiven, God never punishes us for those sins. In his eyes, it is as if we have never committed the sin. As the Psalmist says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us." (Ps. 103:12)

f) Forgiveness results in a restored relationship with God. Besides not being punished for what we have done, we are now in a loving peaceful relationship with God.

Q. 21. a) Did you understand your need for "general" repentance when you first believed in Jesus? If not, how did this limit your understanding of needing to live in total obedience to Jesus? b) List sins which you have committed this past week. Have you repented of these "specific" sins in the Biblical understanding? If not, confess your specific sins to God and ask the Holy Spirit to help you change how you are living so these sins are not a pattern in your life.

3) Baptism: Luke says that John's message was "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." The Greek word for baptism means "to dip or immerse." It was used for making colored cloth by dipping the cloth totally under the water in which there was dye. So baptism was John's practice of totally immersing people under the water. This is the first time in the Bible where baptism is linked with repentance. The Jews understood ritual washings or the baptism of Gentiles, but not a baptism linked with repentance. No one knows where John got his practice of requiring people to be baptized. Scholars have different ideas:

a) John's baptism comes from the Jewish practice of demanding that Gentiles desiring to become Jews be baptized. If a Gentile wanted to become a follower of the God of Abraham, he had to go through three rituals. First, he had to be circumcised just like any Jew. This was the external sign that a person was committing himself to live under the covenant which God made with the Jews on Mt. Sinai. Second, the Gentile would be baptized. This rite was an external symbol that the Gentile was washing away his being a Gentile, his moral corruption, and his disobedience to God. It was an acknowledgment by the Gentile that his whole previous way of life was corrupt and had to be washed away by God so that he could be part of the holy people of God. Third, he had to sacrifice animals to God just like any Jew.

Not once in the history of the Jews had a Jew been required to be baptized. But John told the Jews that in the eyes of God they were as morally corrupt as the Gentiles whom they despised. They too needed to be "washed" of their moral uncleanness. This must have shocked the Jews. They were the children of Abraham and therefore already part of the holy people. They did not think that they were "sinners" like the Gentiles were. Now for the first time in their history, the Jews were told that they were as sinful as Gentiles.

They too needed forgiveness from God. And this repentance had to be on an individual basis. They had to come one by one to be baptized, not cleansed in some general proclamation as took place in the Old Testament time on the Day of Atonement.

b) In the Old Testament, the Jews were told to wash in preparation of receiving the covenant. (Ex. 19:10) Some scholars think that by requiring Jews to be baptized, John was saying that the Jews were to get ready for the "new covenant" that God was about to initiate with them.

c) John's idea of baptism came from the Old Testament practice of the priests and Levites washing before they served God in the Temple. (Ex. 29:4) These ministers had to daily wash their hands and feet to symbolize that they were walking in obedience to God, having cleansed their lives from sin. John is saying that not just the ministers, but all people have to cleanse their lives from sin. The act of baptism was their external symbol that they had washed the sins from their lives through asking God to forgive them.

d) John's idea of baptism came from certain Jewish groups like the Essenes who every day took a ritual bath as a symbol of cleansing their lives and walking in obedience to God. If this was the case, John changed the idea from a "daily" cleansing to a "once-for-all-times" cleansing. John did not ask the Jews to come every day to the Jordan to be baptized. Rather, he asked that they make a firm decision to change the direction of their lives from selfishly living for themselves to living in complete obedience to God. Baptism was the symbol of the cleansing which then took place. In this way they would be getting their lives ready for the coming king.

So we do not know for sure where John got his practice of baptism. His baptism was so unique that soon his type of baptism was named after him and he became known as John the Baptizer. Whatever the source, he seems to have radically changed the understanding of people towards baptism. To John, this baptism would have had two major meanings. First, it symbolized the washing away of moral impurities. Rather than only Gentiles, now everyone seeking to have their lives forgiven and be restored into a proper relationship with God had to be baptized, even if they were of the right tribe (Jews), or right family (priests), or appeared holy in the eyes of people (like the Pharisees.) Second, it indicated a person dedicating himself to a new way of life which honors God. Rather than a daily practice, this baptism was only practiced once to show that a firm decision had been made on the part of the one being baptized to follow God and live in his kingdom as faithful subjects. (Note: There is no evidence that the early church practiced frequent "baptisms" like some church denomination do, declaring that a person is free from the sins of the past year. This practice perhaps finds its source in the Day of Atonement ceremony in the Old Testament. However, such statements are dangerous, because the New Testament always shows that forgiveness is a personal thing where a person repents, confesses his sins and is forgiven. And there is no evidence that a general "prayer" of confession for all church members is able to bring individual forgiveness to all of the people in the church. All a preacher can do is declare that if each "sinner" has repented, then he is totally forgiven by God.)

John's practice of baptism formed the standard for all believers from that time on. Jesus would later have his disciples baptize those choosing to follow him. (Jn. 3:22) And from this time on baptism became one of the major rites of Christians. Although John focused upon "repentance" and the cleansing that it brought, the understanding of baptism would be added to by Jesus and the apostles following the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because this rite creates much confusion among believers, we need to clearly understand what Luke was teaching.

a) Baptism is a once-for-all act by those choosing to follow Jesus. It is the normal pattern for all believers to be baptized. Some denominations practice the baptism of infants as a sign of the children being under the temporary protection of the faith of their parents until the infant is old enough to make their own choice to follow Jesus. For the Jews, the rite of circumcision of infant boys was only beneficial if the Jew later circumcised his heart and lived in obedience to God. (Deut. 10:16, 30:6; Rom. 2:25-29) In the same way, infant baptism is only beneficial when those being baptized also live their lives in humble obedience to God. For other denominations (which to the author of this study guide is the most Biblical understanding of baptism), baptism is a rite for believers old enough to make a personal choice to follow Jesus in obedience.

b) Baptism was public. John did not baptize in a hidden place. Rather, he asked those coming to him wanting to prepare for the kingdom by repenting of their sins to openly show their commitment by being baptized in front of all people. Christian baptism includes the idea that the one being baptized is publicly telling people that he has chosen to follow Jesus as his disciple.

c) Baptism involved "water." Although ancient Christians varied in how to apply the water, the understanding was that the one getting baptized get totally wet as a sign of their whole selves being cleansed from sin. John chose the Jordan River so that he could totally immerse those being baptized. This was the preferred way for the early church. But it seems that in areas where there was little water that the Christians would take pitchers of water and pour them over the one being baptized until they were totally wet.

d) Repentance, forgiveness and baptism were part of one act. Every example of baptism in the New Testament these three things happened at the same time. (e.g. Acts 8:36-38) A person repented and put their faith in Jesus for salvation. God then forgave him of his sins and brought him into the family of God, into his kingdom. Immediately, the person was baptized as an external symbol to all who watched that he had repented, cleansed his life of a sinful way of live, and was now ready to follow King Jesus. It was only later as many people were entering the church who did not understand what it meant to follow Jesus as Savior that the church asked the new believers to first receive teaching before they were baptized so that they had a clear understanding of the Gospel, what repentance and commitment to follow Jesus meant.

Because this was viewed by early Christians as one act, the New Testament writers often presented the act of forgiveness as being linked with baptism. An unbaptized believer was totally unknown to them. Therefore the New Testament sometimes appears to indicate that baptism brought salvation. (Mk. 16:16, Acts 2:38) This is not the case. Rather the total act of repentance and baptism together resulted in forgiveness. In our days where we separate the time of repentance from the time of baptism, we must be very careful to not teach that baptism "saves" a person. If we do so, it turns salvation into something we do, a "work" which in the New Testament is a false teaching.

e) The act of baptism is an external symbol of something happening internally. It is not the external symbol that is most important, but what is happening inside the person being baptized. At least the following things are included in the symbolism of baptism:

1) Baptism is a public declaration on our part that we are committing ourselves to following King Jesus as his disciple.

2) Baptism is an external symbol that we have repented of our sins, chosen to follow Jesus in holiness. It is showing that because of our repentance, we have been spiritually "washed" of our sinfulness.

3) Baptism is a demonstration of what happened to us on the cross. Paul taught that as believers we are "joined" to Christ. When Jesus died on the cross bearing our sins, we also died on the cross to our sinful life-style. When Jesus was buried, our old way of life was also buried. And as Jesus rose from the dead in resurrection life, we too have risen to a new spiritual resurrection and the Holy Spirit now lives through us. (Rom. 6:1-10) As Paul expressed it about his life *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Gal. 2:20)

4) Baptism is a command given to all Christians. It has become common for Christians to put off baptism for many years. This is probably because we have turned baptism into a way to become a member of a church denomination. But that is not why baptism was given to us by Jesus. Its' purpose is to show everyone that we have chosen to follow Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit. An unbaptized Christian must examine himself to make sure he is not living in disobedience to the commands of Jesus to be baptized.

5) Baptism is in the name of the Triune God. (Mt. 28:19-20) In order to express belief that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, are one God in Three persons, we receive baptism into their name. (Note: In the book of Acts, the biggest hindrance to faith was believing that Jesus was fully God and Lord. The Jews found this idea as offensive as some religions in our days find it offensive to call Jesus the Son of God. The early Christians emphasized being baptized into the name of Jesus to show their belief that Jesus is God and Lord and reveal their commitment to follow him as his disciples. Belief in the God of Abraham was no longer enough. Matthew shows the normal pattern of the church when saying people had to be baptized in the name of the Trinity.)

Q. 22. a) Do you think most people being baptized in your church understand "why" they are being baptized? Explain your answer. b) What changes could be made in your church practices to better reflect the New Testament understanding of baptism?

FOURTH DAY

Q. 23. Read Lk. 3:7-18. a) List the different people who came to be baptized by John the Baptist. b) List the different instructions John gave to each person.

d. Examples of those who came to be baptized by John

As John began to preach, the Spirit of God began to move in the hearts of thousands of people. (Note: Luke provides examples of what John preached to people. John no doubt taught many other things as well.) It was not long before people from Jerusalem, Judea, and even as far away as Galilee came to John. They listened to him with great excitement and were baptized by him to show that their repentance meant they were getting their lives ready for the coming Messiah. But it was not long until his popularity led people to come for baptism for the wrong reasons. There were some, even from the religious leaders (Pharisees

and Sadducees) who came to be baptized by John because it was a popular thing to do. However, they did not come with the commitment to change their lives to show their repentance.

Q. 24. Illustrate ways people today can accept Christ or be baptized because it is "popular" to do rather than because they have made the personal commitment to follow Jesus.

When the religious leaders came to be baptized by John for the wrong reasons, John's reaction was very strong. In his accusations, he probably meant "Who is teaching you that the simple rite of baptism will save you. I don't. You have to repent and demonstrate your repentance through changed lives. Neither being Jewish nor being baptized will save you." John was addressing insincere followers. He called them "vipers" fleeing from the coming wrath. (Calling evil people snakes is also seen in the Old Testament. [Is. 4:29]) The area where John was working was known for its snakes. When people lit the fields on fire, these snakes would flee from the fire. At that time they were very dangerous because out of fear they would bite anyone in their way. In the same way, those coming to be baptized without changing their hearts were dangerous- to themselves and to others. Thinking they were saved, they were lost. And they taught others that God was happy with them when in fact God was ready to judge them. Although John was no doubt addressing all Jews who were coming for wrong reasons, his strongest rebuke was for those religious leaders who came to only see what was happening and then wanted to be baptized because they wanted to appear spiritual in the eyes of the crowd. (See Mt. 3:7)

John knew that in their hearts most Jews thought that they would never be judged to go to hell since they were the descendants of Abraham. They believed the righteousness of Abraham would be credited to them so they would not be punished. They even had stories of Abraham sitting at the gates of hell separating out the Jews and sending them to heaven. John showed how wrong this understanding was of having a relationship with God based upon birth. Pointing to the many stones alongside the banks of the Jordan River, John said that if he wanted, God could turn those stones into children of Abraham. Being born Jews did not put them into a correct relationship with God. Each of them must make their own choice to repent and follow God in obedience.

There are Christians today who fall into the same dangerous understanding as the Jews. "I am a Christian because I have not been born in a pagan family" some say. "My parents are Christians so of course I am a Christian" others argue. "I grew up in the church so of course I am a Christian" still others think. "My father is a priest or he was a famous evangelist. This means God accepts me" they believe. But the issue is not what we were born into, but what choice we have individually made. Have we made a decision to personally become a follower of Christ (not just a Christian in name)? Have we personally repented of our sinful life and made a decision to live in obedience to God? If not, like the Jews of old, we are "snakes."

Q. 25. Take time now to examine the reason why you are a Christian. Do you think you are a Christian because you were born into a Christian family? If so, make your own decision to repent and become a follower of Jesus.

Although we tend to hide from people the seriousness of not believing on Jesus, John was very open in what would happen if people did not truly repent. Using an image out of the Old Testament (Is. 10:33-34; Ezek. 31:12), John said that they were in a situation similar to a dried out dead fruit tree. Knowing that

the dead tree would not bear fruit; the farmer had taken his ax and marked the place on the tree trunk where he was to cut. He was about to cut the tree, take the wood and burn it in a fire for cooking or for heating his house. In the same way, God's judgment was about to fall upon unrepentant Jews. They were about to face the strong judgment of God which the Messiah would bring upon them.

John taught one final important truth about repentance and baptism. He knew that people can be deceived into thinking that repentance was just saying "I did wrong" without any commitment to changing how they lived. And he knew that people were willing to go through the symbol of baptism without really having a changed life. So John told people that true repentance had to lead to a change of life. True repentance is not just sorrow for what we have done, it involves changing how we live. For repentance to be revealed as true repentance we must have the fruit of repentance in our lives. Three type of people asked John how they were to demonstrate their repentance. Interestingly, John did not say "sing a lot" or "pray a lot" or "join a monastery to form a holy community separated from the world," like the Essenes were doing. Rather, he said "change how you relate to others where you are living." True repentance always changes how we treat others. That is why Jesus would later teach that no one can relate to God without also loving their neighbor. (See Mk. 12:28-33) Notice the following examples:

1) The rich: John told those who had extra clothes to give their extra clothes to those who did not have any. The cloak which John mentioned was not a jacket worn on top of other clothes but like a long undershirt put on next to the body. One of these was sufficient. This illustration teaches how true repentance will change how we view our material possessions. No longer are they "ours" for "our benefits." Rather, they are given to us by God to help others. We will become generous to those who have nothing. We will not only pray "God give food to those who don't have any" but we will graciously give our food.

Q. 26. Illustrate from your life how being a follower of Jesus had made you more generous with your possessions and how you help the poor.

2) The tax collectors: In John's time the tax collectors were some of the most hated, most corrupt people in society. The Jews hated them for two reasons. First, they were viewed as helping their enemies, the Romans, by collecting the taxes from the Jews for the Roman Empire. Second, they were usually very corrupt, cheating people so that they could get more money than was necessary. In the Gospels, the tax collectors were always classified together with "sinners" like prostitutes.

The Roman system of collecting taxes was to assess a country with how much taxes they were to receive. They then asked people to "bid" for the right to collect taxes. Those who won the bid were called "chief tax collectors." (Zacchaeus was one of these major tax collectors.) The chief tax collectors had to guarantee that the Romans would receive the allotted money. But they were able to keep for themselves any money over this. These chief tax collectors hired others, often bullies in the community, to collect taxes from each person. These people often abused people trying to get more taxes than they should have. Jericho which was near where John was baptizing was a major income tax center.

John told these tax collectors to stop abusing their work as tax collectors. They were to only collect the taxes that they were supposed to collect from people and not cheat them. Interestingly, John did not tell them to leave their hated work and find a more respectable job. Rather they were to turn their work into respectable work by doing only what is right. This is a good lesson to those of us who have work in the

government or as traders. Sometimes we think God wants us to leave these ministries to work in the church. Or we think that God does not care how we work as long as we are faithful in church and tithe our money. But John is teaching that how we work is important to God. True repentance in our case will mean that we will stay in the places of work where God has put us. But we will change how we work so that everything we do is fair and just. We will treat people who come to see us with respect. And we will never try to cheat them by charging them too much money or taking a bribe or a "gift" for our work.

Q. 27. a) List some types of ministries where common people are often economically abused. b) Are most Christians working in that type of ministry treating the common people in the same way as non-Christians? c) If John was to advice Christians in these types of ministries, what do you think he would advise them in how they work in order to show genuine repentance?

3) Soldiers: There were two types of soldiers in Palestine. First, there were the Roman soldiers who were scattered throughout Palestine. They were there to keep peace and make sure people obeyed Rome. Second, there were soldiers responsible to local government authorities like the high priest or Herod Antipas. Their job was to make sure people obeyed the local rules. It was probably this type of soldier who asked John how they were to demonstrate their repentance. They were probably assigned to the tax collectors to make sure people would pay the money to the tax collectors. John did not tell them to leave their work as soldiers. But John tells them not to use threats and pressure tactics to blackmail people into giving them money. Rather, the soldiers were supposed to live on the salary which they received, even if some of them did not think it was enough.

Q. 28. a) Make a list of other situations Christians face where true repentance will demonstrate in "fruit" that is different from how the world often acts. b) Do most Christians act similarly to non-Christians? If so, what changes do you think Jesus would ask of them to demonstrate the reality of their repentance?

e. John the Baptist's relationship to the coming king

John did no miracles to attract people. And he made no claim to be a political leader seeking an army to overthrow Rome as most Jews thought the Messiah would do. Rather it was the power of his words that started people wondering "Is John the Messiah the Old Testament said would come to deliver us?" John's popularity was so great that people, even the religious leaders, came to John asking him whether or not he was the Messiah. (See Jn. 1:19-27) Most of us would have fallen into the temptation of enjoying our great popularity. "Yes, I am a great person" we would be tempted to say. And we would have gotten jealous at the idea that soon someone would become more popular than we are, just like Sintiyu did at the beginning of yesterday's lesson. But John did not allow popularity to cause him to forget his role as a "herald" or "forerunner" of the truly great person, the Messiah. So John used three expressions to show that he was not the Messiah and that the Messiah was much greater than he:

- The Messiah would be more powerful than he.
- John was not worthy to untie the shoes of the Messiah. In Jewish culture, undoing the shoes of another person was a sign of extreme servitude. No master could force his Jewish slave to untie his shoes. Only a Gentile slave could be asked to untie the shoes of another person. John is saying that in his relationship to the Messiah, he was as lowly as a Gentile slave. He had no honor or glory. His role was only to serve his master in total obedience.

Q. 29. a) Describe how our relationship to Jesus is one where we are not worthy to untie his shoes. b) Do you think most people serve Jesus with this attitude? If they don't have a servant-like attitude, why don't they?

Is this how we understand our relationship to Jesus? Yes, he is our friend and savior. But when it comes to honor, we are unworthy servants, his slaves to fulfill his will. We do not stand as equals with rights to do what we want. Rather we stand as lowly slaves to do his will. We must be very careful not to become so careless in our relationship to Jesus that we forget he is the absolute Lord and we are only his unworthy servants.

- The Messiah would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire, much greater than John's baptism of water. John was only able to baptize with water as an external symbol of people's repentance as they got ready for the Messiah. But the Messiah's baptism would be much different and greater. Most scholars understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit to reflect the amazing truth that under the New Covenant, all believers receive the Holy Spirit who then lives in them. When the Holy Spirit came upon all believers in Acts 2, a new era started. The Messiah was giving the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus as predicted by Joel. (See Acts 2:17-21) The coming of the Holy Spirit upon a person was called "baptism" of the Holy Spirit because it symbolized how the Holy Spirit would so cover a person that their whole life would be changed.

But what does fire refer to? That is an issue debated by scholars. There are four thoughts:

a) The fire refers to the tongues of fire which came down upon the heads of the apostles in Acts 2. This is the least likely interpretation, however. This event is always called the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," never the "baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire."

b) Both the Holy Spirit and fire are symbols not of Pentecost, but of the end times. Just before Jesus begins to reign, the Holy Spirit will purify God's people and punish the evil. It is unlikely that this only points to the end of times, however.

c) The Messiah will send the Holy Spirit upon his followers. That Holy Spirit will have a fire-like ministry. In the Old Testament, fire symbolized two ministries. (See Is. 1:31; 4:4; 9:19-19; Zech. 13:9)

First, it was to purify God's people. Just like fire separates out the dross from pure gold, so also the Holy Spirit will work to separate out the evil from the hearts of God's true people and make them even more holy. The fire is the "discipline of the Lord" described in Heb. 12:4-12. These would be the "wheat" John says who will be brought into God's barn of eternal life.

Second, fire was a symbol of punishment and judgment. For those who did not prepare themselves for the Messiah or submit to his rule over their lives, the Holy Spirit would bring upon them God's eternal fire-like judgment.

d) The fire is the judgment which the Messiah will bring upon those who are not willing to submit to his kingdom. The context of what John says clearly shows that the Messiah is going to judge. He is the ax about to cut down their dead spiritual tree. He is the one with the winnowing fork in his hand. His judgment

will separate the evil "chaff" from the good wheat and cause that chaff to be burned with "unquenchable" or eternal fire, just like Palestinian farmers would gather the chaff and burn it in their fires. John is saying that those who repent and submit to the Messiah, they will receive the long awaited Holy Spirit who was predicted in the Old Testament as the major sign of the new work of God among his people. But for those who refuse to submit, all they can expect is the fire of judgment even if they are Jews. They will be treated no differently than Gentiles whom they claimed were created to be like firewood for the fires of hell.

Q. 30. a) Which understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire have you believed before? b) Which of the above views do you think is most likely in this passage? c) In what way has the Holy Spirit worked like fire in your life? d) What does the Bible show about the end of those who refuse to believe on Jesus? (See Rev. 20:11-15)

JESUS BEGINS PUBLIC MINISTRY (26 AD)

JESUS IS BAPTIZED BY JOHN (Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:32-34)

Q. 31. Read Mt. 3:13-17 and Jn. 1:32-34. a) Why did John not want to baptize Jesus? b) Why did Jesus insist that he should be baptized? c) What two things did God do for Jesus as soon as he was baptized which confirmed that he was the Messiah? d) What testimony did John give concerning Jesus?

About thirty years earlier, while in their mothers' wombs, John greeted Jesus. At that time John recognized Jesus and jumped with joy. (Lk. 1:41) Over the next thirty years the two never met. It is hard to imagine that John would not have heard from his parents that his cousin was special, the Messiah who was to come. And Mary probably told Jesus that his cousin John who was born to his aunt Elizabeth in Judea was to become a famous prophet. But thirty years of silence perhaps made John forget about his cousin. There was nothing about Jesus that made him appear different from any other person. But at the second meeting of John and Jesus, John would again honor Jesus.

We don't know how long John was baptizing people as a sign of their getting ready for the Messiah. It must have been long enough for his reputation to spread throughout Palestine. Years later disciples of John could be found spread throughout the Roman Empire. (See Acts 19:1-7) Even Jewish writings mention John's greatness as a prophet.

In Nazareth, about thirty kilometers from where John the Baptist was ministering, Jesus must have heard about the powerful ministry of John. He waited until the day that God the Father told him it was now time for him to begin his public ministry. Being baptized by John marked the end of his private life in Nazareth and the beginning of his three year public ministry. No doubt to the surprise of his family, he left Mary and his step-brothers and sisters (Mk. 6:3) and traveled down to the Jordan River.

In the meantime God had also told John that it was time for the Messiah to appear. The sign that the person was God's chosen Messiah would be the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the individual. No doubt there had been a large crowd listening to John and being baptized by him. But as the day went on, people returned home and John was alone. Suddenly Jesus, John's cousin, appeared before him, asking to be baptized. Jesus' baptism seems to have been a private meeting because John would later need to tell others what happened.

The Holy Spirit told John that his cousin was the Messiah. Jesus' request to be baptized caused John confusion. Why would Jesus come to be baptized? He was not a sinner like the others needing to repent of their sin. And the greater person always baptizes the lesser, so if anyone should be baptized, Jesus should baptize John. John was the sinner, not Jesus. But Jesus' answer was very firm. "I must be baptized. It is how I fulfill all righteousness" he said.

Throughout history Christians have wondered why Jesus was baptized. The Bible clearly says that Jesus was "without sin." (Heb. 4:15) So we know that Jesus' baptism had nothing to do with the need to repent of sins and get God's forgiveness. In this context, the word "righteous" means "to be upright and follow the will of God." Jesus was telling John that it was God's plan for him to be baptized and he had to obey God. So what were the possible reasons that Jesus was baptized?

a. It was the external sign that Jesus was beginning his ministry as the Messiah who came to die for the sins of people. The baptism of Jesus gave John the opportunity to publicly testify that the Messiah, the Lamb of God, had now come. (Jn. 1:29-34)

b. Jesus showed that he approved of the movement John had started of preparing for the kingdom of God through repentance. He might not have needed repentance for sins, but he agreed that John's ministry came from God.

c. Baptism was a sign that Jesus had given himself totally to obey God and serve him as God's Messiah. It was also the place where God would publicly confirm that Jesus was the Messiah through the two signs of the Holy Spirit and the voice of God.

d. By being baptized, Jesus was identifying himself with sinful humans. He did not need to be baptized, but since they did, he was showing them that he was one of them. Later, on the cross, Jesus would carry all of their sins. (See 2 Cor. 5:21) The author of Hebrews expanded this theme by showing that Jesus was like his brothers (fellow humans) in all things except he never sinned. (Heb. 4:15)

e. Jesus was providing the example for all of his followers that we also need to be baptized. If Jesus, the sinless one, needed to be baptized in obedience to God, so also we should obey him and be baptized.

The focus of the Gospels is not upon the baptism of Jesus, but upon what happened after he was baptized. After John baptized Jesus, as Jesus was coming out of the water, he began to pray. (Lk. 3:21) Suddenly two amazing things happened which clearly demonstrated to John that Jesus was God's chosen Messiah, God's unique Son.

First, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. What can we know about this event?

a. Jesus did not receive the Holy Spirit at this time. He was no doubt always with Jesus just like John the Baptist was said to have the Holy Spirit from birth (Lk. 1:16). Rather, this coming of the Holy Spirit is the "anointing" of the Holy Spirit to prepare and empower Jesus for his public ministry. Like the oil which was poured on the head of Saul prepared him for his public ministry as king of Israel, the coming of the Holy Spirit "anointed" Jesus in preparation for his ministry as the Messiah.

b. It was visible. John saw the Holy Spirit as it descended. Usually the Holy Spirit comes upon the person in an unseen way. But God wanted John to know that Jesus was unique by showing the Holy Spirit in a visible way.

c. It was "like" a dove. It was not a physical dove, but similar to a dove. Why did the Holy Spirit come in the form of a dove? We don't know for sure. One idea is the Jews taught that the Holy Spirit was involved in creation. The hovering Spirit was pictured as a "dove" hovering over creation. (Gen. 1:2) It could be that through the symbol of the dove God was saying that the same Holy Spirit who was involved in the initial creation was now involved again in creating new spiritual life through Jesus. The dove is also associated with Noah's ark. (Gen. 8:8-12) There the dove showed that the time of judgment upon the world was over and God would bless mankind once again. In the same way, through Jesus Christ, God was about to pour out his blessing upon mankind.

d. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus was a sign that the new covenant era had arrived. The Old Testament prophets had predicted a time when the Holy Spirit would come upon people in a special way. (Joel 2:28-29) In line with the Old Testament times, Jesus' receiving the Holy Spirit in a dramatic way at the start of his public ministry as well.

e. There was no physical effect resulting from the descent of the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not start speaking in tongues or fall to the ground and shake. The fact that these external indications of the Holy Spirit were not present when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus demonstrates that these spectacular signs are not needed to indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit in us today.

Second, God proved to John that Jesus was the Messiah by speaking from heaven and saying "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*" We can see several things from this:

a. The purpose of the voice was so that God could publicly tell people that Jesus was his special Son, the Messiah he had sent. Twice more during the ministry of Jesus, God the Father would speak from heaven to tell people that Jesus had a special relationship with him. (Mt. 17:5; Jn. 12:23-33) We don't know how many people heard the voice at this time, but it is clear that at least John the Baptist heard it.

b. The voice was a clear affirmation to Jesus that God loved him and was pleased with him. Jesus was about to enter a difficult time of ministry which would result in his death on the cross. So God the Father encourages Jesus by telling him how much he loved Jesus.

c. God the Father quoted two verses in his affirmation of Jesus.

First, God the Father quoted Ps. 2:7. Psalm 2 was acknowledged by all Jews to be a messianic Psalm. Although it was a Psalm originally written by David for the coronation of his son Solomon, the true fulfillment of this Psalm was with the messiah who would be God's true Son in a much greater way. By quoting this Psalm God was saying that Jesus was that Messiah.

Second, God the Father quoted Is. 42:1. In the book of Isaiah there is a special "Servant of God." (Is. 42:1; Is. 52:13; Is. 53:11) That Servant of God could refer to the nation of Israel, but it especially referred to the Messiah who would come and serve God in total obedience, unlike rebellious Israel. The Servant of

God would also give his life for others. (Is. 53) God was telling people that Jesus was the obedient Servant who would die for people's sins.

In quoting these two verses, God the Father was hinting at the two major roles which Jesus would play. He was the King Messiah, the one who would one day rule over all nations. But he is also the Savior Messiah, the one who would die for the sins of the world. Jesus' rule over his kingdom would only start after his death on the cross.

d. For the Jews, this story would have one other major significance. They believed that with the death of Malachi, God had stopped speaking. To hear that God had openly spoken from heaven was an indication that the 400 years of silence was now over and God was speaking to his people once again. The author to the Hebrews mentions this fact. (Heb. 1:1-3) God had spoke to the Jews in ancient times through the prophets. But with the coming of Jesus, God spoke in a much greater way than ever before through Jesus.

This story also provides one of the major proofs that, in some mysterious way, the one God is in three persons; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is the first time in history that the three are clearly mentioned together. At Jesus' baptism we have Jesus on earth being baptized by John. At the same time, we have the Holy Spirit descending from heaven upon Jesus. And at the same time, we have God the Father speaking from heaven. Although we might not be able to understand or explain the doctrine of the Trinity, this story clearly shows that God is made up of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Unlike the false teaching of Jesus Only, God does not change from Father, to Holy Spirit, to Son. This story does not allow us to understand that Jesus suddenly changed to the Holy Spirit to descend upon Jesus, or Jesus suddenly changed to God the Father to speak to Jesus. Historic Christianity has always insisted that God is one (there are not three totally separate, distinct gods) and that God is triune. We must continue to believe this truth.

With the baptism of Jesus, his public ministry started and his popularity began to grow. But for John, it indicated that his ministry was soon over. He would continue to preach and baptize for a few more months. But fewer and fewer people would follow John. Did John grow jealous over this? No. "He must increase and I must decrease" he said. (Jn. 3:27-30) John realized that his role was to point people to the Messiah. Only the Messiah should receive honor and glory. In the near future, John the Baptist would be taken prisoner and killed. But he could go in peace, for he had fulfilled the unique ministry which God had given him.

God gives all of us unique ministries to play in his kingdom. For some of us, no one will know about our ministry and honor us. For others, we will receive public recognition. Sometimes this public recognition will be for a time, and then like Sintayu, it will disappear. But none of this matters. The major question is "Are we seeking to honor the Messiah? Or are we seeking to get honor for ourselves?" Jealousy indicates that we are seeking the honor. We need to be more like John who was happiest when people left him and followed Jesus. He was satisfied with having faithfully fulfilled his unique role in the kingdom. Are you?

Q. 32. Examine your life. a) What special ministry has God given you to bring glory to Jesus? b) Illustrate how, like John, you are bringing honor to Jesus. c) If there are ways you have sought to gain honor for yourself, confess this sin how.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) How is the situation Mihiritu and Mary faced similar when giving birth to their babies? b) Why do you think God allowed his son to be born in such difficult circumstances? c) List the different people who met with baby Jesus. List the types of people who should have gone to honor baby Jesus but didn't. What do you think this teaches about those who tend to believe on Jesus and those who do not often choose to become a follower of Jesus?

2. a) What does Jesus' ability to question and answer the religious leaders as a boy of 12 demonstrate about his knowledge of God's Word? b) List the different ways that Jesus was taught God's Word as he was growing up. c) Which of these ways are being used in your church? d) What are things Christian parents and your church could do to help each child better understand God's Word? Prepare a plan for how to get parents and your church consistently teaching children the basics of what it means to be followers of Jesus.

3. John came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. a) What is Biblical repentance? How does it contrast to how most Ethiopians understand the word repent? Why is there little preaching on repentance, especially to those wanting to believe on Jesus? What negative results come from this? b) John challenged people to prove the sincerity of their repentance through changed lives. List specific ways different types of people in church should change to demonstrate the reality of their repentance. c) What is the Biblical teaching of forgiveness? How does it contrast to how most Ethiopians understand forgiveness? Think through the invitation given in your church to people believing. How well does that invitation express the need to repent and what forgiveness means?

4. a) List the different understandings of why John baptized. Which do you believe and why? b) What does your church teach as the meaning of baptism? How close is your church's understanding of baptism to why John baptized? c) How well do you think those being baptized in your church understand the meaning of baptism? What can your church do better to help people understand what baptism means? d) Why do you think many evangelical Christians do not get baptized? Is their reason Biblical? If not, what type of teachings need to be done in your church so people live in obedience to Jesus' command to be baptized?

5. John said that Jesus would baptize with Spirit and fire. a) List the different understandings of what this means. b) Which do you believe is what John meant and why?

LESSON SIX

FIRST DAY

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Mulatu finished his graduate course in theology from a very reputable school in England. He was one of the brightest students in the school and when he came back to Ethiopia, people were very excited about his potential to lead a major denomination. He was given a good salary and the leadership position over his denomination. Not long after he got into leadership, Mulatu got the opportunity to buy a new house. He used his authority as the leader to take an "interest-free long term loan" from the denomination's money, something no one else had the right to do. He also manipulated his relationships with other church leaders so that he was chosen as the head of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship. Because people like "healers," even though he did not have the spiritual gift of healing, he held large "healing" crusades. As his reputation spread, he thought "God must be very happy with me. I am his instrument for the blessing of Ethiopia."

Q. 1. a) From the fictional story of Mulatu, list three major temptations he faced in leadership. b) Describe how most leaders face these same three temptations.

Q. 2. Read Luke 4:1-13. a) Who led Jesus into the wilderness? b) How long did Jesus fast? c) List the three temptations that he faced and the three responses Jesus gave.

Like Mulatu, every leader faces three major temptations from Satan.

First, there is the temptation for the leader to use the authority God has given him for personal benefits rather than to serve others. Mulatu used his authority to get a house for himself whereas most people in his denomination had very poor homes or rented.

Second, there is the temptation to take a "short-cut" to get greater power and authority, similar to how Mulatu manipulated things so that he would become the head of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship. He pushed himself into leadership rather than let God, in his time, use others to raise him into more leadership responsibility.

Third, there is the temptation to do something to increase our reputation so that we get more honor from the people.

Before he gets into leadership, every leader must make a decision upon what principles he is going to lead. Will he lead according to the principles and systems which the world uses? Will he view leadership as a way to get some benefits for himself, to increase his power over people, and to become popular with people? Or will he use the leadership given to him as a way to serve others? Will he choose the way of power and glory, or will he choose the way of suffering and the cross? This time of temptation was the final thing God used to prepare Jesus for his public ministry.

We saw last week that Jesus was baptized by John and anointed by the Holy Spirit. And God's voice from heaven announced that Jesus was his special Son and that he loved Jesus and was pleased with him.

Immediately the Holy Spirit took Jesus into the wilderness "to be tempted." Jesus went from the emotionally rewarding experience of the baptism to some of the darkest physical days he would face. In his 40 days in the wilderness, he would be lonely with no one else with him besides Satan, tired as sleep would be difficult, and above all very hungry and weak.

The wilderness located between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea (see the map in Appendix A at the back of the book) is one of the most desolate places on earth. Even today, very few people visit there. There are no trees, just rocks and dust and oppressive heat. There are few places where someone can get some water to drink. There were also wild animals in this part of Palestine, making living there dangerous. (Mk. 1:13) Jesus spent 40 days and nights in this desolate area with nothing to eat. After 40 days, he was very weak from hunger, lonely, and tired. Jesus was at his physical and psychological weakest when Satan gave his final three tests.

We can see the following things from this temptation:

1. We must differentiate between four interpretations of the word "test" in the Bible.

First, the Bible uses the word "test" to refer to testing God's patience with us by knowingly not living in faithful dependence upon him. We are told that the Jews "tested" God when they kept asking God to provide for their physical needs rather than trust God. (Ex. 17:2, 7) We "test" God when we also refuse to trust him in times of difficulty and complain against him instead. We "test" God when we demand something from him "now" rather than humbly trust him to provide for us when he wants in the way he wants.

Second, we can "test" God when we put ourselves into a dangerous situation where we then presume that God will take care of us. We can put ourselves in a dangerous situation like riding in a car when we know the driver is drunk. Or we can put ourselves into the middle of a situation where we know we will be tempted towards sexual sin. In these situations we claim we are "trusting" God to help us with protection or to overcome the temptation. But in fact we are testing God by trying to force him to do something for us rather than using the godly wisdom he has given to us. This is the situation of the last test which Jesus faced. Wouldn't God protect his Son? If so, why shouldn't he throw himself off the top of the Temple and "force" God to protect him? Jesus said that to do so is to test God by forcing him to act, not to trust him to protect him in normal situations.

Third, the word "test" can be to put someone into a situation where their character is made evident. (Gen. 22:1; Ex. 16:4) Our teachers "test" us at the end of our course to see how much we have learned. In the same way, God puts us in situations where our character is revealed. The time of the wilderness wandering was such a time for the Israelites. Their constant refusal to trust God demonstrated that they did not have faith in God. God also puts us into difficult situations to see if we will still trust him. As Habakkuk said "Even though there are no cattle in the stall or grain in the field, I will still trust God. I will rejoice in him." (Hab. 3:17-18) Faith is only revealed in times of difficulty, not in times of blessing. And it is the times of difficulties which become the "fire" to refine our faith. (1 Pet. 1:6-7) When God led Jesus into the wilderness, he did it to reveal the character of Jesus, his willingness to use his powers to serve others rather than benefit himself.

Q. 3. a) Give examples of how you or someone you know tested God in the first three ways. b) What did that test reveal about your character and spiritual growth?

Fourth, the word can be used for "temptation," seeking to get someone to do what is wrong. We are told that God will never tempt us to do something that is wrong. (Jms. 1:13-14) He might allow us to get into situations where we can be tempted to do something wrong, but he is never the direct instrument of temptation. Temptation to do evil comes from three sources. First, it comes from the world system in which we grow up. For instance, we are tempted to do wrong when our culture tells us that we can cheat someone in the market by quoting the wrong price. Second, it comes from our sinful nature inside of us. For instance, our sinful nature encourages us to become proud of our tribal heritage or family background. Third, it comes from Satan and his forces, the demons. Using our sinful nature and the world system, Satan often encourages us to do something that is not the will of God. When the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, he was putting Jesus into a situation where Satan could tempt him to do evil.

2. Sin is anything that is outside of God's desire for our lives. Usually when we think about "sin," we think that it is doing something that God has told us not to do. So we know that it is a sin to commit adultery, for God has told us it is wrong. But in the Bible we can see the following things about sin:

a. Something is a sin whether others know about it or not. Sometimes we think we have not sinned until we are caught. So we do not see taking money from the church offering as sin until others know. Then we have to confess that sin. Sometimes it seems as if confession is our way of getting out of a problem in which we have been caught rather than repenting of our sin! But sin is sin in God's eyes whether or not anyone else knows about it. And God always sees it, even if hidden from other people. Therefore if we want to be holy, we must make sure that we have confessed every sin in our hearts even though no one else might know about it.

b. Sin is doing something that is specifically prohibited by God. In the Bible there are things which God has told us not to do. For instance, God says we are not to lie, so anytime we say something that is not accurate, we have sinned against God. The second temptation that Jesus faced of worshipping Satan was this type of sin. God has said that we are to worship only him, so to worship Satan is a direct disobedience to what God had told Jesus to do.

c. Sin is not doing something that God tells us to do. For instance, God tells us to forgive those who hurt us in some way. So we sin when we refuse to forgive someone. Or we are commanded to take the Gospel to others. So if we are not working at taking the Gospel to others, then we are sinning.

d. Sin is not doing anything that is God's specific will for us. So if God has asked us to be an evangelist but we go to school and become a doctor, then we are sinning. It might not be a sin for someone else to be a doctor, but because we are disobeying God's specific will for our lives, then we are sinning.

e. Sin is doing something that God does not want us specifically to do. God did not give Jesus his power to do miracles to meet his personal needs. Rather, his power was given to serve others. Satan, however, tried to get Jesus to turn stones to bread to meet his physical hunger. In the same way, God does not want leaders to use their positions of leadership to benefit themselves and their families. But this is what Satan often tempts them to do.

f. All sin, even if we do something against another person, is an act of rebellion against God. The root problem in sin is that it is rebellion against God's leadership over our lives. So every sin which we commit, we must confess each one to God.

g. Most sins are also against someone else. We tell a lie about someone, we get angry at someone, we gossip and ruin a person's reputation, etc. Although we are to confess these sins to God, that is often not enough. We must confess the sins to the one we have harmed which they know about and which has hurt our relationship. There is no forgiveness from God if we do not ask the person we have hurt for their forgiveness. (Mt. 6:14-15)

Q. 4. a) List one other illustration for each of the above types of sins. b) Which of these seven types of sins have you committed? Have you confessed each one of them to God?

3. Temptation can come from two sources.

First, there are internal temptations. These come from our sin nature. All people are selfish because their sin nature causes them to think first about themselves before they think of others. So the temptation to be selfish in a specific situation finds its root in an internal problem. This is what Jesus meant when he said that it was not what people eat which makes them sinful, but what comes out of the hearts. (Mt. 15:16-20)

As we study the temptations of Jesus, we need to realize that unlike us, Jesus did not face "internal" temptation. Jesus did not have a sin nature. He was innocent like Adam and Eve before they fell into sin. There was nothing in Jesus encouraging him to be selfish. So in this way Jesus was not like other humans.

Second, temptation can come from things external to the person. When Eve was tempted, she did not initially face the internal temptation to rebel against God because she did not have a rebellious nature. Rather, Satan came with an external temptation, a forbidden fruit which he said would make her like God. In the same way, the three temptations which Satan brought to Jesus were external - to turn stones into bread, to worship Satan, and to throw himself off the top of the Temple.

4. To be tempted is not a sin. It is only a sin when we submit to the temptation. So if we see something that causes us to lust, it is not a sin until we dwell upon what caused us to look at a woman and in our hearts we want to have sex with her. Or it is not wrong to see a stereo and wish we had one. But it is wrong to allow our desire for a stereo to become the focus of our thinking cause us to get jealous at those who have one.

5. The confrontation between Jesus and Satan was ordained by God. The Holy Spirit specifically led Jesus into the wilderness to meet the devil. God chose to put his Son in a situation where he would face the strongest temptations which Satan could offer. The battle was not fair since God first made Jesus "weak" through fasting for 40 days.

In Jewish thinking, the desert was the place of "demons." (Is. 13:21; 34:14) By going to the desert, it was there in Satan's home region that there was a major confrontation between the Son of God, the head of the kingdom of light, and the Satan, the head of the kingdom of darkness. (Note: The word "Satan" means "adversary" to show how Satan's primary desire is to fight against anything God wants to do. In

fighting against God's plans and desires, his primary place of battle is to fight against mankind which are created in the image of God. He especially fights against believers. The other major name for Satan, "Devil" means "accuser" or "slanderer." This name reflects Satan's work of accusing us before God.)

6. The Jewish Christians would have viewed this confrontation symbolically. Jesus is pictured as the Second Adam, the one starting a new era. The first era started with the first Adam and Eve. At the beginning of human history, the first man and woman faced Satan in battle in a similar way to Jesus. But they fell into sin and as a result all of human history was changed. They brought "death" into the world. Now, Jesus, the Second Adam is in battle with Satan. He was seeking to start a new era. Would he too fall to Satan's temptations to rebel against God? He didn't, and as a result brought "life" into the world. Adam and Eve faced Satan in the best possible situation, in the Garden of Eden. But the second Adam faced his temptation in the worst possible situation, in the desert. Interestingly, the temptation which Satan brought to Adam and Eve is "can you be like God?" But to Jesus, the temptation was "can you be truly human?" Satan's temptation to Jesus was to get him to stop being fully human and use his divine powers. That is why he kept saying "if you are the Son of God." Satan and Jesus both knew Jesus was the Son of God. The question was would Jesus use his divinity or would he choose to live as a perfect human so that he could be like us.

7. The major purpose for the test was to see whether or not Jesus would qualify as the sinless Lamb of God and die for the sins of the world. If Satan could somehow get Jesus to walk outside of the will of God, Jesus could not be the sinless Lamb of God; he would not be qualified to die for our sins, since he himself would be a sinner. If Jesus had somehow submitted to one of Satan's temptations, none of us would have had the opportunity to become children of God and escape his divine wrath.

The avenue which Satan used to tempt Jesus was to tempt him in how he was going to work as the Messiah. Would he work as the Messiah by being a servant and dying for others, seeking to win their love and obedience? Or would he use the shortcuts of getting people to follow him by taking care of their physical needs without seeking to change their hearts; or compromising his exclusive worship and obedience to God in order to start his rule immediately, or getting people to follow him because of miracles?

8. Hidden in this story of the confrontation between Jesus and Satan is an amazing truth. The Bible never teaches that Satan has as much power as Jesus. They are not two equal combatants. Rather, Jesus is divine. He is the one who originally created Satan. And Jesus is the one who will one day send an ordinary angel to throw Satan into a pit for 1000 years. (Rev. 20:1-3) And at the end, he will throw Satan into hell. Satan is not able to resist God at this time. (Rev. 20:10) So we must never think that this was an "equal" contest. What is amazing is that Jesus refused to use his divine powers to fight against Satan. If Jesus wanted to use his divine powers he could have said "Go to hell now Satan." But he didn't. Jesus knew that the time for the overthrow of Satan had not arrived. He faced Satan in his human power alone, just like we face Satan as humans.

Part of the temptation which Jesus faced was whether or not he would use his divine powers to defeat Satan or whether he would face Satan as a true human. Jesus was committed to facing Satan as a human so that he could be tempted in every way that we are without any extra advantage of using his divine power. (See Heb. 4:15) The only difference between Jesus and us when we face Satan is that Jesus did not have a sinful nature to influence him to sin. In his struggle against Satan, Jesus used the same tool that we have

at our disposal. He quoted the Word of God and said "no" as he refused to listen to Satan. As a result, none of us can accuse Jesus of having an unfair advantage when it comes to temptation. We can't say "the temptation took me" and claim we are hopeless to resist. Rather, like Jesus, we can resist by saying "no." Like Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit to help us as well. (Note: Jesus did not cast Satan into hell because he knew that that would only take place at the end times. When Christians say to Satan "Go to hell" this has no power since God has told us that Satan will only be cast into hell at the end times.)

9. Jesus was tempted throughout the whole 40 days. It is one thing to face a temptation once and get it over with. But Satan tried to wear Jesus down until he would finally give in. This is the worst type of temptation. The three tests which are described to us are the final temptations which Jesus faced before Satan gave up and left Jesus alone. We must not think that Satan never tempted Jesus again. Like us, Satan would have frequently tried to tempt Jesus to sin against God. Rather, Jesus faced the most severe temptations from Satan at two times in his life. First, Satan tried to tempt Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry. Second, just before his death on the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane, Satan would tempt Jesus once again not to go the way of the cross.

10. The root of every temptation Jesus faced was whether or not he would submit to the will of God. It was not specifically a sin to turn stones into bread. But that was not the will of God. And it was not specifically a sin to throw himself off the temple, but again that is not submitting to God's way of ruling "after" the cross, not by by-passing the cross.

11. Jesus must have explained these temptations to his disciples, since no one else was around to witness the temptations. Jesus wanted his followers to understand that being tempted by Satan, especially as leaders, was a part of being a follower of Jesus. Many of the temptations we face are similar to the three temptations Jesus faced. And our manner of escaping temptation is similar. We must firmly say "no" to Satan's temptations, using the truths of God's Word to refute Satan's attempts. Jesus also wanted the disciples to realize that he, their Master, really did understand when they were tempted to sin. God did not keep him in an ideal situation where he did not have to face Satan. Rather, God sent him into battle with Satan just like we daily face a battle with Satan over whether or not we will submit to God.

Q. 5. a) List some truths about trials and temptation you have learned in this section. b) List some truths about spiritual warfare you have learned from this section. c) Illustrate how Satan tried to tempt you and how you overcame him.

THE THREE FINAL TEMPTATIONS WHICH JESUS FACED:

1. Turning stones into bread

Jesus was in the wilderness and had not eaten for 40 days. By now he would have been weak with hunger and his every thought would have been about food. Satan probably pointed to a stone which to Jesus looked like a loaf of bread or like a roll which we buy for 50 santeme and said "Jesus, you are hungry. (There are 100 santeme to the Ethiopian birr. So 50 santeme is like saying 50 cents.) Turn that stone into bread." It is hard to see what is the "sin" in this temptation. Jesus would later miraculously feed over 5000 people. So why not feed himself when he was so hungry? Jesus was facing several temptations at this time:

a. Satan was trying to get Jesus to stop depending upon God to meet his physical needs and to meet those needs his own way. Whereas the Jews in the wilderness demonstrated their lack of trust in God by demanding that he meet their physical needs, Jesus said that he would focus his attention upon the spiritual things of life, his relationship with God. He would wait for God to meet his physical needs.

b. Satan was trying to get Jesus to use his powers outside of the will of God. Paul said that when Jesus became human, he laid aside his divine power to become a servant. (See Phil. 2:7-8) God allowed Jesus to continue to use his divine power to serve others. But in all else he had to live like any other human. He was not allowed to use his divine power to meet his own physical needs. As a man, Jesus had to live dependent upon God for his daily needs like we do. The prayer which he taught the apostles, "Give us this day our daily bread" was not just something he was to teach others, but what he had to pray for himself.

c. Satan was getting Jesus to focus his ministry upon physical needs rather than spiritual needs. Satan was telling Jesus "If you want to get people to follow you, use your powers to give them material things so that they are impressed and follow you." This same "temptation" would follow Jesus all of his life. Although Jesus did miracles to help others, he did not do those miracles to impress people. When the Pharisees said "Show us a sign and we will believe in you." Jesus refused to use his powers to impress people. Jesus quoted Deut. 8:3 to show that what matters is the "spiritual" food that God gives and we must follow Jesus not for the physical benefits he gives us, but because we seek to follow him as our God. Jesus knew that he could meet all of the needs of people, but if they did not change their hearts, then not much would change. There will still be wars, selfishness, tribal fighting, etc. Jesus knew that true change must come from the heart as people seek to follow him. Only when their hearts change will their external situations really change.

Q. 6. a) Describe how many evangelists seek to get people to believe so that a physical need can be met. b) What type of believers does this type of message result in? c) Explain how the evangelists' message would change if they emphasized getting people to trust Jesus because only in him is true salvation.

In our days we are tempted to make it easier for people to believe on Jesus. "Believe and you will be healed. Believe and you will get a job. Believe and God will bless you physically." we often hear. We are getting people to focus upon the "bread" of earth rather than the "words of God." And Satan uses us as a tool to focus on the temporal and not the eternal. As a result our churches are filled with people who follow Jesus because of some physical blessing. If that blessing is not there, they quickly reject Jesus and return to the world. How different the teachings of Jesus and the apostles was when they asked people to seek first the kingdom of God, even if it brought suffering. (See Acts 14:22) As a result people believed and were willing to die for their Master even if they did not receive the physical blessing they wanted.

Q. 7. Describe how you have seen church leaders fall for this type of temptation.

2. Receiving authority to rule over all people through the short cut of one act of worship of Satan

In his second temptation, Satan took Jesus to the top of a large mountain and showed him the kingdoms of the world. Although Satan could have physically taken Jesus to one of the high mountains in Palestine and showed him the territory all around, most likely Satan took Jesus "in the spirit." In a vision Jesus was able to see all of the kingdoms of the world- the large centers of power like Rome, Egypt, Babylon, etc. Satan told Jesus that if he would just bow down in worship once, Satan would give those

kingdoms to Jesus. Jesus could start his Messianic reign immediately rather than wait for hundreds of years to get it at the end of time. (See Rev. 19:11-16) Within the context of the whole Bible, we can learn the following about this temptation:

a. God has promised Jesus the authority to reign over all kingdoms of the world. In Ps. 2:8-9 God tells Jesus to wait until the day that he will give the nations to him as an inheritance. In Is. 2:2-4 we are told that one day all of the nations of the world will come to Jesus to honor him and submit to his authority over them. In Dan. 7:13-14 we read a prophecy of how one like a Son of Man gets the kingdoms of the earth from the "Ancient of Days." And in Rev. 19 we read of a day when Jesus will descend upon the earth and rule over all nations. So Jesus had been promised that one day the kingdoms would be his. Satan was offering him those kingdoms early. He could start his reign immediately rather than go through the long process arranged by God to die on the cross and start a spiritual kingdom in people's hearts which would take over two thousand years. Jesus is still waiting to receive the kingdoms of earth.

b. The Bible shows that Satan has great authority over the kingdoms of the earth. Jesus does not question his rights to give those earthly kingdoms to him. Jesus would later call Satan "the prince of this world." (Jn. 12:31) Paul calls Satan "the god of this age." (2 Cor. 4:4) But the Bible is clear that Satan's authority over the kingdoms of the world is limited. Satan is still under the absolute authority of God. Even Satan acknowledged this for he said that those kingdoms had been "given to him." Who gave them to Satan but God? It is God who raises up kings or nations and lowers them when his plans are completed. (See Dan. 4:17) So Satan has much authority over the nations of the world. But it is limited authority, and he can only work under the authority of God. So the only authority over the world which Satan could offer Jesus was limited authority. It would not be the absolute authority which Jesus would one day have if he followed God's plan.

c. The Jewish understanding of the Messiah was that he would come and immediately rule over the kingdoms of the world. All nations would submit to the Messiah who would rule over them from Jerusalem. But they had no expectation that first the Messiah would have to die for the sins of people. Satan was tempting Jesus with an easier way to become the Messiah. Would he choose to become the Messiah by receiving power and authority as political people in the world or church usually try through doing all they can, even if it is a sin, to become leaders? Or would he become the Messiah by first dying for the sins of people? Satan was offering Jesus the "crown" and glory of authority without the "cross" of suffering and rejection and death.

Leaders face this same type of temptation when they begin to desire the power and authority and glory that comes from being church leaders without the "suffering" that comes from being servant leaders who seek the best for God's people. They have fallen for Satan's trap for desiring positions of leadership without fulfilling that leadership in God's way. New Testament leadership is always through the path of the cross, the giving up of our dreams and desires so that we can serve the people of God. Paul expressed it this way: *"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."* (2 Tim. 2:10)

d. Satan's temptation involved the following:

1) Satan was asking Jesus to compromise in order to get something that Jesus wanted. "I can give you the people and their kingdoms now. Why wait? All it takes is a one time act of bowing your knee in

worship of me. That isn't too bad is it?" said Satan. Satan meant that what is important is not "how" you get the kingdom, but that you get the kingdom. He tried to convince Jesus to only do a "little, temporary sin" and the kingdoms of the world would be his.

For the second time Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy saying that God's Word clearly said only God was to be worshipped. (Deut. 6:13) Jesus told Satan that it is wrong to compromise Biblical standards to get something that seems good. Doing so is a step of rebellion against God, for we are not willing to wait for God to fulfill his will in his time.

Q. 8. a) List ways Christians can compromise absolute holiness in order to get something that they think is good for them. b) Describe ways Christian leaders can compromise holiness and honesty in order to get something that they believe is good for God. (e.g. give a bribe to get church property). c) Why is it important for Christians to remember that God is only honored when we do things with absolute truthfulness and holiness? d) When we think we need to compromise to get something good, what does this demonstrate about our trusting God to overrule in a situation?

There are many ways Satan tempts us to compromise our moral standards in order to get something we think is good. For example, we can cheat on a test to get a good score and a better chance to get into University. Or we can give someone a bribe so that we can get our goods for our store more quickly. Church leaders are also tempted to compromise in order to get something that they want. They want property for a church but know it won't be given them without a bribe- so they give some money. But anytime we compromise like this, we are "worshipping" Satan. If Jesus had submitted to Satan's way, he would have rebelled against God who had his own plan of how to make Jesus a king. God's way was difficult and included the cross. In the same way, anytime we compromise truth, we are saying we must do things our way, that God won't work it out for us in his time. We can't trust him to work what is best. We cannot honor God and use a sinful act at the same time.

2) If Jesus had just done the one act of worship to Satan, the results would have been disastrous. First, there would have been no salvation for our sins. Without the cross, deliverance from the spiritual bondage to Satan and deliverance from God's eternal punishment of sinners would not take place. Second, Jesus would have become disqualified to die for us. He would not longer be "sinless"- for he would have rebelled against God in worshipping someone outside of God. No matter what the personal pain he must endure, Jesus chose to worship only God and obey him completely.

3. Receiving the honor and worship of people by causing them to be amazed by miracles

The last temptation was when Satan took Jesus, probably in the spirit (i.e. in a vision), to Jerusalem. He had Jesus stand on top of the roof of the Temple. Most likely Jesus was in the corner of the Temple complex which overlooked a large valley called the Kidron Valley. It was about 137 meters from the top of the Temple to the valley below. Satan knows God's Word and one of his favorite tools in confusing people is to misquote God's Word. He did that for Eve when he changed one of the commands which God had given. (i.e. "do not touch the fruit"). For Jesus, he took one of the Messianic Psalms (Ps. 91:11-12) which Jews believed promised God's protection on the Messiah. The Psalm was teaching that God would protect the Messiah and his people from evil. It was not a promise to be claimed when we foolishly put ourselves in danger and seek to force God to protect us. Rather than living his life in obedience and trust, knowing that God would take care of him, Satan was asking Jesus to force God to protect him. He was to throw himself off the Temple forcing the angels to catch him so that he would not be hurt. Jesus again turned to the book

of Deuteronomy to say that God's Word says we are not to test God to do things for our benefits. (Deut. 6:16)

What was the temptation which Satan brought upon Jesus?

a. Satan was trying to get Jesus to use his relationship with God to force God to do a miracle to protect him. "If you are God's Son, have Him demonstrate your special relationship with him. Force him into a situation where he has to do something spectacular." Satan was inferring. But Jesus knew that his relationship with God did not give him the right to compel God to do spectacular things for him. Rather, as he lived his life using the natural wisdom and caution God had given him, he was supposed to trust God to protect him.

b. Satan wanted Jesus to use miracles to astound people and cause them to follow him because of miracles. No doubt there were thousands of people in the Temple below worshipping God. Imagine their amazement should Jesus throw himself off the Temple and people would see angels catch him and lower him gently to earth. How easy it would be to use miracles to convince people that he was the Messiah. Rather than wait for God to tell him how to use his power to help people, Satan suggested that Jesus get the allegiance of people by astonishing them. Wouldn't it be easier to get followers if he always impressed them with great miracles? Yes, but what type of followers would they be?

Isn't this similar to how some miracle workers today want to attract people to come to the conference by doing miracles? They are seeking to astound people by the miracle. Unfortunately those who come to Jesus simply because of miracles, if they don't come out of a deep sense that they are sinners and need Jesus to save them, if they don't come with a desire to follow him as their Lord, this type of faith rarely works. When the miracle they want is not there, they usually quickly stop following Jesus. This would later happen to Jesus. Those who saw Jesus feed over 5,000 people followed Jesus and wanted to crown him king only as long as he did what they wanted. When Jesus taught them some difficult truths, they quickly abandoned Jesus. (See Jn. 6:60-66)

Q. 9. a) Describe how you have seen people focus upon miracles like healing and follow Jesus to get these rather than understand their sinfulness and come to Jesus as their Savior and Lord. b) What usually happens to the faith of those who choose to become Christians because of a miracle without a clear understanding of Jesus' death and their need to accept Him as Lord and Savior?

c. Satan was tempting Jesus to focus upon becoming popular. One of the most dangerous temptations for church leaders is the desire to be popular with others. And one of the ways we become popular is by doing things which astound and please people. Satan was trying to tempt Jesus with popularity which comes by doing things which please people rather than those based upon true spirituality. Rather than the slow process of getting people to change their hearts and lives through repentance, Satan was tempting Jesus to try the fast approach of astonishing people through miracles.

d. Satan was tempting Jesus to change his relationship to God from accepting God's Lordship to getting God to do what Jesus wanted. Through the wrong application of God's Word, Satan was seeking to change the relationship between God and man. God is the Lord and we need to do what he wants. Satan was telling Jesus to be the Lord and force God to do what Jesus wanted. "Rather than live in a submissive way to God, trusting in his protection, force him to protect you." Satan was saying. In response Jesus says

that a man's relationship to God is not to be defined by how we force God to do things for us (testing God), but how we trust God's promises of protection even as we live our lives in obedience to God. Any time we try to force God to do something for us rather than living by "faith" in God, we are actually forgetting who we are and who God is. We are "testing" God rather than trusting him. We are seeking to be the Lord who tells God what to do.

We sometimes pray "God heal this person." But who are we to give orders to God? Or we pray "God protect me" even though we knowingly take foolish and dangerous risks by traveling at night where there are thieves. These are examples of testing God. Unfortunately, like Satan, some believers twist God's Word trying to force God to do what they want when they pray.

Q. 10. a) Give an example of how we can abuse one of the promises in God's Word just like Satan abused Scripture. b) Illustrate how church leaders can seek the easy way of trying to be popular with people by astounding them rather than the slow way of helping people grow in spiritual maturity. c) Describe ways we try to reverse the relationship of God as Lord and we as servants by giving God orders and treating him as if he is supposed to meet our needs.

Jesus defeated Satan and so Satan left him "until an opportune time." Throughout Jesus' life, Satan continued to tempt Jesus to sin, especially to entice him away from the cross. Satan used Jesus' friend, Peter, to encourage Jesus not to go to Jerusalem to die. (Mt. 16:21-23) [Satan still uses our friends today to get us to do what God does not want.] Jesus even went as far as to plead with God the Father to take the cross away from him. But, even in his plea, Jesus said "Yet not as I will, but as you (God) will." (Mt. 26:36-46) People would also tempt Jesus to use his power to astonish them, to meet their selfish needs. But miracles were a way for Jesus to show compassion to others, not as a way to gain many followers. Jesus often taught difficult truths to encourage people to follow him out of correct motives.

It was after the temptation, while Jesus was still tired and weak that God sent his angels to minister to Jesus. (Mt. 4:11) You and I may face similar times of darkness in our lives. Satan will whisper in our ears that God does not love us, that he is punishing us for some unknown sin, etc. But like Jesus we must resist these temptations. As we maintain our trust in Jesus, the God of comfort will comfort us as well. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

SUMMARY: The three temptations of Jesus teaches us some important truths:

1. God understands us and the difficult situations we endure on earth. Through Jesus Christ God tasted poverty, the death of loved ones, rejection by friends and family, and even the temptation to sin. He is not like the rich who distance themselves from the poor and do not empathize with them. Rather, Jesus was one of the poor. When we go to the throne of God in prayer, we find a God who is not indifferent to the things we are suffering with, but has great compassion for us, for he has experienced the same problems that we now face. (See Heb. 4:14-16)

2. Part of being human is to endure temptations of rebelling against God. God allows Satan to tempt us to rebel against him. Satan usually tempts us in the areas of our lives where we are weakest. For us, Satan also looks for weak areas to attack us. For some it is sexual sin, others cheating to get a good grade, or telling lies about a church leader to get what one wants.

3. Jesus shows us the way to overcome Satan's temptations. He did not shout at Satan "be gone" or "be thrown in hell" as we often try to do today. Rather, he immersed himself in God's Word. This helped him in two ways. First, when Satan came with a temptation Jesus immediately understood that what was being offered was not God's desires. He even recognized Satan's attempt to twist God's Word to reinforce the temptation. Second, Jesus said "no" through pointing to Scriptures and saying that he was submitting to God's will and not listening to Satan. Submission to the will of God is the major way we overcome Satan. God promised that in the midst of temptation there is always a way for us to overcome. (1 Cor. 10:13) We are not powerless to overcome the temptation. But we must draw close to God and know His Word.

4. Jesus' temptation was not just to do something we normally call sin. Rather, it was to do something "good" or "permitted" but not the will of God for our lives. Throughout his life, people would always try to get Jesus to take the easier way of power and authority and meeting people's desires rather than suffering on the cross. Satan offered Jesus the world without the cross. Satan can use our family and friends to tempt us to do something that we know is not God's will for us. (e.g. look for a good paying job when we know that God wants us to be an evangelist)

5. Jesus' temptation shows us the great difference between how Satan works and how God works. Satan tempted Jesus with the use of "miracles" and "power of rulership" to accomplish his desires. Wouldn't it be easier to worship God if he always did miracles for us like he did for the Jews in the wilderness- if God demonstrated his presence with a pillar of fire, or fed us with manna? It would be much easier to gain followers if Jesus had worked this way. Satan likes to gain control of people through miracles and power.

God humbly asks us to cooperate with him, he never forces us to obey him or control us against our will. Even the Holy Spirit which God has given to live in us works according to the desires of our hearts. He does not force his way upon us. We have the ability to refuse to obey him or to make use of his power. God wants people to put their faith in him. He wants them to freely love and worship him. He wants them to trust him even when it seems that he is not present or working or things are not getting better. In his response to Satan, Jesus basically said that he trusted God and God's ways, and would follow that even though it was a more difficult way.

As the church we have to be careful not to follow Satan's style of working. We must be careful not to bribe people to follow Jesus or join our churches with promises of miracles which meet their physical needs. And we must not seek the short cuts of power to try to force people to believe on Jesus or obey him. Throughout history the church has often tried to use politics to force people to follow Jesus or be good- but it always fails. People have to choose to follow Jesus from their hearts; it can't be forced from the outside. God wants people's love- and love is always given freely. It does not come through the bribe of a miracle or through force. John expressed God's way of working in this way: "we love him because he first loved us." (1 Jn. 4:19) God's way is to show us his love seeking to gain our love for him in return. This way of working takes more time and is more difficult. But once we love Jesus, then we are very willing to do anything that pleases him. If we are forced to obey Jesus by our parents or church, or if we selfishly obey Jesus in order for him to meet our desires, then we will always do as little for Jesus as we think we can get away with.

As church leaders, we must be careful of not falling for Satan's temptation and using his methods. We must be careful of the short cuts to obedience by forcing people to follow our rules and regulations

out of fear. Nor should we be swayed by the world's understanding of success, by being a large church, or being educated, or having the power of miracles. Rather, we must trust the gentle Holy Spirit to work with the will of others to get them to obey God. And we must seek to get others to love God from their hearts so that they willingly obey. It is much harder, but it is the way of Jesus, the way of the cross.

Q. 11. a) Summarize in your own words these five teachings. b) Explain why these teachings are important for our church today.

SECOND DAY

Girum had faithfully served God for many years. Since he was older, he had not had many opportunities for education, either in the public school or in a Bible school. But in spite of these limitations, God had used him to plant a church in his community and help that church grow to over 400 members. Girum watched as younger men who had more education began to take over more responsibilities of the ministries and leadership in the church. Many of the other elders resisted these younger men. But Girum was the first to spot godly young men with potential and send them away for further training in a Bible school and then encourage their growth when they returned. When God raised a very popular man to become the pastor of the church, Girum rejoiced. When some of the older members came to Girum and complained about the new young leaders and how they had taken over the church, Girum encouraged them to honor the giftings and callings of God in the lives of these young men. Girum had no interest in popularity. He wanted God to be honored in greater ways, even if that meant younger men took over his leadership position in the church.

Q. 12. a) How was Girum's attitude different from many older church leaders' attitude today towards gifted young men and women in the church? b) Why do you think Girum had a different attitude towards being replaced by more gifted men?

Q. 13. Read Jn. 1:19-51. a) Describe John the Baptist's attitude towards Jesus in these verses. How was it similar to Girum's attitude? b) What three type of leaders did John say he was not? What did he say his role was? c) List the different names for Jesus found in this section? What do these names tell us about the character and ministry of Jesus? d) How did John encourage his disciples to follow Jesus? e) Describe how each of the five disciples came to follow Jesus as their Master?

While Jesus was being tempted for almost six weeks in the wilderness, John the Baptist continued his ministry along the Jordan River. No doubt he started reflecting more on Jesus, the Messiah, and the ministry he would have for the nation of Israel. John knew that his ministry was about to come to an end. God had raised him up for a specific purpose, which was to get people ready for the arrival of the Messiah. And now that the Messiah had arrived and was ready for his public ministry, John began to encourage people to no longer follow him but to follow Jesus. During the early church times, John was greatly honored. Even two hundred fifty years later there were those who greatly honored John the Baptist, some even claiming that he was the Messiah. In his Gospel, the Apostle John wanted to clarify this misunderstanding about John. So the Apostle John included stories of the life of Jesus which describe the relationship between John and Jesus. Throughout this section, the Apostle John shows different ways that John the Baptist honored Jesus rather than seek to be honored himself. John the Baptist is the perfect "witness" which all disciples of Jesus should follow.

JOHN'S TESTIMONY TO THE DELEGATES FROM JERUSALEM (Jn. 1:19-28)

Existing leaders are often afraid of new people who become popular and who work in a way that is different from what they are used to. Many leaders, especially those over churches who have a long history, tend to resist new things in favor of those who do things the same way as previously. We have much to learn from John the Baptist.

The word about John the Baptist and his popular ministry reached the religious leaders in Jerusalem. You will remember that Jerusalem was where the Temple was located and where the high priest and the majority of the priests lived. No doubt they were wondering whether or not John was a false prophet since he was not acting like a normal priest or like a prophet. And he was not aligned with any of the traditional religious parties. He was not a Sadducee, Pharisee, or Essene- so they wondered who he was and what he taught and they wanted to evaluate his ministry. They came to John not out of a desire to join the revival movement which John had started. Rather, they were trying to determine what danger it would bring to them.

Two types of delegates were sent.

First, there were the "priests and Levites." Most likely these priests and Levites were from those ministering in Jerusalem and linked to the high priest and the ruling priestly family in Jerusalem. They could have been part of the Sadducee party. These were also those from the same tribe as John the Baptist who was also a priest. So the religious leaders in Jerusalem sent delegates who would best understand John and his ministry since he was one of them.

Second, there were the Pharisees. The Pharisees, some of whom were priests, others were from other tribes. When they heard that John was baptizing the Jews, they too came to question John about his ministry.

This delegation brought a temptation for John the Baptist. Would he seek to take honor and glory to himself for his popular ministry? Or would he humble himself and turn people to the Messiah as God had asked him to do? Many church leaders fail at this point. When God blesses us, we often take the honor rather than keep pointing people to God, who is the source of all fruit in our ministry.

We usually understand someone's ministry from the context of what we are used to. The priests and Levites knew that John was doing something very different from what was expected. He was not baptizing Gentiles, but Jews. And he was claiming that people should get ready for the coming king, the Messiah, and his kingdom. There were three types of people that the Jews thought would come at the end times and establish the glorious kingdom of the Messiah. So they asked John which of the three people he was:

1. "Are you the Messiah?" The word "messiah" in Hebrew or "christ" in Greek both mean "the anointed one." This reflects the Jewish practice of anointing their leaders with oil when they first begin to lead. It became a technical term for a great leader who would one day come and lead Israel. The Jews had known many who had come and claimed to be the "christ," the leader who would bring political deliverance to the Jews. Usually these false messiahs came to start a rebellion against Rome but were then quickly killed by the Romans. But still the longing for the Messiah remained in the Jew's hearts, and so when John came ministering in unusual ways, the religious leaders began to wonder if he was the Messiah. Even though

John did no miracle, his call for people to change their spiritual lives communicated to some that John was the Messiah. John's answer was very strong. "I am not the Messiah" he firmly said.

2. "Are you Elijah?" Starting from the time of Malachi, the Jews had developed many different views about Elijah. (See Mal. 3:1; 4:5) Elijah was a unique person in Jewish history. Not only was he a great prophet who did amazing miracles, but he never died. Instead a chariot took him to heaven. The Jews began to make up stories about Elijah. They believed he was the one who sent angels to protect rabbis from danger. And at the end times, he would return to the earth. Even today on the celebration of the Passover, the Jews will leave an empty seat at the table for "Elijah" whom they believe will introduce the end times. They believed he would raise people from the dead and he is the one who will pick the Messiah and anoint him. Jesus would later say that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 3. (Mt. 17:10-13) However, John the Baptist knew he was not the type of political Elijah that many of the Jews was expecting. And he knew that he did not have the right to choose and appoint the Messiah. So John the Baptist told the delegates that he was not the Elijah they were expecting.

3. "Are you the Prophet?" The Jews during John the Baptist's time also had various traditions about a special prophet at the end time. Some taught that one of the great prophets of old like Isaiah or Jeremiah would raise from the dead and return to Israel. Others taught that a Moses-like prophet would work in the end times. (See Deut. 18:15) He would do miracles like Moses and bring renewal so people would obey the laws which God had given Israel. Again, John told these religious leaders that he was not this promised prophet.

John, quoting well-known verses from the book of Isaiah, insisted that he was only like a herald telling people to get ready for the coming king similar to how Syrian kings would force people to clear up the roads before they came to visit a town. They were to get the roads of their moral lives in order so that when the king visited them, they would not be embarrassed.

We do not know whether the delegation from Jerusalem included Pharisees, or if the Pharisees sent another delegation to question John. However, the Pharisees also had questions for John the Baptist. The most important religious teaching for the Pharisees was about ritual cleanliness. Most of their teachings and later a major part of their literature was about what makes a person ritually clean or unclean. What bothered them about John the Baptist was that he was using the rite of baptism upon Jews. The Pharisees taught that Gentiles wanting to become Jews had to go through the ritual cleansing process of baptism. For "unclean" Gentiles, this was proper. But John insisted that Jews also go through baptism to be cleansed. This was totally against their understanding because they thought that they were "clean" since they were the children of Abraham. But now John was implying that they were as "unclean" as the Gentiles and therefore had to be ritually cleansed through baptism. The Old Testament also taught that when the Messiah appeared; it would be a time of cleansing. (See Is. 52:15; Ezek. 36:25-26; Zech. 13:1) John's baptism was teaching that the Messiah had come, and it was time for Israel to be cleansed. But they had to do it just like the Gentiles, symbolically washing away their moral filth.

The Pharisees asked John where his authority came to baptize Jews. What famous religious leader had authorized this action? Or what Biblical passage or religious writing told John that Jews too had to be baptized. John did not directly answer them. Instead, he told the Pharisees that the greater "Messiah" had already come. In comparison John was not worthy to be his slave.

There are two teachings here which John was emphasizing:

1. The Messiah had already come. However, people like the Pharisees had not recognized him. Only John, and soon some of his disciples, would have the spiritual discernment and faith to look at Jesus and know that he was the Messiah. The Apostle John was indicating through this that there are always two types of people. There are the majority who are not able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. So they ignore him, and some even fight against him like the Pharisees would do in just a few years time. But there are the few, like John the Baptist and the early disciples and now the growing number of Christians, who had the spiritual eyes to see who Jesus really is, and worship him, and follow him as their Lord.

2. John the Baptist insisted that he was no greater than a Gentile slave when it came to his relationship to Jesus. In Jewish culture, untying the shoes of someone was considered very humiliating. No teacher could ask his student to do it for him. Only a Gentile slave was considered low enough to untie the shoes of a Jew. And yet John the Baptist said that in comparison to Jesus, John was lower than a slave. He was not worthy to untie Jesus, his Master's, shoes.

Remember, John was at the peak of his popularity with the Jews. Thousands came and listened to his teaching. For over two hundred years, people would continue to honor him as a great prophet. But John refused to see himself as special or great. He was very humble- realizing that in comparison to Jesus, he was only the lowest of slaves. Those of us who are ministers in the church must remember this. If God chooses to use us to do miracles, or preach great sermons, or get a special educational degree, or sway people with our teaching, or plant many churches- this does not make us great. Jesus is the only one who is great. And we are not even worthy to untie his shoes!

Q. 14. a) Describe the contrast between the attitude John had towards becoming popular with the attitude many church leaders or ministers have when they become popular. b) Explain how this humility is a sign of greatness.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S WITNESS TO THE CROWD THAT JESUS IS THE LAMB OF GOD (Jn. 1:29-34)

The religious leaders left and John continued his ministry. The next day John saw Jesus walking by at a distance. Jesus had probably just returned from his time of temptation in the wilderness. We are not told what Jesus was doing in the region, but there is no indication that Jesus came to talk further with John. We never read of Jesus meeting his cousin, John the Baptist, again. (Later, John the Baptist would send some disciples to clarify some things with Jesus. See Mt. 11:1-6)

Q. 15. a) Read Ex. 12:1-11. What happened to the Passover Lamb? b) Read Ex. 29:38-43. What animals were used most frequently in the daily sacrifices for the Jews? c) What prophecy is given in Is. 53:7? How did Jesus fulfill this imagery? d) Read Rev. 5:5-8. How is Jesus described in this section?

Seeing Jesus walking in the distance, before all of the crowds gathered around to listen to him, John the Baptist openly says "There is the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world." It is interesting that John did not say "There is the miracle worker." Or "There is the political deliverer." Or "There is the one who will give you all you want." The Gospel centers upon Jesus the Lamb of God. The whole purpose Jesus came to earth was to be like a Passover lamb, dying on behalf of the sins of others. Although

Jesus does do miracles in his church today, the New Testament's emphasis is that Jesus is the one who provides for the most important needs of people, their sins which have caused them to be separated from God. We must be careful in our preaching today that we do not so focus on other parts of Jesus' ministries (e.g. miracles) that we play down this truth that his greatest ministry now is to be the Lamb of God for the world.

Because we are not familiar with animal sacrifices, this image has little impact on us. However, sacrificing of lambs was familiar to all Jews. It was a central to their worship as the cross is to us today. The mention of the lamb would bring up different images in the minds of the Jews.

1. The Passover Lamb: Since the feast of the Passover was just a few weeks away, when those around John heard the title "Lamb of God" their minds would most likely have gone to the lamb which all of them would soon buy for this important celebration. Starting from the days of Israel being delivered from Egypt, the Passover Lamb had great significance for the Jews. A Passover Lamb was bought by each family. On the night of the Passover celebration, the lamb was slaughtered. Originally the blood was placed upon the door posts. Later, the lamb was killed in the Temple and the blood was to be poured in the altar in the Temple. Then the lamb was eaten by the family. This celebration reminded the Jews that the blood on the door caused the angel of death to not kill their first born, and reminded them of the night when their nation was delivered from slavery.

We will later see that it was during this important Passover celebration that Jesus was crucified. By his death on the cross his shedding of blood, Jesus was offering deliverance from the sins which had separated everyone in the world from God. As Paul said, Jesus has become our Passover. (1 Cor. 5:7)

2. The daily sacrifice lamb: John was from a priestly family and he was very familiar with the worship system of the Jews. In the Temple, every morning and every evening, the priests would sacrifice a lamb to God. The meaning of the daily sacrifice was that God would forgive the daily sins of his people. Perhaps John had this daily sacrifice in his mind when he called Jesus the Lamb of God. On the cross, Jesus not only covered our sins and provided us salvation, but his blood which he shed on the cross continues to cleanse us from our daily sins. (1 Jn. 1:9)

3. The Servant of God who would die like a lamb: (Is. 53:7) Some scholars think between when he baptized Jesus and when John called Jesus "the Lamb of God," John the Baptist had spent more time reflecting on the teachings of the book of Isaiah, considered by the Jews to be the most important book of prophecy. John had just described himself as the one who prepares the way for the Lord, which is a prophecy found in the book of Isaiah. (Is. 40:3) John the Baptist also knew that the great "Servant of the Lord" described in Isaiah would also die for the sins of his people. So perhaps John was indicating to people that Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy, the expected servant of God who would provide for the sin problem of God's people. This prophecy would become one of the most important prophecies for the New Testament Christians.

4. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac: By pointing to Jesus, a human, as the one who would take away sins, perhaps John was reminding the Jews of how Abraham sought to sacrifice his own son in obedience to God. God eventually provided a substitute lamb. But in the case of Jesus, God the Father provided his Son as a sacrifice and this time there would be no replacement lamb to die in his place.

5. The Conquering Lamb of God: During the Maccabean times, one of the images of the coming Messiah was of a large male sheep with huge horns. That male sheep would deliver God's people from all enemies. He would be a conqueror-combining the traits of a lamb and a lion. The Apostle John, who also wrote the book of Revelation, would later describe Jesus as the one who is both the "Lamb" and the "Lion of Judah." Perhaps John the Baptist was telling the Jews that Jesus was that conquering Lamb, the one would help them defeat sin and death in their lives. And that conquering took place by dying as a sacrifice lamb.

John the Baptist wanted this great crowd to clearly understand the relationship between himself and Jesus. He wanted everyone to know that Jesus was greater than he so he used three illustrations to point to how Jesus would be greater:

1. Although John the Baptist was born before Jesus, he was the lesser of the two. Jewish culture taught that the older and the one who came first was always the greater, more important than the one who came later or the younger. Perhaps some Jews in John's time were using this belief to try to claim that John the Baptist was greater than Jesus. But John himself witnessed that even though he is older (although Jesus was from eternity, physically he was born after John) and started his ministry first, Jesus is the greater. This is an important truth for us to remember. We sometimes think that because we are older or came into ministry before another person, we should have the favored position. But John the Baptist recognized that God is the one who determines who is greater and who is lesser in ministry. Age and who started ministry first has nothing to do with it. Those elders, like Girum, who truly seek to honor Jesus will always be willing for God to raise up a greater leader for his kingdom rather than fight against such a person.

2. Jesus would provide a much greater baptism. John's baptism only consisted of water symbolizing the cleansing from sin brought by repentance. But Jesus would also baptize his followers with the Holy Spirit. Jesus would take of the same Holy Spirit who came upon him at his water baptism and give him to his followers. [John insists that this Holy Spirit "remained" upon Jesus. Rather than a periodic empowerment of the Holy Spirit like was common in the Old Testament times, Jesus' empowerment by the Holy Spirit was permanent. The Apostle John later wrote that Jesus promised that this same Holy Spirit would remain with his followers forever. (Jn. 16:5-15)]

The Jews believed that the Holy Spirit was primarily linked to prophecy. And they taught that with Malachi, the Holy Spirit had stopped working and there were currently no inspired prophets in Israel. But they knew that one day the Holy Spirit would start his prophetic ministry again. Hearing about the Holy Spirit would immediately bring important Old Testament prophecies to mind to the Jews listening to John. Over five hundred years earlier the prophets had foretold a day when the Holy Spirit would come upon all of God's people. (Joel 2:28-29) The Jews knew that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon people would be the major mark of the kingdom rule of the Messiah. So John was telling the Jews that Jesus was their king, and that he would bring in the kingdom rule of the Messiah which they had been longing for for hundreds of years.

3. Jesus is the "Son of God." For most of us the name "Son of God" brings with it the image of the unique relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father, two members of the Trinity. The book of John does describe Jesus' unique role as the Son of God more than any other book of the New Testament. But the title "Son of God" had other meanings for the Jews. The nation Israel was called God's Son (Ex. 4:22-23) because in choosing the nation of Israel, God had established a unique relationship with

Israel. The Jews knew that the "Servant of God" discussed in Isaiah would be the ideal Israelite, the one who fulfilled all of God's desires for the nation of Israel. He would be a true "son of God." The kings of David were also called "son of God." (See 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7) When they were crowned kings, they entered into a unique relationship with God described by God as becoming his son. The Jews believed that the ultimate son of David, the Messiah, would be the "Son of God" in a much greater way, for because of his holiness, he would have a closer relationship with God than any Davidic king ever had. Most likely this is what John meant when he called Jesus the "Son of God." He was telling everyone that Jesus was the Messiah, David's greatest son and therefore the greatest "Son of God." However, the Jews would have thought he was only a human just like the other "sons of God" like Solomon mentioned in the Old Testament. After the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Christians would grow in their understanding that the title "Son of God" meant much more than this. They would realize that Jesus was the "Son of God" in that he was divine just like God was divine.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S WITNESS TO HIS DISCIPLES AS HE ENCOURAGES THEM TO FOLLOW JESUS (Jn. 1:35-42)

All followers of Jesus are to be "witnesses." (Acts 1:8) What does it mean to be a witness? Does it mean that we have to be great speakers? Do we need a lot of special training before we can witness? Is the church supposed to organize "witnessing teams" and go out witnessing to the unsaved on certain days? Is this to be our primary way of witnessing about Jesus? This section of the Gospel of John describes what a witness is like. Therefore he tells us some stories from the ministry of John the Baptist and when people first started to follow Jesus to illustrate that witnessing is different from how we often imagine it.

1. The goal of witnessing is to get people to follow Jesus, not us. John the Baptist was a very unusual leader. He was popular and great crowds followed him. And yet, he knew that his role was to point people to Jesus. So when John the Baptist saw Jesus after his time of temptation, he knew that it was now time for Jesus' public ministry and that his ministry was about over. Having pointed out Jesus to the crowd the day before, the next day John was meeting with several of his disciples. He saw Jesus walking by and once again he pointed to Jesus and said "Look, the Lamb of God." John was not only telling his disciples that Jesus was the Messiah, but he wanted his disciples to follow Jesus, not him.

One of the greatest temptations for a "witness," especially once that witness becomes famous, is to seek to get people to follow him. If God gives the person the ability to speak eloquently or do miracles, the temptation is for the person to say "look at me, I am great." It is a unique popular leader who can say to his followers, "follow him, he is greater than I am." The more God uses us, the harder it is to stay humble. But the role of any witness, no matter how famous he becomes, is to keep pointing people to Jesus and say "Follow him."

Q. 16. a) Describe how you have seen popular church ministers seek to get a "following" rather than seek to get people focused on Jesus. b) Why is it important for church leaders to remember that as "witnesses," they are to keep focusing people's attention upon Jesus and not them and their ministry? c) Evaluate your witness. Are you causing people to focus upon you or upon Jesus? Explain your answer.

2. Witnessing is primarily about introducing people to Jesus and then letting Jesus convince them to follow him. It is interesting that some of the greatest disciples of Jesus were previously disciples of John the Baptist. They had heard about the ministry of John and traveled from Galilee down to the Jordan where

John was baptizing and had been baptized by John. They were not part of the "crowd" around John, but part of his disciples. Jesus would later honor their spiritual hunger for following God and make them his core leaders, his apostles. In this group of followers of John the Baptist were Andrew and Peter, Philip and probably Bartholomew, and most likely James and John. Not only were these disciples originally John's disciples, but they probably knew each other. We know that Andrew and Peter often fished together with James and John. (Mt. 4:18-22; Lk. 5:1-11)

When John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to his close disciples, two of them left John and began to follow Jesus. We only know the name of one of those disciples, Andrew, Peter's brother. Who was the second disciple? We don't know for sure, but most likely that second disciple was the author of this Gospel, the Apostle John. One of the unique things about John as an author was that he was reluctant to name himself. So he just says there was a second disciple, and later he would call himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23; 20:2) without stating clearly that it was he. The fact that the author, writing over 60 years after the events, knew the exact time when they met with Jesus indicates that it was John. No doubt he thought back to the first time he met Jesus with great fondness. So the first two disciples to follow Jesus were Andrew and John.

It was around 4 PM when these two disciples started following Jesus. When Jesus saw them, he asked them "What do you want?" They called Jesus "rabbi"- a Jewish title of great respect given to teachers, and then they asked "Where are you staying?" This was an indirect question meaning "We want to spend some time with you to get to know you better." John the Baptist only pointed Jesus out to his disciples. It was now the responsibility of Jesus and the disciples to get to know each other and for the disciples to start following Jesus because they believed in Jesus themselves. The work of a witness is never to argue people into the kingdom of God. Rather, it is simply to try to get people and Jesus together. Then it is up to Jesus and the Holy Spirit to help people to follow Jesus. The more people know Jesus, the more they will want to follow him. So the first two disciples started to follow Jesus by their own free choice. Later Jesus would choose them to be part of the inner core of his disciples, changing them into apostles.

But not only is John the Baptist an ideal witness, Andrew is also a model witness. Where should a new believer start to witness? It should be to his family and friends. They know him. They see the changes Jesus has brought to his life. So that is where all witnessing should start. It did not take long for Andrew to know in his heart that Jesus was the Messiah. So he went to find his brother Peter who was also a follower of John. He introduced Peter to Jesus. Imagine the role Andrew played in the history of the church. Although never as famous as Peter, it was his witness that caused Peter, the future leader of the church, to follow Jesus. When we witness, we have no idea what plans Jesus has for that person—he could be like a Billy Graham or one of the famous women in the church!

In the Gospels, Andrew is pictured as a great witness in two ways.

First, although he followed Jesus first, he was willing for his brother to become more popular than he without become jealous. But Andrew knew that what mattered is that someone come to Jesus and be used by Jesus, not who got the credit or who became popular. A witness is not to be concerned about who gets the honor for his ministry or who later becomes famous. Rather he is concerned that people come to Jesus.

The second amazing thing about Andrew is that although not very famous and never part of the inner circle of Jesus' followers, and without preaching a sermon or becoming a formal evangelist he often brought people to Jesus. Three times in the Gospel of John, Andrew played an important part of introducing people to Jesus. (See Jn. 1:40-42; 6:8-9; 12:22)

As soon as Jesus met Peter, Jesus knew that Peter was to become a special minister on his behalf. Peter's Jewish name was Simon. But Jesus gave Simon, which was Peter's Jewish name, a new name. In Aramaic that new name was "Cephas" (see 1 Cor. 1:12) and in Greek "Peter." Both names mean "rock." In the Old Testament, whenever God wanted to indicate a new relationship with a person, he would change their name. So Abram became Abraham and Jacob became Israel. Jesus was telling Peter that he was now to have a new relationship with him. He was to become the "rock" which Jesus would use as the foundation to start his church. In spite of knowing all of Peter's weaknesses, Jesus saw what Peter would eventually become. Often as church leaders we are too quick to judge a person. If they fail, we often want to have nothing more to do with them. But if Jesus had taken that attitude with Peter, Peter would never have become the major leader of the early church. May God give us the faith to look past the weaknesses of people to see what they can become should they give their lives totally to God! Who knows, that person we could be witnessing to might one day become another "Peter" in the hands of God!

Q. 17. a) Give an example of how you have seen God take a person like "Simon" who was weak and ineffective and turn them into a "Peter" who serves God greatly. b) What should this teach us about not judging too quickly what will happen to someone who has failed in the church?

PHILIP AND NATHANAEL BEGIN TO FOLLOW JESUS (Jn. 1:43-51)

Jesus had been staying along the Jordan River, where John was ministering, and in the wilderness of Judea for over six weeks. He decided to return to his home territory of Galilee, a journey of about 32 kilometers (two day's journey) from where John the Baptist was baptizing. (Note: Scholars do not know where the place called Bethany by the Jordan is located.) Somewhere on his trip, perhaps near Cana, Jesus met Philip. Philip was from a small town called Bethsaida. Bethsaida was located at the top of the Sea of Galilee. (See map in Appendix C in back of book.) Although it seems that Capernaum was actually the home of Peter and Andrew and James and John (Mt. 4:13-22), they probably had another fishing outpost at Bethsaida and stayed there frequently. So Philip and Peter and Andrew probably knew each other well.

Whereas Andrew, James, John, and Peter now took the initiative to follow Jesus, it was Jesus who said to Philip "Follow me." In Jewish culture, usually parents on behalf of their children or prospective students would come to a famous teacher and ask to be his disciple. It was rare that the teacher would ask someone to be his disciple. And yet Jesus went against culture, asking Philip (and later all of the apostles) to become his disciples. He chose the disciples, the disciples did not choose him. The command to a student was always "follow me," for in Jewish culture, the student would walk behind the teacher learning of him. The goal of the student was to be able to believe the same truths as the teacher, act like the teacher, and have the same character as the teacher. And that is the goal of becoming disciples of Jesus. Jesus wants us to believe the same truths that he believed and taught. He wants us to have the same character of love as he does. And he wants us to behave as he behaves. The Gospel stories were written to teach us what Jesus believes, what his character was like, and how he acted in relation to others and God.

Q. 18. a) List some truths Jesus taught that he wants you to believe as well. b) What are some characteristics of Jesus which we see in the Gospel story which we are to emulate? c) What are some actions which Jesus did that he wants to see in us? d) Describe how you have changed to become more like Jesus as his disciple.

It was not long until Philip was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. And so he immediately began to witness about Jesus. It is likely that Philip and Nathaniel were also followers of John the Baptist or at least familiar with his teachings. Philip went to find his friend Nathaniel and told him that he had found the Messiah- the one predicted throughout the Old Testament (called Moses and the prophets). But when Nathaniel heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, he was doubtful. Nathaniel, like most Jews, expected the Messiah to come from Judea, the center of Judaism. Or he thought the Messiah would maybe come from one of the more famous towns in Galilee. But Nazareth had no reputation at all to indicate that someone as great as the Messiah would come from there. That would be as unexpected as claiming that the President of Ethiopia would come from a small town like Omo Rate, Southern Omo. Nazareth was so insignificant that it is never mentioned in the Old Testament, in any Jewish writing of this time, or in any history book written by Gentiles. Again we see how God sent his Son not among the great people, but to the most humble of people. Jesus came in "humility," not in great power and honor as we would expect of a great leader. Like us, Nathaniel had a difficult time accepting something that is not the way that we expect things to happen. Philip did not try to argue with him. All he did was say "Come and see."

When Nathaniel and Jesus met, Jesus praised Nathaniel. "You are an ideal Israelite. There is no hypocritical worship or crookedness in you." Jesus told him. Since Jesus and Nathaniel had never met, this amazed Nathaniel. "How do you know me? We have never met." Nathaniel asked. Jesus' answer proved to Nathaniel that Jesus had supernatural powers. "I saw you sitting under the fig tree." Jesus answered. Devout Jews often chose a large shady fig tree as a place to pray, study Scripture and meditate. In his supernatural knowledge, Jesus had seen Nathaniel sitting under the fig tree meditating and praying and that was where Philip met him. Nathaniel's faith was instant. You are the "Son of God" and "the King of Israel," both names for the Messiah.

Jesus told Nathaniel that he and the other disciples would soon witness even greater miracles than his seeing Nathaniel under a fig tree. Over the next three years, Nathaniel, as a follower of Jesus, would witness many amazing miracles, even the raising of people from the dead. But to Jesus, the greatest thing was not that Nathaniel would see miracles, but that he and the disciples would see "heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." In this saying, Jesus is making a play on words. Jesus had previously called Nathaniel a model "Israelite," not a crooked "Jacob." You will remember that while Jacob was fleeing from Canaan to Haran, had seen a vision of a ladder stretching from heaven to earth and angels going up and down that ladder. (Gen. 28:12) That vision symbolized that God, through his angels, was with Jacob, watching over his journey. But Jesus was telling his disciples that there was now a greater "ladder" between God and man. That ladder is Jesus Christ. Through him God's greatest revelation would come to mankind. And through him, mankind and God would be reconciled. Again the Apostle John tells us that what made Jesus great was not the miracles we will soon read about. But it was the fact that as the ladder, through his death, mankind and God were being brought together.

For the first time, Jesus adds another unique title for himself. He calls himself "the Son of Man." In the Gospels we see that this is Jesus' favorite title for himself. He does not call himself the Messiah or the Son of God. Rather he usually called himself "the Son of Man." There are two possible meanings for this title.

First, some think Jesus was focusing upon being human. That is how this title is used in the book of Ezekiel, where the prophet is often called "son of man." (Ezek. 2:1) Second, this name came from a prophecy in the book of Daniel. We are told that when God's eternal kingdom comes, one "like a son of man" would come and get the right to the kingdom from God the Father. (Read Dan. 7:13-14) This is the most likely context of Jesus using this name. During the Intertestamental times, other books began to write about this "Son of Man," a name they liked to use for a divine-like person at the end times. Jesus probably chose this title because it did not have as many political ramifications as the title "Messiah" had. Jesus was telling people that he was the one who would start the eternal kingdom for all people. He was not the one who would start a political oriented kingdom just for the Jews which is what the Jews expected.

Scholars debate about who Nathaniel was. He is only mentioned by this name in the book of John and never mentioned in the other Gospels. There are several ideas. Some believe he was one of the followers of Jesus who did not get chosen to become one of the 12 disciples. Others believe that Nathaniel and Bartholomew, one of the 12 disciples, are the same. Bartholomew is not mentioned in John and Nathaniel is not mentioned in the other Gospels. So they are probably the same person, some scholars say. And in the first three Gospels, Philip and Bartholomew are usually mentioned together, perhaps indicating that they were friends. (Mt. 10:3) A few think that Matthew and Nathaniel are the same person since both of their names mean "gift of God."

Q. 19. Summarize in your own words what lessons we have learned about being a witness for Jesus from John the Baptist and the early disciples.

THIRD DAY

JESUS' EARLY MINISTRY IN GALILEE (LATE 26 AD)

The Gospel story turns from John the Baptist, the one who came first to prepare the way for the Messiah, to Jesus Christ. From now on, the Gospel focuses upon Jesus. In many ways Jesus continued the ministry which John the Baptist started. Both of them focused their teaching on repentance and preparation for the coming kingdom of God. (See Mt. 3:1-2, 4:17)

Q. 20. Read Jn. 2:1-11. a) Where did Jesus perform his first miracle? b) What was the first miracle Jesus performed? c) Why do you think this miracle was called a "sign?" d) What did this miracle cause the disciples to do? (vs 11)

JESUS' FIRST MIRACLE: CHANGING WATER INTO WINE AT A WEDDING (Jn. 2:1-11)

The public ministry of Jesus started in a small, hidden way. Jesus made no effort to attract a crowd through doing miracles. Only five disciples, his mother and a few servants saw it.

Shortly after Philip and Nathaniel put their trust in Jesus, Jesus was invited to a wedding in the town of Cana. Cana was a village about 10 kilometers away from Jesus' home town of Nazareth. Jesus probably knew the wedding party because Jesus and his disciples as well as Jesus' family were all invited to the wedding.

For the Jews, a wedding was considered a serious religious event. In fact, the bride and groom often fasted before the wedding to cleanse themselves for their new life together. But when the wedding came, it was a time of great joy. This joy would later symbolize the relationship between the Messiah and his people. (Rev. 19:9) The usual Jewish wedding happened at night. The groom and his friends would go to the house of the bride and collect her. The wedding party would then walk or ride through town. People came out to watch them walk to her husband's parents' home. The path was lined with burning torches. The bride and groom wore "crowns" on their head and they were called "king" and "queen." When they arrived at the groom's home with the bridesmaids and the groomsmen, a major feast was held. Upon entering the house, a special prayer was prayed, and then a special cup of wine was drunk by the new bride and groom. A covenant document was signed by the groom where he promised to take care of the wife. After the short ceremony, the celebrations and feasting began. It was common for the wedding ceremony to last up to seven days. Guests would come bringing wedding gifts. But it was expected that the groom's family would provide food and wine for everyone. Should there not be enough wine or food, it would bring great shame to the parents of the groom who were supposed to provide all of the food. Wine was considered one of the major things at the celebration. "Without wine there can be no joy" said the Jewish religious teachers.

Before the seven days were finished, the wine ran out. For some reason Mary, the mother of Jesus, became involved in the crisis which this new couple faced. Did she find out about it because the women ate in a separate part of the house where the wine was stored? Or were Jesus and Mary related to the wedding party or good friends and perhaps Mary had the responsibility to help in preparations? We don't know for sure, but Mary felt an obligation to help out this new couple.

Mary went to Jesus asking him to get involved. In a crisis like this, friends of the wedding party were supposed to help out in any way they could. Jesus had been taking care of Mary and her children for some years. The fact that Joseph is not mentioned here indicates that Joseph had died. And as the oldest son, Jesus had the responsibility to care for the family, probably inheriting his father's carpentry business. Had Mary grown to depend upon him and came to him for some practical solution? Or did Mary have enough understanding about Jesus that she believed he could work a miracle? She knew that he was different, the Messiah promised by God. She had no doubt seen how different he was from other boys growing up. And she knew that he had been to Jordon River and perhaps had heard that he had been baptized by John. Perhaps Jesus' new disciples had shared with her about John's words about Jesus the Messiah. We don't know what Mary was expecting, but Mary came to Jesus for a solution to the problem.

Jesus' words to Mary seem harsh to us.

First, Jesus addressed her as "Woman" and not "Mother." Although we often use the term "woman" as an insult, it was not so in Jewish societies. In fact, in Jewish and non-Jewish writings, people often addressed their wives as "woman" as a term of respect. (Jesus would later address his mother "Woman" on the cross. (Jn. 19:26) It is unlikely he would speak harshly to her at this time.)

Second, Jesus asked Mary "What do I have with you? My hour has not arrived." What Jesus seems to have meant by this statement is "What has this problem to do with us? It is not our business whether or not the wine has run out." Plus Jesus insisted that his "hour" had not arrived. In the book of John, the word "hour" usually referred to the time of the death and resurrection of Jesus. (Jn. 12:23, 27) In this case, Jesus

is saying that the time when he was to publicly reveal himself to the nation of Israel as the Messiah had not yet arrived.

Why did John include this story? This was an important time not just from the point of Jesus starting his public ministry, but because it introduced a shift in his relationship to his physical family. Scholars think that Jesus was indirectly telling Mary that he would no longer relate to her as mother and son. She was no longer in the position to command him to do things. And he was no longer in the position to take care of them. Since the rest of the children had now grown up and could take care of themselves, he was free to fulfill the reason why he came to earth. From now on, it would be God, Jesus' Father, who would determine what Jesus would or would not do. Jesus' allegiance was not to his earthly parents, but to his heavenly Father. From now until the day of crucifixion, Mary, the mother of Jesus disappears from John's Gospel story.

Mary somehow recognized that Jesus would do the miracle. So she told the Jews to obey Jesus fully. Probably with the disciples watching, Jesus looked at six stone jars placed by the door of the house. Each of these jars held about 80 liters of water, so there was a total of 480 liters of water. These six jars were normally filled with water, not for drinking as we use them, but for the ritual purity of the guests. The water was used to wash the feet and hands of each guest who came to the wedding.

Jesus told the servants to fill up each jar with water until all were completely full. And then he told them to take a cup of water to the chief steward who was to oversee the setting up of the tables, and oversee the distribution of the wine. As this man tasted the water, it was now wine. Sometime after pouring the water into the jar, all of the water turned to wine. (Note: Some people like to say that this wine was actually unfermented "juice." However, in the New Testament this word is always used for fermented wine. Jewish practice was to take fermented wine and mix it with two or three parts of water. So it was intoxicating, but not strongly so. It was culturally inappropriate for someone to get drunk at a wedding.) The chief steward was surprised. Normally people would start the wedding celebration with the best wine. And then after people were full, they would serve less expensive wine when they could not taste as well.

What was the result of this miracle? We are told that two things resulted.

First, Jesus was "glorified." Jesus was revealed through these actions to be unique, God's powerful Son. In the Old Testament, the word "glory" usually has to do with God's presence being revealed. The glory of Jesus is that in and through him, God's presence was being revealed to people. Second, the disciples grew in their faith in Jesus. Faith is something that grows. The disciples started with understanding that Jesus was the Messiah. Now they knew his power.

The Apostle John included this story for several reasons:

1. To show us the character of Jesus. We can see several things about Jesus from this story.

- a. Jesus enjoyed life with others. Sometimes we picture Jesus as being very serious and not willing to join in other's joy. But Jesus was willing to enjoy life with others. In fact, the Pharisees would later accuse Jesus of partying too much. He was known for eating and drinking with "sinners," who were the disreputable people in the eyes of the Pharisees. We must never let the unbelievers think that we evangelicals cannot have fun. God gets no glory from us having long serious faces and not enjoying life. If

Jesus was known for going to parties, shouldn't we be known by unbelievers as those who really enjoy life without the "sin" (drunkenness, sexual sins, coarse jokes) which the world assumes is part of having fun.

b. Jesus never made any attempt to show off his power. The wedding was an unusual place to do his first miracle. We would have chosen the market place so that many people would see. But Jesus never used his miraculous powers to impress people. At this wedding, except for Jesus, the disciples, Mary, and the servants, no one realized that a miracle had taken place.

c. Jesus did his miracle out of compassion for a poor couple who did not have money to buy enough wine. He wanted to keep them from being embarrassed throughout their lives as the ones who ran out of wine at their wedding. Most of Jesus' miracles were done because of his compassion to help people, not as a way to astonish the crowds.

2. To provide a "sign" about Jesus. (Note: The New Testament uses three words for miracles. First, there is the word wonders which refers to the result of a miracle upon people. It astonishes them. Second, there is the word miracles which in Greek comes from the word mighty power. It focuses upon the power to do what is impossible. Third, there is the word signs to show that the purpose of what was done was to reveal something about the character of the person doing the miracle. John always called the miracles of Jesus "signs" to show that their purpose is to reveal the character of Jesus. Jesus was not doing the miracle to astound people or to reveal his power.) The miracles of Jesus reveal Jesus' character of love for hurting people. But they especially reveal and prove that Jesus' is the divine Messiah.

JESUS' EARLY MINISTRY IN JUDEA (EARLY 27 AD)

JESUS CONFRONTS THE ABUSE OF WORSHIP IN THE TEMPLE (Jn. 2:12-25)

Q. 21. Read Jn. 2:12-25. a) What was the name of the feast that Jesus attended in Jerusalem? b) What did Jesus do when he entered the Temple? c) Why do you think Jesus became so angry? d) What did the religious leaders want Jesus to do? e) What sign did Jesus present to the religious leaders? f) What do you think vs 23-25 seeks to teach us?

From Cana Jesus traveled 30 kilometers to the city of Capernaum. Jesus would later make this city his base as he ministered throughout Galilee. With Jesus were the five disciples and Jesus' mother and brothers. Although the disciples had a growing faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the brothers of Jesus did not believe that he was the Messiah. They would not believe until after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Jesus' family returned to Nazareth, probably when Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover.

Although the first three Gospels focus upon Jesus' ministry in Galilee, the book of John focuses on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. And most of the ministry in Jerusalem took place around three Passovers which Jesus attended. (Note: It might be four Passovers if the unnamed feast in John 5:1 is also a Passover.)

The Feast of the Passover was the most important religious holiday for the Jews. It normally took place in April. All Jewish men within 20 kilometers of Jerusalem were required to come to Jerusalem to attend and all devout Jewish men throughout Judea and Galilee attended if possible. Jews scattered throughout

the Roman Empire would try to attend at least once in their lives. Some scholars have estimated that over 2.5 million Jews would be in Jerusalem at the Passover.

Jesus attended each Passover in Jerusalem. Perhaps this celebration had special meaning to him because he knew that it would be on Passover when he would be sacrificed as the "Lamb of God" for the sins of the world. After staying in Capernaum for just a few days, Jesus joined other travelers from Galilee and traveled over 120 kilometers from Capernaum to Jerusalem. This was at least a three day journey.

What happened when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem is hard for us to believe as something Jesus did. We often picture Jesus as being a very kind, soft spoken, loving person who never got angry at anyone. We think never getting angry is a sign of holiness and that getting angry is a sin. We think it is better to not confront people or compromise our stance in order that we might have smooth relationships. And we especially do not want to get those who are in leadership or are people of influence angry with us. But as we read here, Jesus did get very angry. And he got angry at those who had power and authority. In our study of the life of Jesus we will see that he got angry at anyone who hindered purity of worship of God and anyone who set up roadblocks to people coming to God for forgiveness. But Jesus rarely got angry with the common people who were caught in a life of sin. If Jesus is our example, doesn't this mean that we too should get angry at those whose actions destroy that ability of people to put their faith in Jesus and worship him?

Q. 22. a) List some situations in the church and country you think Jesus would get openly angry over. b) If we are like Jesus, how do you think we should react to these situations?

This passage in John has created a lot of discussion among scholars. The first three Gospels describe Jesus driving out moneychangers at the end of his ministry, during the final week before he was crucified. (Mt. 21:12-17) But the Apostle John puts this event at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. There are two views about the timing of this event.

First, there are some who think Jesus drove people out of the Temple twice, once when he started ministry and another time just before he died. They do not see any difficulty in believing that both at the beginning and end of his public ministry, Jesus drove people out of the Temple in protest to the corrupt worship found there.

Second, the majority of scholars think that Jesus only drove people out of the Temple once, at the end of his public ministry. They believe that John, who was using his book as a "teaching tool," was not as interested in placing the story of Jesus in chronological order but placed it early in Jesus' life to teach important theological truths. Scholars say that John wanted to show how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of suddenly appearing in the Temple to refine it. (Mal. 3:1-4) He also wanted to show that Jesus came to "clean out" Jewish worship which had been corrupted by Jewish religious leaders. In its place Jesus came to introduce true worship of God by dying on the cross. These scholars claim that if Jesus had cleaned out the Temple when he first started ministry, it would be unlikely the Jewish leaders in the Temple would let him do it a second time just a few years later. In this study guide we have chosen to follow the understanding that teaches that Jesus cleaned out the Temple twice.

The Temple at Jerusalem was a magnificent building, one of the seven greatest buildings in the world of Jesus' time. By the time Jesus entered it, it had been in process of being remodeled for 46 years. Work

on the Temple was started by Herod the Great in 19 BC but was not finished until 64 AD. This Temple was destroyed six years later in 70 AD when the Romans burned it when the Jews rebelled. The Temple complex was set at the highest point of the city of Jerusalem on a hill called Mt. Zion. (Look at the diagram at the back of the book of Herod's Temple.) The actual Temple building where the Holy of holy and the holy place were located was surrounded by four large courtyards. Closest to the Temple was a courtyard called the Court of the Priests. In this area just outside of the Temple building the priests performed their ministry and offered sacrifices on the large brass altar. The second courtyard was called the Court of the Israelites. In this courtyard Jewish men were allowed to come and worship. The third courtyard was called the Court of the Women where the Jewish women worshipped God. The last courtyard was called the Court of the Gentiles. It was in this large courtyard that Gentiles were allowed to worship God. On the door between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women there was a large sign written in several languages warning the Gentiles that if they entered the Court of the Women, they would be killed.

As Jesus came to the Temple to worship his Father, he entered the Court of the Gentiles. But instead of finding a peaceful place where Gentiles from all over the world could worship God, he was confronted with a marketplace where people were buying and selling, arguing and bickering over prices. There was not a spirit of reverence which made worship conducive. What had caused this marketplace-like condition in the Court of the Gentiles?

1. The Jews were indifferent to the worship of Gentiles. The Jews only thought about themselves, boasting that they were the children of Abraham. They did not think God cared about the Gentiles. If God did not care about the Gentiles, why should they keep the Court of the Gentiles for the worship of Gentiles? Their prejudice made it very difficult for Gentiles to worship. We do the same thing today when we insist that people of other religions come to our churches where the worship style is offensive to them, or when we use a language to worship which most people do not understand, or when we reveal our prejudice against the other tribes or against the poor or uneducated. Any of these things which reveals our indifference to the worship of others is similar to the attitude which the Jews had toward the Gentiles. It was this attitude of indifference to the worship of all people which caused Jesus to become so angry.

Q. 23. a) Describe how we can have this same attitude to people of other religions and hinder their ability to believe in Jesus and worship him. b) Describe how we can have a similar attitude to the poor or uneducated.

2. The Old Testament commanded that all Jews pay a yearly tax of $\frac{1}{2}$ shekel to the Temple. This helped pay for the upkeep of the Temple and for the sacrifices. This was equivalent to two day's worth of wages for a common man. The Jewish religious leaders taught that this money had to be paid using Jewish money. But Jews from all over the Roman world had come to Jerusalem to worship. They had Roman, Greek, Egyptian, or Syrian money. Where were they to get the Jewish money for the tax? The Jewish religious leaders decided to set up booths in the Court of the Gentiles where these people could exchange their foreign money for Jewish money. The religious leaders put their friends in these exchange booths. These money changers charged a fee to exchange the money and another fee if the bill they had to change was large. Often this added 50% to the money the Jews had to pay to the Temple (or the equivalent of one more day of work.) With over 2 million people needing tax money for the Passover, these money changers became very rich. And of course the priests benefited from a percentage of their income! So all day long people were lined up before these booths trying to change their money and arguing with the money changers that things were not fair.

3. The Old Testament also commanded that any animal sacrifice to God had to be without defect. (Lev. 1:3) It was the responsibility of the priests to determine which animal was defective and which animal was pure enough to be sacrificed. So the priests came up with a good idea. "Why not have the pure animals ready for the worshippers so that they can buy them without worrying about whether the animal was good enough?" they thought. So the priests authorized their friends to bring sacrifice animals (cattle, goats, sheep, pigeons) into the Court of the Gentiles and sell them to the worshippers. But it was not long until the high priests saw this as a way to make money. If a worshipper brought his own sacrifice animal from his home or which he bought from a cheaper place, the priest would claim that the sacrifice was not good enough. So everyone was required to buy from these merchants in the Court of the Gentiles. Of course these merchants charged high prices for these approved animals. And of course the priests made even more money off of the percentage which they charged these merchants.

So rather than encouraging the Gentiles to worship, the priests turned their worship area into a marketplace. And rather than seeing their ministry as a way to serve others, the priests looked for ways to make extra money off of worshippers. (This is similar to how some try to charge visitors in the marketplace extra money for the produce.) The priests who were supposed to be leading the worship of God were not thinking how to encourage the people to worship. Rather their attitude was "How can we use this situation to benefit ourselves?" Can't this same attitude impact us today? How easy it is for us to begin to minister for the "gift" which churches give us when they invite us to speak or sing! There are some choir members or speakers who get angry when the gift they receive in a church is not as large as they expected. Or there are other ministers who will only go to the churches who give them large gifts. This attitude reveals that we are trying to gain money from our ministry rather than minister out of a desire to serve. We have become like the "priests" and "merchants" with whom Jesus became so angry!

Q. 24. Describe ways that church ministers' and choir members' motives can change so they are serving to receive benefits rather than to serve others.

When Jesus saw all of this commotion in the Court of the Gentiles, he grabbed some ropes probably used to tie up the sheep and cattle, made a whip, and started whipping the sellers and the animals, driving them all out the Court of the Gentiles. He turned over the tables filled with money. With a loud, angry voice he shouted "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

Why was Jesus so angry?

First, he was no doubt angry that his Father's house of worship was treated with irreverence. When we worship we come before the great God of the universe. We should only do this with reverence. When we come to church, if we are talking and laughing, or if we only come out of ritual, or if we have not prepared our hearts, we are coming before God with irreverence. Our lives have become like the marketplace of the Temple, not suitable to worship God in reverence and awe. (See Heb. 12:28-29)

Second, Jesus was angry that the noise and merchants kept Gentiles from being able to worship. God's desire is for all people to be able to worship him. (See Mk. 11:17) In the midst of the marketplace of the Temple it was impossible for any Gentile to come in a spirit of worship and honor God.

Third, some scholars think Jesus was seeking to show the Jews that animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were no longer able to bring forgiveness of sins. The Old Testament prophets had warned that

God was not satisfied simply by the sacrifice of animals. (Is. 1:10-17; Amos 5:21-25) Now Jesus was saying through his actions that worship through animal sacrifices in the temple was a thing of the past. (Heb. 8:13) Only through his sacrifice for the sins of people could a sinner be reconciled with God and his sins forgiven. And worship came from hearts, it is not based upon external rituals. We too can become so attracted to the externals of worship; to a large and fancy church, or choirs with beautiful clothes, a large keyboard – that we forget that what really matters to God is what is happening in the hearts of people. Could Jesus be angry with our worship because what is happening in our hearts is not the true worship that he desires?

Jesus' actions of driving out the money changes brought two opposite responses. For Jesus' disciples who had come with him from Galilee, their minds went to the Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would be overcome with a zeal for God's house and how people worship God. (Ps. 69:9) They grew in their understanding of Jesus as the Messiah.

For the majority of people, especially the religious leaders, they got angry and confronted Jesus. They wanted Jesus to prove that he was a true prophet by doing a miracle. For the first time Jesus clashed with the religious leaders. Throughout his ministry and culminating with his death, it was these religious leaders who represented the "Jews" who strongly resisted the ministry of Jesus. These religious leaders recognized that Jesus' actions did demonstrate his claim that he was the Messiah. But they had seen many false messiahs, people who can come claiming to be the messiah only to disappoint the people. "Prove to us that you are the Messiah. Show us a miraculous sign" they told Jesus.

But Jesus never did miracles simply to prove that he was the Messiah. He had no desire to be known as a miracle worker. His miracles were responses to the problems people were facing. As he did his miracles, for those who were perceptive they were "signs" or "proofs" that he was the Messiah. But he did not want to flaunt his power. (Note: This is very different from some so-called miracle workers who go around proclaiming that they are miracle workers seeking to demonstrate their power, even if they do it in the name of Jesus. Many people come to these miracle workers to be amazed by the miracles, not to meet with Jesus and become his followers.)

Jesus answered these religious leaders with a prophetic riddle which no one initially understood. "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." he said. The religious leaders misunderstood the riddle, thinking he meant the physical Temple behind them. It had taken over 46 years for the Temple complex to reach this level of development. How could Jesus rebuild it in three days? Three years later, the Jews would use this statement of Jesus to accuse Jesus of blasphemy against the Temple.

So what did Jesus mean by this riddle?

1. Primarily, Jesus was talking about his physical body. The Jewish religious leaders would destroy his physical body on the cross. But because of the resurrection three days later, Jesus would rebuild the Temple of his body. It was only after the resurrection that Jesus' disciples understood what Jesus' riddle meant.

2. Second, perhaps Jesus was also talking about the worship system of the Jews. The physical Temple represented the Jewish way of worship through animal sacrifices. That system was to be destroyed when Jesus died on the cross, replaced three days later at the resurrection of Jesus and a new worship system

which Jesus would initiate. Jesus would soon tell a Samaritan woman that the time is coming when people would no longer worship in a specific city or Temple like Jerusalem, but in their hearts, in spirit and truth. (Jn. 4:21-24) The death and resurrection of Jesus replaced the Old Testament sacrifice system with the ability of all people to come to God through Jesus Christ. (See Heb. 8:13; 10:11-14)

Following the feast of Passover was a seven-day festival called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus stayed in Jerusalem for that celebration as well. He did do miracles which caused people to get excited and make professions of belief and follow Jesus. Jesus soon became very popular because of these miracles. But following Jesus because of the amazing things they saw did not bring saving faith. These popular disciples of Jesus did not come to Jesus with an understanding that they were sinners and that Jesus was their Savior. Nor did they come to Jesus with a willingness to submit to him as their Lord. Jesus knew that it would not be long until many of these would abandon him when things got difficult. Not too many years later, when Jesus presented some difficult truths, all of these who followed him out of the selfish desires to enjoy his miracles abandoned him and returned home. (See Jn. 6:66) So Jesus did not get excited by the large crowds of people who were following him.

There are two important lessons which John wanted to teach in Jn. 2:22-24.

First, John wanted to warn people that it is very hard for any of us to know whether or not someone has true faith. Only Jesus can see a person's heart and know if their faith is true. When people raise their hands in church saying they believe in Jesus, we can only see their external actions. So we can't really say "Today these have become children of God." All we can say is they have made a profession to believe in Jesus. Only Jesus knows what type of faith is in their hearts. There are two things which reveal to us whether this faith is real or not. First, there is a changed life. Paul said that if "anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things have passed away and all has become new." (2 Cor. 5:17) If there are no changes, especially changes of character, we have reason to doubt the reality of their faith. Second, there is perseverance in the faith. John would later testify that there were some who had seemed to be Christians but left the fellowship to follow false teachings. Their leaving revealed that they were not really part of the fellowship from the beginning. (1 Jn. 2:19) What John was saying is that people can seem to believe. But when they fall into false teaching and leave the true faith, they often reveal that their initial act of belief was not real.

Second, John was warning Christians not to put too much emphasis upon miracles. Miracles do play an important role in the church. They are primarily acts of compassion where Jesus seeks to help those who are suffering, just like he did miracles while on earth. And they are also signs encouraging people to believe in Jesus. Especially when a church is first starting in a new area, God will do many miracles to verify the reality of Christianity to those who follow Jesus. But miracles have a negative side to them. It is easy for people to become like the Jews, following Jesus for the miracles and earthly benefits which they think Jesus will bring them. But when those miracles no longer take place, or when they don't get the benefits they expect, or when persecution comes, those who base their faith upon miracles soon fall away from following Jesus. It is important for us to make sure people move beyond following Jesus for miracles or physical benefits to belief in Jesus because he alone is the Savior for their sins and the Lord of their lives. True faith follows Jesus whether or not those earthly benefits are seen. As the apostles later told Jesus "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn. 6:68-69) Or as Job confessed "Though he slay me, I will follow him." (Job 13:15) Or as Habakkuk testified "Though there are no sheep in the stall... yet I will rejoice in God my Savior." (Hab. 3:17-18) Is your faith based upon the benefits you hope Jesus will

bring you? Or is it based upon an awareness that Jesus alone is the Savior, the one who brings you spiritual forgiveness and gives you eternal life? Has your faith caused you to submit to God as your Lord, the one with full rights to do anything he wants in your life? That is the type of faith Jesus wants to see in our lives. In fact, we will see that Jesus often made difficult demands upon those wishing to follow him- telling them that they have to take up their cross of difficulty first. Perhaps it would be better for us to not hurry people into faith in Jesus but fully explain to them that there is a cost to following Jesus. Only after they have decided to count the cost should a person choose to follow Jesus. Jesus preferred small numbers of people who were totally determined to follow Jesus over large crowds who were caught up in the emotional excitement of the moment.

Q. 25. a) Describe how many people "believe" in Jesus because of miracles or some expected physical benefit. b) What happens to the faith of many of these when the expected miracle does not happen or when life is difficult for them? c) Describe why it is important for church ministers to clearly explain to people seeking to follow Jesus to warn them that there is a cost, that there will be difficulties in following Jesus.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) List the three temptations that Jesus faced. Discuss what sin each of the temptations sought to cause Jesus to commit. b) Discuss ways those same three temptations are similar to temptations church leaders face today. c) Contrast how Jesus overcame Satan's temptations and different ways we try to overcome temptation today. What can we learn about overcoming temptation from Jesus?

2. a) John the Baptist was a model church leader. Discuss various lessons we can learn from John the Baptist and his attitude towards ministry and the success of others. b) Give some examples of how the lack of those characteristics is causing harm to the church today.

3. a) List some things which we can learn about being a witness from the early disciples of Jesus. b) Describe why most believers are reticent to share about Jesus to their neighbors. c) What do you think church leaders can do to get more people to be like Andrew and Nathaniel?

4. a) Describe Jesus' first miracle. Why did he do it? b) We live in days when many want to be known as miracle workers. Compare Jesus' attitude towards his ability to do miracles to the attitude many current healers have. What do you think Jesus' attitude towards miracles can teach us about miracles?

5. a) Why did Jesus get angry in the Temple? b) Discuss situations we face today when we should also get angry. c) List situations when we should not get angry but often do. What is the difference between situations where we should not get angry and situations where we should get angry?

LESSON SEVEN

FIRST DAY

INTRODUCTION TO JESUS' PUBLIC LIFE AND MINISTRY

Q. 1. Suppose Jesus had come to live and work in Ethiopia. a) What do you think he would have looked like? b) What do you think his character would be like? c) Whom do you think Jesus would have chosen to spend most of his time with? Where would he have chosen his friends from? Whom would he refuse to relate closely to? d) What type of ministry do you think he would have focused on?

Most of us have grown up knowing about Christianity. We are part of a nation which for almost 1700 years has followed Christianity. So the stories of the Gospel are familiar to all of us. Unfortunately, when we are too familiar with something, the amazingness of the story is lost to us. And we begin to imagine Jesus to be similar to how our culture pictures an ideal religious person. Following are just some of the images that we may have about Jesus:

- Jesus looked like an Ethiopian from the north with very light skin and fine features. Or perhaps he looked like a Westerner with long straight brown hair and brown eyes.
- Jesus and Mary were so special and holy that they had a ring of glory surrounding their heads.
- Jesus would be so holy that he never got angry or frustrated. And of course he would never have laughed or joked with people. Instead, he would have had a serene expression on his face, living in love and peace with all people. Or perhaps Jesus was like a strong preacher or prophet who went around openly condemning people for their sin, threatening them with hell if they did not change how they lived.
- Jesus would never have gotten tired, or sick, or hungry. And of course he would never be tempted to sexual sin or pride or any of the other sins we struggle with. Because he was special to God, he would have been rich and enjoyed special blessings.
- Jesus would have chosen to relate to the religious leaders who are very holy. He would choose people who have attended seminary or a theological college to be his friends, people known to be "spiritual." And he would never relate to those who were social outcasts. He would never be seen in a bar, or with the prostitutes, or with the potters.
- Jesus held large crusades where he healed people and demonstrated his power seeking to amaze the crowds.
- Most likely we all have a wrong idea of what Jesus was like. This is because we allow the pictures and videos we see of Jesus or our cultural understandings to determine how we think he was like and how he acted. But if we study the Gospel stories, we will probably gain a very different view of Jesus. Before we begin to examine the details of the public life of Jesus, we will summarize what the Gospels tell us about Jesus. Hopefully this will give us a clearer picture of who Jesus is and how he ministered on earth. Remember, as Christians we claim to be "followers of Jesus." That is what the word "Christianity" means.

Since a follower of Jesus is someone who seeks to believe like Jesus believed and act like Jesus acted, we must have a more accurate picture of our Lord. Only then will we bring him the honor that he deserves.

1. What did Jesus look like?

Every culture tends to assume Jesus looked like their understanding of a perfect man. So if you are from Korea, your mental image of Jesus is of a perfect Korean man. Or if you are from the west, your image of Jesus tends to be that Jesus looked like a handsome western man. And if you are from Ethiopia, probably you will think Jesus looked like an Ethiopian. Since light skinned Ethiopians from the north are generally viewed as being the most handsome, many people think that Jesus would have looked like a northern Ethiopian, not like an Ethiopian from the deep south who is more dark skinned and has African features. But all of these ideas are false. In truth we do not know what Jesus looked like. There were no pictures of Jesus in church history for over 500 years after the death of Jesus. The pictures of Jesus which we see from the past or even those we hang on our wall today tend to wrongly show Jesus either like a European or like someone from our culture.

Amazingly, the Gospels never give us any indication what Jesus looked like. We can learn two things from the Bible.

First, Jesus was a Jew. So he would have looked like a Jew- both in facial features and in dress. This means that he would have had facial features similar to the Arabs, his skin color would have looked like an Arab or Palestinian, and he would have dressed more like the Arabs of the Middle East than to Africans or Europeans.

Second, we are told in prophecy that Jesus was a very ordinary person. Isaiah 53:2 tells us that there was nothing in the outward appearance of Jesus to cause us to think he was special. He was not more handsome than we are. He did not have a special ring of glory around his head indicating his holiness. None of us would have picked Jesus out of a crowd and said "There is the Son of God. He is the one I want to follow." Even John the Baptist was not able to recognize Jesus as someone special until he saw the Holy Spirit come upon him. (Jn. 1:31-33)

2. What was Jesus' personality like?

We often picture Jesus as calmly going through his life on earth with little emotion. He never got angry, or frustrated, or sad. But the Bible shows that Jesus openly demonstrated the full range of human emotions.

- Jesus was filled with joy and laughter. He was not a hermit who did not get close to people. Nor did he walk around with a stern or serious face that drove people away from him. Rather, people enjoyed inviting Jesus to their celebrations. The Pharisees even accused Jesus of being a glutton and a drunkard. (Mt. 11:19)

- Jesus was excited when he saw his followers understand spiritual truths. (Lk. 10:21)

- Jesus became sad when people refused to accept him and his rule over their lives. (e.g. Lk. 13:34-35)

- Jesus had a tender heart. His eyes were often filled with tears as he saw people suffer. He cried over their pain. (e.g. Jn. 11:35; Lk. 19:41-44) When he met people who were suffering, we are told that he was moved with compassion. (Mk. 1:40-44) Jesus did not do miracles to impress people but as a result of compassion to specific problems people faced. So he raised a woman's only son from death knowing that son was the only way the widow would have a hope for a good future. Or he listened to the cry for help of lepers who were outcasts from society, or of a woman who bled for 38 years, or blind beggars, etc.

- Jesus was filled with deep sorrow and anguish. As he faced the cross, humanly he did not want to suffer the pain that he knew was coming. (Mk. 13:32-34)

- Jesus longed for human companionship. We are told that one reason he chose the apostles was so that they could be with him. (Mk. 3:14) And when he faced his trial in Gethsemane, he asked his closest friends to be with him. (Mk. 14:33)

- Jesus was very patient with the ordinary people, even sinners and social outcasts like prostitutes and tax collectors. But he got very angry with religious leaders whose actions hindered people from relating to God. He was angry with them for making up a lot of rules which kept ordinary people from thinking they could get close to God. Or he got angry at them when they taught that God was an angry God seeking to punish sinners rather than a God of love seeking to spiritually heal them. So he angrily accused the Pharisees and Sadducees who today would have been like the bishop, or heads of denominations, or graduates of theological colleges. He even took a whip and drove out merchants who were hindering the spirit of worship in the Temple and financially abusing people in the name of religion.

- Jesus loved people. The rabbis of Jesus' time emphasized that they should be aloof from people, not close and friendly with them. But it did not matter to Jesus if people were powerful like Nicodemus or just ordinary fishermen; religious like the Pharisees or open sinners like the tax collectors; male or female; adults or children whom most Jews thought were unimportant; educated like Matthew or uneducated like most of the disciples. Jesus was friendly to all of them. Jesus seemed especially close to those whom society usually classified as not worthy of attention. So he focused his ministry on social outcasts like lepers, or politically unacceptable people like tax collectors, or poor women who had no one to care for them, or people from backward parts of the country like Galilee, or people from despised tribes like the Samaritans. Even Jesus' enemies had to admit that Jesus was not influenced by an individual's position or wealth. (Mt. 22:16) People knew that Jesus loved them. So they enjoyed being close to him, touching him, and eating with him. They felt his love in everything he did.

Jesus was on one hand "at home" in the world. So he was fully human and as a human he joined into the society of people. He never tried to be a hermit separated from people. Nor did he try to isolate himself from sinners. Every normal experience we have, Jesus experienced. He got rained on when he walked; he got dirty from the mud; he got hungry when he did not eat; and he got tired when he did not sleep. God did not make life any easier for Jesus just because He was His Son.

But he must have also always felt different from all other people, never fully part of society. Jesus was sinless and therefore different. Everywhere he turned there were sins which hurt him; injustices by religious or political leaders; anger of neighbors against each other; sexual sins; sins of the tongue, sins of pride, and sins of prejudice. As the only person who was totally sinless, this must have not only hurt him to watch, but made him feel different. Friendship usually involves doing things together with no sense of

embarrassment. But when people were with Jesus, gossiping about the friends or wanting to get drunk, or doing hurtful things to others- Jesus would refuse to participate. So he would always be seen by others as the "different" one. Yet sinners were drawn to him.

Q. 2. Contrast how you have always pictured Jesus with what we listed above. a) How is it similar? b) How is it different? c) Describe how Jesus' personality is different from how most church leaders act today. d) If church leaders were to be more like Jesus, give specific examples of ways that they would need to change.

3. What was Jesus' ministry like?

We often picture Jesus holding large crusades preaching and especially healing and doing miracles. We are tempted to compare him to some of the famous healers seen in the church today. But a close look at Jesus shows his ministry to have been very different from what happens in many churches.

Jesus was a dynamic speaker. He was not dynamic in the way we often think of energetic speakers today- for there is no indication that he shouted, used dramatic gestures, etc. There was something in Jesus teaching that so impressed people that they were willing to go without food for three days just to listen to him! Unlike most of us who are teachers, Jesus did not pass on theoretical truths. Rather, he insisted that truth that mattered would change how people live. He was also a very creative teacher. He used parables and stories from peoples' ordinary life to teach spiritual truths. As a result his followers could remember Jesus' teaching years later since they could remember the stories and parables which he told. People realized that something was different in Jesus' teaching. He did not quote other famous religious leaders or books as the source of his authority. He simply said "the Old Testament says this, but I say to you...." (Mt. 5:21-22) People were amazed that his teaching was with authority lacking in other teachers. Jesus' teaching was primarily filled with the love and grace of God, not punishment. He told people that God was like a Father who longed for his child to return home, not a God who is holding a stick ready to punish people. But Jesus also was strict in his demands on people. He went beyond the Law and asked people to get their heart right. For instance he did not only focus upon adultery, but lustful looks. And he told people to think carefully before they decided to follow him- for his way was the narrow way. Following him required death to self and would often be the road of persecution which could bring death. He did not want masses of people to follow him. He was satisfied with a few strongly committed people. Although all people believe that Jesus was a good man and a good teacher, unbelievers today continue to struggle with how Jesus openly declaring that he was God, the Messiah whom the Jews were waiting for.

Jesus performed miracles as if they were a normal part of his life. Although 1/3 of the Gospel stories deal with miracles, Jesus did not seem to emphasize them. When he first started doing his miracles, those who grew up with him in Nazareth could not understand how he could be different from them. "How can he suddenly do miracles? Where did the wisdom to teach and the power to do miracles come from?" they wondered. (Mat 13:53-56) Jesus never allowed miracles to become the focus of his ministry. When people emphasized too much his miracles, he would often leave that area and go somewhere else. (Mk. 1:35-39) Or when he healed someone, he would often tell them not to tell anyone. (Mk. 1:43-44) When people demanded that he do a miracle, he would refuse. He did not use his miracles as a way to impress others. If people showed outright disbelief, he would refuse to do miracles. (Mt. 13:58) Usually his miracles were done to meet a specific need of a person and out of compassion, not to reveal his power. Not once did he refuse to do a miracle if someone asked. He never pronounced healing on masses of people as we would have if we had the power. Although these miracles brought temporary popularity, the miracles did not

produce the lasting faith that we would expect. How different Jesus' attitude towards miracles is from how many famous healers today work!

Q. 3. Compare how and why Jesus did miracles to how many famous miracle workers seek to do miracles today.

Jesus was not concerned about gaining material possessions. He never asked for money for any of his ministries. He had no home where he could live. He had so little money that he had to borrow a coin to use it to teach others a truth (Mt. 22:19) and performed a miracle to pay his taxes. (Mt. 17:20) His disciples were so poor that they would eat grain left in the fields for the poor people. (Mt. 12:1) Even when meeting with the rich, not once do we see him asking for money to help him and his disciples. On the other hand, he did accept the help of those, usually women, who wanted to financially assist him. (Lk. 8:1-3)

Jesus refused to let cultural traditions establish what he did and did not do. For instance, Jews placed a lot of emphasis on ritual cleansing, but he and his disciples openly refused to practice these traditions. He touched lepers and dead bodies which Jews taught made them unclean. Jewish men refused to have anything to do with women, but he would openly meet with women, even prostitutes. Some of his most faithful followers were women. Not only did they financially support him, but when the male disciples fled, they were the ones bold enough to stand by the cross as Jesus died. Jews refused to relate to Samaritans, but he openly met with them, ate with them, stayed with them, and used them as good examples in his stories. He refused to be prejudiced like others.

Jesus focused his efforts on teaching a few well rather than preaching to large crowds of people. We often assume that the more people we preach to or teach the better. We think this way more will hear the Word of God and change will happen more quickly. But rarely does this work well. After years of focusing upon teaching thousands of people or having large conferences, we see little deep spiritual growth in the lives of people. Jesus' approach was the opposite. In Jesus' ministry we see the following:

Those who were in power and authority felt threatened by Jesus. Both the political leaders like the high priest and Sadducees and the religious leaders like the Pharisees saw Jesus as an indirect threat to their leadership. The High Priest and religious leaders probably feared Jesus mostly because they were afraid that he would upset the Romans who would then punish the leaders of Israel. The Pharisees disliked Jesus because he did not have the same view about their traditions and was leading people away from following their teachings which focused upon external practices rather than getting their hearts right before God. Throughout the public ministry of Jesus it was these leaders who strongly resisted Jesus and they eventually plotted his death, working with the Romans to have Jesus crucified.

The crowds of people were attracted to Jesus primarily because of his miracles and the benefits they could receive from him. Most people were not willing to change their lives to become serious followers of Jesus. Jesus would teach them when he had the opportunity. But he did not put much trust in their "faith" in him. (Jn. 2:23-25) Jesus had little interest in being popular with the people. When Jesus' teachings got increasingly more difficult, most of these people would no longer follow Jesus. In fact, they would listen to the religious leaders and eventually join them in crying "Crucify him."

There was a smaller group of followers. Some have estimated that there were probably 100 who were committed to following Jesus constantly as his disciples. Jesus would teach these disciples more fully

than the crowds. It was to these that Jesus often talked about the cost of being his followers, seeking to get them even more committed, warning them that they were to carry their crosses as well. Eventually he would choose 70 of them to send out two by two to witness throughout all of the towns in Judea telling people to get ready for the kingdom of God. (Lk. 10:1)

There were 12 close followers whom Jesus specifically chose. (The 100 disciples chose to follow Jesus themselves. But this close group were specifically chosen by Jesus.) He called them "apostles," or representatives sent to minister on behalf of Jesus with his authority. It was these closer disciples who left all that they had to follow Jesus. People like Matthew left his profitable work as a tax collector to be one of the poor followers of Jesus, or Peter, Andrew, James and John who left successful work as fishermen. In choosing to follow Jesus, these 12 were accepting a life of poverty. These 12 men were an interesting mix of people. Eleven of them were from Galilee, the part of Palestine classified by Jews from Judea as the backward, irreligious region of Palestine. Only Judas Iscariot was from Judea. One of these 12, Simon the Zealot, was probably a freedom fighter seeking independence from Rome. Matthew came from a type of work which was despised by all Jews. Amazingly, not one of these 12 was from the respectable type of people (theologically trained) like the Pharisees. None were considered rich and powerful. Instead, in the minds of the rich and religious leaders, they were "uneducated." (Acts 4:13) Jesus knowingly chose his key leaders from ordinary people. Jesus worked closely with these 12. He knew that the "success" of Christianity depended upon these ordinary people who would lead the church after he had returned to heaven.

Jesus chose three apostles, Peter, James and John, to be his closest friends, and with whom he worked most closely. He would allow only them to see certain miracles which he did not do before the others. Or he took them to the Mount of Transfiguration, leaving the other disciples at the bottom of the mountain. Like us, Jesus needed close friends. And Jesus knew that these three would have the greatest impact upon the early church, so he prepared them most carefully.

Jesus had one disciple who was his closest friend. The Apostle John became known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." (Jn. 13:23) We don't know why John became Jesus' closest friend. Did he give himself most fully to Jesus?

Q. 4. a) If Jesus was in Ethiopia today, to which class of society do you think he would belong? Explain your answer. b) What do you think was required to become one of the inner groups of followers of Jesus? c) What would need to change in your life for you to be a close follower of Jesus like John or Peter?

Q. 5. a) Contrast Jesus' personality to what we think an "ideal" spiritual person is like. What things did Jesus do that would earn him our respect? What things did he do that we would question and even reprimand? What things in your personality would you need to change to become more like Jesus? b) Contrast Jesus' ministry style from how we think church ministers should minister today. What is similar? What is different? What changes would come in our ministry if we were to minister by following Jesus' example?

We all claim to be followers of Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus means that we try to resemble him in how we act and how we minister. But as we study the life of Jesus, we quickly see major differences between Jesus and us today. Would we welcome Jesus in our churches, or would we treat him like the Pharisees did? When he did not keep some of our church rules, or when he openly ministered to prostitutes or other socially unacceptable people, as church elders would we expel him as too morally

liberal for us? We put our hope in the educated and the rich and the famous. But Jesus never sought out these type of people. They had the most difficult time following Jesus. Instead, he looked to the common people, and even to the social outcasts as his key disciples. And Jesus did not put an emphasis upon the numbers of people who followed him, thinking that the more who followed him the better. He never made belief and following him easy. Rather, he openly taught people to carefully think through what it means to be a disciple of Jesus before they claimed to be his follower. To be his disciple would involve a life of difficulty and persecution. It was a narrow road. (Mt. 7:13-14) And it was to these willing to give up everything to follow Jesus whom Jesus focused his attention upon. I wonder how many would be in our churches today if we put such demands upon people? Would the majority of our church members turn away from Jesus saying "what you say is too difficult for us?" (Jn. 6:60-67)

Q. 6. a) What lessons do you see in the above teachings about Jesus' character which as a follower of Jesus you are to emulate? b) What lessons do you see in the above teachings about Jesus about how a follower of Jesus is to act in the world?

Q. 7. Take 10 minutes to prayerfully reflect upon how you follow Jesus. Are you presently like the crowd, following Jesus because of the benefits you think he will give you? Or are you like the 12 who said "To whom can we go? You alone have the words of eternal life." What evidences do you see in your life that demonstrates which group you would be in?

SECOND DAY

JESUS MEETS WITH NICODEMUS (Jn. 3:1-21)

Q. 8. Read John 3:1-21. a) What type of person was Nicodemus? b) What time of the day did he come to visit? Why do you think he came at that time of day? c) Summarize in your words the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus. d) Using Jesus' teachings, list the major truths that are involved in the Gospel which we must share with non-believers.

We don't know how long Jesus worked in Jerusalem at this time. The first three Gospels do not mention this visit by Jesus, and John summarizes this time simply by saying that Jesus did many miracles. Seeing the miracles, many Jews became excited and started following Jesus. The Pharisees were also closely watching Jesus to see if in fact he was the Messiah they had been expecting. And they were no doubt wondering "Is Jesus a true prophet or a false prophet?" The majority of these Pharisees would soon turn against Jesus, claiming that he was a false prophet working under the power of Satan. (Mt. 12:24) But there was one Pharisee who was deeply impressed with Jesus. Although he was not an open follower of Jesus, twice Nicodemus supported Jesus. First, he supported Jesus when the Sanhedrin met and declared that Jesus was a false prophet. (Jn. 7:5-52) Second, Nicodemus joined Joseph of Arimathea, who was another upper class secret follower of Jesus, to get permission to take the body of Jesus down from the cross and bury him. (Jn. 19:39-40)

In today's story on Nicodemus we learn that salvation is the result of a work of God on the heart of an individual, bringing him a radically different understanding of his relationship with God which leads to a changed life. Jesus called this experience the "new birth."

Who was willing to follow Jesus? The Gospel stories show that usually it was the common people who openly followed Jesus. The religious leaders and the rich and powerful political leaders did not want to get

close to him. But the story of Nicodemus is an example of one important person who did follow Jesus. It was to Nicodemus, with his theological training, that Jesus gave the clearest explanation of what brings salvation. From the story we can learn four things about Nicodemus:

1. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. This means that Nicodemus had a deep desire to honor God. There were only 6000 Pharisees in all of Palestine. To be a Pharisee, Nicodemus had to demonstrate a zealous desire to obey the law no matter how inconvenient it might be for him. Not only did he have to obey the more than 400 clearly written laws in the Old Testament, but he had to commit himself to obey fully the thousands of added laws which religious scholars had made over the years. These scholars, like Nicodemus, believed that God's will for every part of life could be found in the laws, and it was up to them to determine exactly how to submit their life to the laws. For instance, they knew that the Old Testament told them to keep the Sabbath holy and not do any work. But the Pharisees wanted to know what exactly was work and what was not work. They really wanted to obey God totally and be blessed by him. So religious scholars, like the Pharisees, made up rules which determined exactly what it meant to not work on the Sabbath. For instance, they said that for someone to take a rope and tie up their donkey would be work. But if they tied up their shoes, that was not work. If a person walked less than a kilometer, that was not work. But if they walked more than one kilometer, then it was work. Unfortunately, Nicodemus and other Pharisees began to define their relationship with God based upon how to keep rules. They did not realize that God was more concerned with their hearts. Whereas we need to respect Nicodemus' desire to fully obey God, we should be saddened that he, like many people today, focus so much on keeping certain regulations without ever coming close to relating personally to the living God.

Q. 9. Describe how people of other religions can focus more on keeping certain rules and regulations than relating to God and what happens in their hearts. b) Describe how some evangelicals can also focus so much upon external obedience to certain rules that they no longer encourage people to examine what is happening in their hearts or how real their relationship with God is.

2. Nicodemus was well-trained theologically. To be a Pharisee who was a member of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Court) meant he had to be deeply trained in the Old Testament laws and the traditions of the elders. If Nicodemus was in Ethiopia today, he would have completed a graduate degree in theology. Although he knew the Old Testament well, like many people, he was not able to understand how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus as the Messiah.

3. Nicodemus was a "ruler." This means that Nicodemus was one of 70 men who sat on the Sanhedrin which was the Supreme Court of the Jews. This Supreme Court had religious jurisdiction over all Jews no matter where they lived. If this Court said that a person was a false teacher, then Jews throughout the whole Roman Empire were obligated to treat the person as a false teacher. (This is why Saul, later known as the Apostle Paul, had the right to go to Damascus and arrest Christians for believing on Jesus.) This meant Nicodemus was a very powerful, important man. He would have been in the group which sentenced Jesus to death. (Mt. 26:57-67)

4. Nicodemus was wealthy. We know this because of two facts. First, most of the non-priests sitting on the Sanhedrin were from rich ruling families. Some scholars think that Nicodemus was from one of the most important families in Judea. There are some historical indications that his family was often sent to Rome to negotiate on behalf of the Jews. Second, Nicodemus and Joseph together brought over 45 kilos

of burial spices to use when they buried Jesus. (Jn. 19:39) This amount of spices was very expensive. Nicodemus must have been wealthy to afford this.

Church history has shown that this type of person- a religious leader in a religion that opposes Christianity who thinks he is a good person, wealthy and powerful politically- usually have a difficult time accepting the fact that they need the Gospel. But there are a few, like Nicodemus and Paul, whom God's Spirit moves to put their faith in Jesus Christ.

John, whom some scholars believe was an eyewitness of the meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus, describes what happened. John tells us that Nicodemus came at night. Did Nicodemus come at night since many theological teachers preferred the night for religious discussion. During the day they had work and many interruptions, so it was at night that they could discuss without people interrupting either Nicodemus or Jesus. Or was this because he was afraid of what the other Pharisees would say if they knew that he had visited Jesus? Already the majority of the Pharisees were taking an anti-Jesus stand. Throughout the book of John, we read that Nicodemus was usually afraid to take an open stand for Jesus. He is a negative example of a follower of Jesus who was too afraid to openly share that he believed in Jesus.

Q. 10. a) Describe how today many wealthy, powerful Christians tend to hide their faith out of embarrassment. b) What position do you think a Christian politician should take about whether or not to hide his faith?

Having seen the miracles, Nicodemus and many Jews like him, were forced to admit that Jesus was a holy man sent from God. Nicodemus said that "We know you a teacher who has come from God." He was even willing to call Jesus "Rabbi," a Jewish title of respect reserved for those who were highly respected. [The fact that Nicodemus would call Jesus "Rabbi" is amazing for Pharisees usually looked down upon people like Jesus whom they called "ignorant" since they did not have formal training by respected rabbis.] Nicodemus was impressed by these miracles, but Jesus wanted to point him to a greater miracle, the change of a heart which trust in Jesus would bring.

Like many today, Nicodemus was impressed with the power of miracles which only changes the external situation of a person. They often overlook that the greatest miracle is for a person to become a child of God, saved for eternity. Many people go away from crusades physically healed, but never having their spiritual condition changed. Sadly they miss the greatest miracle of all. And many Christians today get very excited about a miracle of physical healing, but shrug with indifference when God does a miracle in the heart of a person and brings salvation! Have we become like the Jews of Jesus' days who were excited by Jesus' miracles, but indifferent to his spiritual teachings on following Jesus?

No doubt Nicodemus wanted to know more about Jesus and whether or not he was the Messiah who would start the kingdom of God on earth. He came with a sense of pride, thinking he was one of the ones who known the truths of the Old Testament. But it was not long until Jesus showed him how little he really knew about the truths of God's Word. One of the dangers for those who receive theological education is that they often think that they know something and therefore they become proud and look down on others. But this attitude of "I know what is right." is usually a sign that we really do not know the spiritual truths which really matter.

It seems that Nicodemus and Jesus were discussing God's kingdom when Jesus made a confusing statement "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." There are two words here that we must interpret properly if we are to understand what Jesus meant:

1. THE KINGDOM OF GOD: (Matthew uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven." This is because the Jews did not like to use the name "God" because they were afraid that in doing so they would break the command "Do not take the Lord's name in vain." So they would use general terms to refer to God- terms like "heaven." Both phrases "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" mean the same thing.) Although we usually use the word "kingdom" to refer to a nation over which someone rules, for the Jews, the word "kingdom" referred to the reign of a person. So the kingdom of God is where God's will is perfectly done, whether it is heaven or earth. (e.g. Read Mt. 6:10) God's kingdom is anywhere where God reigns. It can be in heaven. It can be in our hearts. To enter the kingdom of God means to become a member of the kingdom God. It means that we allow God and Jesus to be the absolute ruler. He is to be the ruler of our lives and of our church. And one day Jesus will be the absolute ruler of the world. So becoming part of the reign of God is not just a simple act of saying we will believe in Jesus, but where little changes in our lives. Rather, it is the decision on our part to allow God to reign in absolute authority over us. He controls what we believe and do.

Q. 11. a) Do you think most new Christians who are seeking to enter the kingdom of God understand that God wants to reign over their lives in total authority? Explain your answer. b) Examine your own life. 1) List ways that you would say God is ruling over you as king. 2) List ways that you are resisting God's rule over your life. Why do you resist his kingship?

2. BORN AGAIN: Scholars debate what the phrase "born again" means. There are three possible interpretations.

First, in Greek the word can mean to have a complete and radical change in one's life. Gentiles who chose to become Jews and follow the Jewish religion were said to be born again because who they were and how they lived was totally different from what it used to be.

Second, it can mean "born for a second time." This is the meaning which Nicodemus understood.

Third, it can mean "born from above." The Jews used "above" to refer to God. This means that entering the kingdom of God requires an act of God whereby he brings a change in a person's heart.

Unfortunately we use "born again" so often that it has little meaning today. What Jesus was saying is that if anyone wants to enter into the place of blessing under the rule of God it requires a radical change in their lives. But this change is not something we produce ourselves through our own effort. Rather, it is something God must do- it must come from above. This new birth is not a slow change, but a major change. (See 2 Cor. 5:17 & Gal. 6:15 for similar expressions by Paul about the difference Christ makes in our lives.)

As a skilled teacher, Jesus did not only tell someone facts. Rather, he challenged them to think. So Jesus would often make a difficult statement, forcing the person to ask a question of clarification. Jesus would then make another difficult statement, generating more questions until the person was in the position to understand spiritual truths.

Jesus' statement that he must be "born again" caused Nicodemus to be confused. Nicodemus was only thinking in human terms, so he misunderstood Jesus to mean that entrance into the kingdom of God required another human birth. So in one of the most important explanations about salvation in the New Testament, Jesus explains to Nicodemus how this new birth takes place and what results it will bring. Following is a summary of what Jesus taught Nicodemus:

1. It is impossible for a human to bring this radical spiritual rebirth to himself. All the "flesh" can do is produce a human being. (Jn. 3:6) John uses the word "flesh" here to mean what is natural and human in contrast to what is divine and miraculous. It refers to the weakness of humans because they are limited to life on the earth. No one in his own strength can change his character so that he will qualify to enter into God's kingdom. Entering into God's kingdom always requires a miracle, something impossible for humans to accomplish.

2. To be "born again" requires being "born of water and the Spirit." (Jn. 3:3-8) Scholars have different understandings as to what this "water" refers to. There are three major ideas.

First, some scholars think the water refers to a person's physical birth. It refers to the water that surrounds the infant in the mother's womb which bursts just before the baby is born. This is the least likely interpretation.

Second, others think that the water is a reference to the baptism signifying repentance which John the Baptist had been practicing. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus would have been familiar with what John the Baptist was preaching and doing. So Jesus was telling Nicodemus who thought baptism was only for Gentiles or for people who were very sinful that he too had to repent of his sinfulness and demonstrate his repentance with baptism just like everyone else. Just because he was a revered theological leader did not mean he was above repentance and baptism. Since the surrounding passages refer to John the Baptist, this is a good possible interpretation.

Third, other scholars think that Jesus was referring to Old Testament prophecies which refer to water to symbolize the cleansing work God will do on the hearts of people. It is a picture of salvation. (See Ezek. 18:31; 36:26) The Jews believed that when the Messiah came he would bring spiritual cleansing and the Holy Spirit. So Jesus was telling Nicodemus that since he is the Messiah, it was now time for the spiritual cleansing and the Holy Spirit to come. Only then would the real kingdom of God arrive in his life and among the Jews. So Jesus was teaching that before a person could enter into the kingdom of blessing which God has prepared for them, they must repent and have their hearts cleansed of their sin.

But this new birth also requires the Spirit. The word "spirit" could refer to one of three things:

First, the reference to "spirit" could refer to spiritual birth, the spiritual change that comes into our lives when we trust Jesus.

Second, more likely it refers to the Holy Spirit's powerful work in a person's life. As a person believes, the Holy Spirit enters into his heart, cleansing it of sin, and then gives the person the power to live in obedience to God. No longer does a person have to try to obey God in his own power. Rather, now the Holy Spirit gives the person the power to obey God out of love.

Third, it could refer to the presence of the Holy Spirit which God would give to all followers of Jesus. This giving of the Holy Spirit started on the day of Pentecost. As Paul said, if someone does not have the Holy Spirit living in him, he is not a member of Christ. (Rom. 8:9-10)

In the Hebrew and Greek language, the word "Spirit" and "wind" are the same. So Jesus makes a comparison between the two. No one sees "wind" with their eyes. But they can feel the wind on their faces and see the results of the wind as it moves the leaves in the trees. In the same way, the Holy Spirit's work in a person's life is unseen. But we can see the Holy Spirit's presence by indications of a changed life. If there is no change of character, then we have reason to wonder whether or not the Holy Spirit has created a new person.

Q. 12. Make a list of changes you have seen in your life since the Holy Spirit has brought you new birth.

3. Jesus, the Son of Man, has come down from heaven. So he personally knows spiritual realities. (Jn. 3:10-22) Jesus is not like the Pharisees and other religious leaders who can only quote other writers but do not really understand spiritual truths. Therefore Nicodemus needed to listen to Jesus because he knows about heaven and how the realm of the Spirit works, and he alone can clearly explain it to mankind.

Jesus next gives his clearest explanation of the Gospel in any of the four Gospels:

a. Entrance into the kingdom of God brings us "eternal life." Jesus often uses three words to describe what salvation consists of.

First, salvation occurs when we enter the "kingdom of God." Salvation means placing ourselves under the kingly rule of Jesus who then controls our lives and blesses us with his presence and protection.

Second, salvation means becoming children of God. (See Jn. 1:12-13) We no longer relate to God the Father as strangers. Rather, we are now part of his family. Our relationship with God is based upon love. God the Father loves us and works in our lives in a way that is best for us, even if that sometimes includes discipline. (Heb. 12:5-11) But as children of God, we have a relationship where we lovingly obey God. Jesus said that we demonstrate our love for God and for Jesus by obeying his commandments. (Jn. 14:21) We don't love God if we are not living our lives in a way that brings him pleasure.

Third, salvation brings "eternal life." We often think of eternal life as living forever. Although salvation does bring us a life with God which will never end, this word primarily means a quality of life that unsaved people cannot enjoy. That life is one of inner joy and peace not dependent upon external circumstances as we trust God to work everything out for our good. (Jn. 14:27; 16:33; 17:13) It brings a deep sense of peace with God. We no longer cringe before God in fear that he might do something to us. Knowing that he is always ready to forgive, we come before him in reverence, but also with boldness as children of God. We have peace with ourselves, no longer fearing that in some way we will fail to be good enough. Now we trust Jesus to have made us good enough through his death on the cross. We have a close relationship with God that is loving, trusting, reverent, and obedient. And we no longer fear the future or fear death for we know that our life in heaven will be much greater than anything we enjoy now. As followers of Jesus, we enjoy a life that is far greater than even the most rich unbeliever enjoys. Even famous sports people or movie stars with so many of the earthly blessings, reveal through their lives that they have

little joy and purpose to life. But even the poorest Christian can have a sense of peace which those with earthly riches do not have.

b. Entrance into the kingdom of God is possible because of Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus reminded Nicodemus of an Old Testament story to illustrate that God must provide a means for salvation. (Read this story in Num. 21:4-9.) In the Old Testament, when the nation of Israel rebelled against God, God sent poisonous snakes to bite them and cause death. God told Moses to make a brass serpent and raise it high on a pole. Moses commanded the people to look at the brass serpent so that they would be healed. Just raising the serpent up did not save anyone. Each Israelite was responsible to look at the brass serpent for healing. If they obeyed God and did this, they were healed of the poison.

Spiritual salvation is similar. All people, even religious people like Nicodemus, have been bitten by sin, bringing upon themselves the judgment of God which unless cured bring spiritual and eventually eternal death. The only way to avoid this eternal death is for God to provide the medicine. God's medicine was for the Son of Man, Jesus, to leave heaven and come to earth- to become human. But then he had to be "lifted up" on the cross to die for the sins of people. But for the salvation to be effective, each individual had to obey God's command to look to Jesus as the solution for their sins. No one is saved just because Jesus died on the cross. And no one is saved because their parents trusted in Jesus. Each individual has to personally look to Jesus as the source of their salvation.

Jesus called himself God's only Son. Jesus is claiming that he has a unique relationship with God the Father than no one else was able to enjoy. Israel might be called God's son. (Ex. 4:22) Davidic rulers might be called God's son. (2 Sam. 7:14) We might become God's sons when we believe on Jesus. (Jn. 1:12) However, none of these sons are similar to Jesus, who has a special and unique relationship with God the Father. He is divine. But John also referred to the fact that when God, in love, gave his unique Son, he was giving his "only" Son. He did not have a large family with many similar sons. Rather, there was only one such Son, much like Abraham only had Isaac as his unique son. But out of love, God gave the only Son he had. Like Abraham, his choice to sacrifice his Son, was an act of great cost. But whereas God spared Abraham the death of his son and provided a lamb as a sacrifice, God let his Son be killed as a sacrifice for sin.

John calls looking to personally apply Jesus' death to our lives "believing in him." This is another one of the phrases that we often use without understanding what it means. For there to be saving faith, two things are needed:

1) We must know the facts about God, about our sinfulness, and about Jesus' death on our behalf. We must know that Jesus is the only one who can cure our sin and separation from God. We must know that we cannot do anything in our own strength to earn our salvation. Instead, salvation is a gift from God.

2) We must then apply our knowledge. We must stake all of our lives upon what Jesus said about the way of salvation and who he is. We must look only to Jesus as the one who paid for our sins on the cross. This will involve stopping trying to be good enough for God to like us and accept us. But it will also mean that if we are part of a religion that teaches wrong truths about Jesus, we will leave that religion and follow Jesus. Knowing that Jesus is not just our Savior but our Lord, we will lovingly submit our lives to obeying Jesus in all things.

Belief in the Bible always means a life committed to the truths. Abraham demonstrated his faith in God by leaving Ur and going to Canaan. If he had not obeyed, he would not have had faith. In the same way, if we are to have faith in Jesus, this means that we live our lives as if he is what he says he is. He claims to be our only Savior – so we turn away from trying to be saved by our works or by some other type of religion. He also claims to be our Lord- so we enter into a relationship with him and we obey his rule over our lives.

c. Salvation originates in the heart of God, not in the efforts of man. God is not an angry God who wants to punish and destroy all who disobey. Rather he is a God of love. And because he is a God of love, he took upon himself the responsibility to find a solution for the sin of mankind. So he sent Jesus to die for sins.

d. God's gift of salvation is available for all people. Everyone needs God to save them. They might be wealthy, educated, from the right tribe (a Jew), and religious like Nicodemus. Or they might be poor, uneducated, openly sinful, and from a tribe despised by others like the Samaritan woman in John 4. It does not matter to God. Every person needs God to provide for their salvation which he has done through Jesus. No one is good enough to not need Jesus' death. And no one is too bad to be outside of God's offer of salvation. God wants to give his free salvation to everyone.

e. Whether or not a person receives the benefits of the death of Jesus depends upon their choice of what to do with Jesus. People either separate themselves from darkness of a life of sin to the light of following Jesus. Or they separate themselves from the light of Jesus so that they will live in darkness of their rebellious sins. There is no middle ground. God does not force a person to trust Jesus as his Savior and submit to Jesus in obedience. It is always dependent upon the free choice of a person. God does not want to force us to love him. For love to be authentic love, it must be given freely. So a person can make the choice to turn to Jesus for salvation. Or they can refuse to turn to Jesus for salvation for his sins. If a person chooses to trust Jesus, then they are able to get God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life. But if they choose to refuse to trust Jesus, then they do not receive the gift God wants to give them. In one way we could say God never sends a person to hell. Rather, each person chooses to go to hell by refusing to believe Jesus. One person has said no one will be in hell who hasn't chosen to be there. "I don't want God and I don't want Jesus. I don't want to allow them to have anything to do with my life" the unbeliever says. God honors their choice and puts them in the only place his glorious, gracious presence is not found, which is in hell.

f. Until someone believes on Jesus, they stand under the "condemnation" of God. Just like eternal life is both a present quality of life and a future unending life, so also if a person refuses to trust in Jesus, they already face the judgment of God and will face the eternal judgment of God. People either enjoy God's blessed "eternal life" or God's "condemnation" now. To have a condemned type of life means a confused, purposelessness, alienation from God and each other, futility in living, and the loss of everything that makes living worthwhile.

God's judgment is both "indirect" and "direct." It is indirect in that the unbeliever knowingly refuses the quality of life that Jesus wanted to give them causing their own harm. So they don't enjoy joy and peace in their hearts. They bear the pain of life without hope. Their lives are filled with restlessness, bitterness of broken relationships, tribal and political wars, hopelessly looking for something to bring them pleasure only to find that everything is as Solomon said "vanity." (Eccl. 1:2) And their life of sin (drunkenness,

adultery, sexual promiscuity) brings upon them the judgment of broken families with divorce, destroyed marriages where there is no unity or trust, and diseases like AIDS. (See Rom. 1:18-32 for a description of how indirect judgment is seen in mankind.)

But they are also under the "direct" judgment of God. Although God can directly punish them in this life, the major place of punishment will be after death. They have chosen to live their lives either in rebellion to God or indifference to him. So he places them in hell where there will be none of his blessings present. There will be no love, no gracious rain, and none of the other blessings from God which he constantly gives us. In its place there will be great punishment of every kind. There will be constant hatred, struggles, fighting- worse than any pain that they have faced on earth. This unending punishment is symbolized in the New Testament by fire and anguish.

g. Why do people not want to believe on Jesus? If the gift of eternal life is free and if the life which Jesus wants to give us is better than anything we can imagine, both now and in heaven, surely everyone will want to believe. But that is not what happens. Instead, we see most people turning their backs on God's gift. Jesus told Nicodemus this was because when a person comes to Jesus, the condition of their inner lives is always revealed. For those who accept Jesus' salvation, they come to Jesus and his light of moral purity and say "I am so evil. I need your cleansing." Because they openly admit their sinfulness, they get healing. This is similar to how we must first tell the doctor our disease before he can know what medicine to give us.

But this makes most people uncomfortable. They prefer to keep their sins hidden. They like the darkness of controlling their own lives and doing what they want rather than living in obedience to God. So because they never come to Jesus for the cleansing of their hearts, they are never cleansed. They refuse to admit their sinfulness and moral sickness to Jesus, so he cannot give them the medicine to heal their hearts.

The difference between whether or not a person is saved or lost does not lie in how many sins they commit. It does not depend upon being part of the right religion, or the right tribe, or being educated. Nicodemus has no more advantage than the Samaritan woman about whom we will study tomorrow. The difference between whether or not a person enjoys eternal life is how they relate to the light, Jesus Christ. If they embrace the light, all of their sins, no matter how great, are immediately forgiven and the person becomes a child of God. But no matter how good they are or respectable in the eyes of other people, if they refuse the light, they will find themselves under the condemnation of God.

Q. 13. a) How well do you think most people in your church understand what it is that brings them salvation? Explain your answer. b) When Christians introduce a person to Jesus, what do many of them focus on besides salvation from their sins? c) Write a summary in your own words what a person must know and do in order to become saved.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S RESPONSE TO JESUS' GROWING POPULARITY (Jn. 3:22-36)

Q. 14. Read Jn. 3:22-36. a) What did Jesus and his disciples do after they left Jerusalem? b) What was the attitude of the followers of John the Baptist to Jesus' increased popularity? c) What was John the Baptist's response to Jesus' increased popularity?

One of the greatest tests a church leader will face is the desire to become and stay popular. When God brings another gifted person into the church, as the leader watches his popularity decrease, often jealousy will grow in their hearts. They forget that God is the one who raises up a person and gives him a certain responsibility and makes him successful in ministry. Leaders often begin to think that they have built the ministry themselves and that it is up to them to protect that ministry. But because God is the one who chooses to use us (2 Cor. 3:4-6), God always has the right to replace us and raise up someone else and make them even more effective than we were. It is a rare church leader who can humbly accept the changes in God's plans and let God use anyone he wants for the furtherance of his kingdom.

John the Baptist was uniquely chosen by God as the forerunner for the Messiah. In that ministry, God gave him great success and many people came to listen to him and repented of their sins. But shortly after the baptism of Jesus, things began to change. Fewer and fewer people began to follow John the Baptist and more and more people, even some of John's disciples, transferred their loyalty and attention to Jesus.

Soon Jesus became so popular in Jerusalem, that he left the city and moved into the rural areas. Eventually he too began to minister along the Jordan River, close to Judea. John the Baptist moved his ministry further north to a place called Aenon near Salim. We do not know for sure where this place is, but most scholars think it is closer to Galilee in the north. Not only did Jesus preach and teach, but he too continued the baptism which John the Baptist had started. We are not sure what Jesus' baptism meant, but since his message was similar to John the Baptist's asking people to repent and get ready for God's kingdom (Mk. 1:15), most likely Jesus' baptism was also a symbol of repentance and internal cleansing. We are told that Jesus did not baptize people himself. Rather, he allowed his disciples to baptize. In this he was similar to Paul who did not like to baptize people so that they did not focus their attention upon him. (1 Cor. 1:14-17)

It seems that some people went to John the Baptist and began to compare his ministry and Jesus' ministry. Perhaps they argued over whose baptism was better, John's or Jesus'. The disciples who were with John the Baptist had grown jealous of Jesus' increased popularity. They thought there was a sort of competition going on between two great leaders. At great personal cost, they had chosen to follow John. And so they did not want to be part of a movement that was growing smaller. This is similar to how many church ministers or churches have a sense of competition among each other as to who is the most popular and growing the fastest. They fall into Satan's trap of trying to build up their own reputations or their own kingdoms rather than the kingdom of God.

Q. 15. a) Describe how a sense of competition can develop between church leaders. b) Describe how a sense of competition can develop between churches or denominations. c) What does this reveal about our desire to build our own kingdom and not God's kingdom.

John the Baptist refused to be drawn into the competition. He taught his disciples three important truths about ministry in the kingdom of God:

1. John said that his role in serving God was never to get people to focus upon him, but upon the Messiah. He was never to be the most important person, but Jesus was. John knew from the beginning that he would never be the most popular leader and that as the Messiah Jesus was to be the most popular. Many leaders fall into this trap of Satan of seeking to be popular among people, working to enhance their reputations. But they forget that the reason God has called them into ministry is to point people to Jesus.

Like John the Baptist, they should desire that people focus less on them and more on Jesus. Only he deserves the glory. To the level that church leaders or church ministers seek the glory of people, to that level they are taking away from the glory that should go only to Jesus.

2. John the Baptist insisted that he had a specific ministry given to him by God and it was his responsibility to only fulfill that ministry. In Jewish law, when someone was assigned to represent someone else, he could speak with authority only in the areas that the one who sent him had allowed him to speak. And the delegated person could only act on behalf of the one who sent him as long as the person wanted him to speak. It is similar to giving a person power of attorney to act on our behalf- that authority is only in the area we designate (e.g. to sell our house) and as long as we allow it. God had asked John the Baptist to be the forerunner of the Messiah. He was not chosen by God to be the Messiah. And John the Baptist was only supposed to minister until the Messiah would start his public ministry. So John knew that his God-given work was almost completed. John knew that there was no reason for him to be jealous of Jesus, for God had never assigned him Jesus' ministry. To the level that he faithfully fulfilled his ministry as a forerunner, to that level he was successful in the eyes of God.

God does not compare one church minister to another church minister to see who is the most popular. Rather, God evaluates each minister based upon the specific responsibility God had given him to see if he has served faithfully. God calls some people to be popular conference speakers. God gives others the role of city pastors. And God asks others to serve him as rural evangelists. It does not matter where we serve as long as we are serving where God has put us to the best of our ability. That is what determines success in God's eyes.

3. John the Baptist's greatest joy was seeing the success of Jesus. John said that Jesus was the bridegroom. (Note: Both the Old Testament and the New Testament compares the relationship of God's people to God the Father and Jesus in the imagery of a groom and bride. (Ex. 34:15; Deut. 31:16; Ps. 73:27; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-23) God the Father in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament are said to be the groom. And Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament are said to be the bride of Christ. So what are church ministers? They are "friends of the bridegroom."

In Jewish culture, the friend of the bridegroom played a very important role. He was chosen as soon as the two became engaged. Once they were engaged, they would wait about one year to get married. During the engagement time, the friend of the groom brought messages from the groom to the future bride, and from the future bride to the future groom. He was also responsible to make sure both the groom and the bride remained sexually pure. He made most of the arrangements for the wedding feast. And then on the wedding night, he accompanied the groom to the house of the bride and escorted them back to the groom's house for the wedding celebration. At the end of the wedding celebration, he would escort the bride and groom to the room where the bed was. He guarded the door so that no one would enter. But he also listened to the shout of joy by the groom when the wedding was consummated. Hearing and seeing the joy of his friend, the groom brought great joy to the friend of the groom. The friend of the groom knows that it is not his night of celebration and joy. It is the night for the groom and bride to celebrate. The satisfaction that the friend receives is to see the joy on the faces of the bride and groom.

John told his disciples that his relationship to Jesus was similar. Jesus was the groom. John was there to make Jesus as successful and happy as possible. His sense of satisfaction came from knowing that he had served Jesus well and Jesus was becoming more popular. Isn't this what church ministry is to be like?

Aren't church ministers to take their greatest delight in knowing that Jesus is being worshipped, people are following Jesus with all their hearts, every day people are increasingly growing to resemble their friend, Jesus, and more people are putting their trust in Jesus as their Savior? Have we become mistaken in leadership when we think we are the ones who are to rejoice in our success? Or are we getting our greatest joy in knowing that Jesus is receiving more glory? Can we not rejoice when someone is a more effective minister than us in that he is a tool of God to bring Jesus more glory?

Q. 16. a) Summarize in your own words how John understood his role compared to Jesus. b) Describe how church ministry is similar to John the Baptist's role. c) Evaluate the attitude towards ministry you have seen among many churches or church ministers. How does their attitude compare to John the Baptist's?

Most likely many of John the Baptists' disciples were not happy with this answer. They wanted John the Baptist to do something to maintain his popularity rather than lose it to Jesus. Even though John told the disciples that his time of ministry was almost over, some of John's disciples did not accept this. Years later, the Apostle Paul met disciples of John in the city of Ephesus. (Acts 19: 1-7) They still had not left John the Baptist to follow Jesus.

The Apostle John finishes his evaluation of the ministry of Jesus with an explanation why he is so much greater than John the Baptist. (Jn. 3:31-36) Why is Jesus greater?

1. Jesus has the more complete and accurate revelation from God. Because Jesus is divine and lived in eternity past in heaven, he can reveal God and his will much more fully than any human like John the Baptist who only knows the earth. Jesus has seen God the Father, but John the Baptist hadn't. Therefore what Jesus reveals is totally accurate.

2. Jesus has the Holy Spirit in a greater way than any human- it is without limit. Jesus is also the Holy Spirit giver, giving the Holy Spirit generously to all of his followers. John the Baptist did not have this type of power. (Note: In the Greek it is not clear if the "he" refers to Jesus being given the Holy Spirit without measure, or if it meant that Jesus would give the Holy Spirit to his followers without measure.)

3. God the Father loves the Son in a special way and has committed all things into his hands. Jesus will later say that God the Father has committed to him the right to judge all people. (Jn. 5:22) Paul wrote that before Jesus all will bow to honor him, whether in heaven or in earth. (Phil. 2:9-11)

John ends this section with a warning: Be careful how you react to Jesus. If you love him, accept him, listen to him- then you will enjoy the eternal life type of fruitful, blessed unending life. But if you are indifferent to Jesus, or if you actively resist him, the wrath and judgment of God will rest on you. The "wrath of God" refers not to sudden anger and hatred as it usually is for humans. Rather, it is God's displeasure at sin and evil. God is opposed to all evil and sin and out of his righteousness determines to punish it. Just because God is love does not mean he can set aside his determination to punish sin. So either Jesus accepts the punishment on our behalf on the cross, or those who refuse to accept Jesus receive the punishment. It is the fault of those who refuse to believe on Jesus if they end up being punished by God. They have refused his gracious pardon.

Q. 17. a) What lessons do you see in the above teachings about John's character which as a follower of Jesus you are to emulate? b) What lessons do you see in the above teachings about how a follower of Jesus is to act in the world?

THIRD DAY

When Tsion was 12 years old she ran away from home where her father used to beat her and her mother treated her like a slave. She went to the city of Addis Ababa thinking she could get a job and find a better life. But there was no work. Desperate, she went into a hotel where a young man offered to pay her if she would sleep with him. Tsion agreed and started a life of being a prostitute. Years went by, and Tsion became callous. When people around her found out she was a prostitute, they treated her as if she had leprosy which if they got close to her, they would catch. Tsion knew that her life as a prostitute was wrong. One day she heard an evangelist share with another person that their sin could be forgiven if they believe on Jesus. Tsion wanted to know more about Jesus, but she thought "I am too evil. I am sure God does not care for me. I am beyond the love and forgiveness of God."

Q. 18. Do you think a person can be so evil that God will not forgive them? Explain your answer.

One of the amazing things about Jesus is that he even related to prostitutes. He did not approve of their lifestyle. However, he knew that they too needed to be forgiven and become the children of God. Refusing to allow the customs of the Jews to stop him from talking to a prostitute, Jesus would meet with them and warmly share about God's love. He did not treat them as if they had an incurable disease. And when they confessed their sin, Jesus freely welcomed them to become his followers. Some of the women who followed Jesus were those who had once been prostitutes.

Amazingly, the followers of Jesus today are afraid to ever be seen with a prostitute to lovingly share with her that Jesus will forgive her of all of her sins. In fact, many people claiming to be Christians will not even accept a former prostitute into their churches. They continue to treat her like she has a leprosy, even though she has become a child of God.

Q. 19. a) Describe how Christians, even ministers, are afraid or unwilling to show love to and share their faith with people like Tsion. b) Describe how many Christians will not relate to a converted prostitute, making her feel unwelcome in their church. c) Why do you think those of us who claim to follow Jesus have a difficult time being like him in this way?

Q. 20. Read John 4. a) Whom did Jesus talk to in Samaria? b) Describe what type of woman she was. c) List some of the truths Jesus taught about worshipping God. d) What can we learn from this passage about Jesus' character and how we should act as his followers?

Q. 21. Read Lk. 3:2-3; 18-20. a) What happened to John the Baptist. b) Why did Herod react this way?

JESUS MEETS A SAMARITAN WOMAN AT A WELL (Lk. 3:2-3, 18-20; Jn. 4:1-26)

In his organizing of his Gospel, the Apostle John took two stories from the early ministry of Jesus to show how Jesus was concerned with all people. Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman were at the opposite extremes in social and religious standing. Nicodemus was rich, the Samaritan woman was poor. Nicodemus was a man, the Samaritan a woman. Nicodemus was from the most conservative religious group, the Pharisees, the Samaritan woman from what was classified by most Jews as a false religion.

Nicodemus was morally upright, the Samaritan woman was immoral. And Nicodemus was a Jew and the woman a Samaritan. And yet both received the attention of Jesus as he sought to explain to them within their different contexts about spiritual truths. It was not important if a person was rich, religious and respectable like Nicodemus or poor, morally corrupt and part of a false religion like the Samaritan woman. Jesus knew that all people were equally loved by God and needed salvation.

We don't know how long Jesus stayed in Judea ministering. But his popularity continued to grow until Jesus and his disciples had more people coming to him for baptism than were going to John the Baptist. Two things happened which led to Jesus moving his ministry from Judea back to Galilee.

1. Jesus' popularity grew to the point where the religious leaders in Jerusalem, especially the Pharisees, became concerned with Jesus. Whereas before the Pharisees were concerned about John the Baptists' ministry, now they began to focus their attention upon Jesus. Jesus knew that a confrontation with the Pharisees was inevitable. Jesus knew that he was bound to upset the religious establishment because what he emphasized (the spiritual condition of people) was different from the Pharisees' emphasis upon external ritual purity. Jesus was not yet ready to openly confront the religious leaders. So Jesus decided to go back to Galilee where he would be further away from the attention of the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

2. John the Baptist was arrested by Herod Antipas. (Lk. 3:2-3, 18-20) Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great. When Herod the Great died, Herod Antipas was given the territories of Perea and Galilee to rule over. This means that most of Jesus' ministry was in his territory. Because John the Baptist ministered on the eastern side of the Jordan River, his ministry was located in Perea, which was the territory of Herod. Although John the Baptist did not interfere in political matters, he did openly speak out against the personal evils of Herod Antipas. The one evil which angered John the Baptist the most was the fact that Herod Antipas had divorced his wife and taken Herodias as his wife. Herodias was Herod Antipas' niece, the daughter of his half brother. She was married to her uncle Herod Philip who ruled over the territory to the northeast of Galilee. Because Herod Philip had few political ambitions, Herodias divorced him and married Herod Antipas. She continually sought more political power for herself and her husband. Eventually the Romans got angry and send them far away into exile.

Because John the Baptist was so outspoken against Herod Antipas, he was arrested and taken to a prison east of the Dead Sea. John the Baptist's formal ministry was now over. He had fulfilled his task of preparing people for the coming of Messiah. He had run his "race" and it would not be long until the time of his departure would come. But this great man left an example for all witnesses of Jesus to follow. He got people to focus upon Jesus and then he stepped aside so that they could follow Jesus. He did not try to build his own following. Nor did he get jealous when Jesus became more popular and successful than he.

Q. 22. Summarize ways that John the Baptist modeled what it means for church leaders to be faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Jesus probably did not want to be caught up politically in the imprisonment of John the Baptist. So he left the Jordan River area and moved into Galilee, another region under Herod Antipas' control. Over the next couple of years, Herod Antipas' animosity towards Jesus would grow. (Lk. 13:31-33) But Jesus would not meet him until the night before he was crucified. (Lk. 23:7)

From where Jesus was baptizing, there were two ways for him to travel to Galilee. The shortest way took him through the territory of Samaria which, like Judea, was politically under the control of the Romans. The longer way was to follow the eastern side of the Jordan River and cross over into Galilee just below the Sea of Galilee. (See the map in Appendix A in the back of the book.) Although people from Galilee were more willing to travel the shorter road through Samaria, conservative Jews who hated the Samaritans did not like to travel through their territory but preferred to travel the longer road.

John tells us that Jesus "had to go" through Samaria. Why did Jesus have to travel this road? It was not because there were no other options. Jesus could have taken the longer road and bypassed Samaria. Rather, Jesus was attentive to the desires of God the Father. And God had a certain woman in Samaria, and a certain city, who needed to hear the Gospel. And perhaps Jesus wanted to teach the disciples an important lesson- the Gospel was for all people, even the hated Samaritans.

The story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman is amazing because Jesus broke three major Jewish customs in doing it.

First, Jesus defied the Jewish cultural practices of not traveling through Samaria so that he would avoid becoming ritually impure. For hundreds of years there had been a deep feeling of hatred between the Jews and Samaritans. The tensions actually started during the times of Solomon. There were two tribes who often vied for leadership over Israel; Judah in the south and Ephraim in the north. Ephraim was located in what would later become Samaria. Although during the time of David God chose the tribe of Judah to provide political leadership, after King Solomon died in 930 BC the tribe of Ephraim led a rebellion and separated from Judah. The nation of Israel split between Judah in the south with kings from the line of David, and Ephraim and the majority of the tribes in the north ruled by Ephraim. In order to make this separation not just political but religious, rival worship centers were started in the northern kingdom of Israel. Two hundred years later, in 722 BC, God punished Israel for its idol worship and the Gentile nation of Assyria conquered Israel. Most of the more educated Jews were taken into captivity to the land of Medes. Assyria brought Gentiles to live in Israel, especially around Samaria. The Jews and Gentiles intermarried and their offspring became known as the Samaritans. Their beliefs also became mixed up with partly following the Old Testament and partly following the idol worship of the Gentiles. The Jews from the northern nation of Israel never returned to the Land of Promise and have been called "the ten lost tribes of Israel."

Over 140 years later, God also punished the southern nation of Judah and sent the Jews into captivity to Babylon. However, 70 years later, many of these Jews returned to the Promised Land. When they arrived, the political center of the region was Samaria. These Jews wanted to rebuild the Temple which the Babylonians had destroyed. The half-Jews from Samaria wanted to help them, but the Jews in Jerusalem told them they were not pure Jews and therefore could not help. Angered, these half-Jews, now called Samaritans, worked with the Persian government to stop the rebuilding of the Temple for almost 20 years. During the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, tensions continued between Jerusalem and Samaria.

Sometime after the days of Nehemiah, the half-Jews decided to build their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. This was a very historical mountain in Jewish history, for it was there that Joshua had the Jews renew their covenant with God. (Joshua 8:30-35) And it was near there that the first religious center of the Jews was established in Shechem. The Samaritans changed some of the passages in the books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) to increase the honor of their Temple. They claimed that it was on Mt. Gerizim

that Abraham sacrificed Isaac. And they claimed that Moses instructed the Jews to worship on Mt. Gerizim. This rival religion greatly angered the Jews in Jerusalem.

In 129 BC, one of the Maccabean rulers called John Hyrcanus decided to attack and conquer Samaria. He not only destroyed the political center, the city of Samaria, but he also destroyed that Temple on Mt. Gerizim. (Over a hundred years later when Jesus met with the Samaritan woman at the base of Mt. Gerizim, that temple was still in ruins.) For the next 125 years, Samaria was under the political control of Judea. Only after the death of Herod the Great in 6 AD did Samaria return to being politically independent of Judea, administered by the Romans from Caesarea. Although there were times of peaceful co-existence, the hatred between the Jews and Samaritans always remained. During the time of Jesus, some Samaritans snuck into Jerusalem and threw dried human bones into the Temple. This caused the Temple to become religiously impure so worship had to stop for a time. Often Jews traveling from Galilee to Judea on the way to worship in the Temple were harassed by the Samaritans. Sometimes they were beaten, robbed, and on occasion killed.

Scholars debate how the religious Jews classified Samaritans at this time. There is some evidence that Samaritans were classified in a better position than the Gentiles- for at least they did not worship idols but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Even though they had corrupted some of the stories, the Samaritans sought to obey the teachings found in the five books of Moses. They were viewed as "ignorant Jews" who did not follow all of the religious practices of the conservative Jews. At other times the hatred towards the Samaritans was so strong that the Jews taught that the Samaritans were permanently ritually impure. Jewish teachers wrote "Don't eat the bread of the Samaritans, for anyone eating the bread of a Samaritan is like eating a pig." They taught that Samaritan women were permanently menstruating so that they and their families were always ritually impure before God.

Q. 23. a) Describe how some tensions between tribal or religious groups in Ethiopia leads to the same type of dislike as the Jews had for the Samaritans. b) What can we learn about Jesus' refusal to allow tribal prejudice limit his ministry?

The second way Jesus defied Jewish culture was by talking to a woman in public. Conservative Jews like the Pharisees taught that a man was never to talk to a woman in public. They were not even supposed to talk to their sister or mother. In fact, using Job 31:1 as their basis, the Pharisees were known for keeping their eyes lowered so that they would not look on a woman. They earned the nickname "bruised and bleeding Pharisees" since they would often run into things because they did not look up out of fear of seeing a woman. For Jesus to openly talk to a woman like this would ruin his reputation among the more conservative Jews. Jews also taught that women were of little use but to have babies and cook for the men. They thought that a woman was not intellectual enough to have a theological discussion. She was only to believe what her husband told her. Women were viewed so poorly by the men that one of the prayers Jewish men would often pray was "Thank you Lord that I am not a woman."

Q. 24. a) Describe how some men in Ethiopia view women. Explain if it is similar or different to the way the Jews viewed women. b) Are there ways that women in your church think they are being discriminated against or viewed as not being as important as men? Ask three women in your church and write down their answers.

Third, Jesus defied all Jewish understanding of proper relationships by openly meeting with a woman who was known to have been immoral. The Jews taught that in extreme cases a woman could be divorced three times. But for a woman to be divorced five times was unheard of. And the fact that she was living openly with someone not her husband would have been known by all and she would have been classified almost like a harlot. Such a woman would be shunned in public and people would laugh at her wherever she went. And any man talking to her would be assumed to be involved with her sexually.

Q. 25. a) Describe ways Ethiopians have a similar view to immoral woman as the Jews had. b) What can we learn as followers of Jesus from the fact that Jesus would talk to such a woman and show concern for her spiritual condition?

God is not bound by human prejudice. Jesus was not restricted by the tensions that were centuries old between these two tribal groups. And he did not allow the religious teaching that the Samaritans caused people to be religiously unclean and unable to worship in the Temple to influence him. Jesus was also not concerned that the Samaritan was a woman and that people might think he was doing something improper by talking to her in public. Nor did Jesus shy away from her because she was immoral. Jesus was the Physician who had come to heal all who were sick. (Lk. 5:29-32) And this immoral Samaritan woman obviously needed for her soul to be healed.

It was a long walk of thirty kilometers from where he was baptizing people on the Jordan to Sychar. When he arrived at Sychar, we are told that it was noon. The town of Sychar was located at the junction of a major road. Where the two roads met, there was a well 50 meters deep which had first been dug by Jacob two thousand years previously. The well was known for having good water. There was another well closer to town which most people would have used. Directly behind the city was a mountain rising 240 meters high was Mt. Gerizim.

Those who grow up in the country know that women prefer to get water early in the morning or later in the afternoon when it is not as hot. So why did this woman come at noon when the sun was hottest? And why did she go to a well that was further from her home? Both of these indicate that this Samaritan woman was embarrassed to get water when other women were drawing water. Everyone knew her and her reputation. They would have pointed fingers at her, laughed, and called her bad names. So she chose a time of the day and the well where few people would be around to see her or talk to her.

Jesus and his disciples arrived at the well tired from their journey. The fact that John tells us Jesus was tired was to remind us that Jesus was human just like us. Yes, he is divine but Jesus was also fully human. Except for when he did his miracles, Jesus did not make use of his divine powers but lived with all of the human limitations that we face like becoming tired and hungry. Jesus sat down by the well and the disciples left for town which was about one kilometer away to get food.

Not much later, Jesus met the Samaritan woman God had sent him to Samaria to meet. The woman would have known instantly that Jesus was a Jew, for his clothes and his accent were different from the Samaritans. And she knew the historical hatred there existed between Jews and Samaritans.

Palestine does not have many springs so in most areas people depended upon well water. The culture was that each person was responsible to bring their own rope and bucket by which to get water. Even

travelers like Jesus would carry a small leather container to draw water from wells. The Samaritan woman would have had her own bucket for drawing water as well as an animal skin container for holding water.

As she was about let her bucket down for water, Jesus spoke "Give me some water to drink." This startled the woman for three reasons. First, he was a man and should not have been talking to her. Second, he was a Jew and she was a Samaritan. And third, Jesus was saying that he was willing to drink out of a Samaritan's utensil. Jews traveling through Samaria usually carried their own eating and drinking utensils. That way they would not become ritually impure from using the Samaritan utensils. By drinking from the bucket, Jesus was going to become ritually impure.

Jesus was not primarily concerned about getting a drink of water even though he would have been thirsty. He was looking for a way to get the Samaritan woman talking about spiritual things. When she expressed her amazement that he was talking to her, Jesus said that if she realized who he was, she would be the one asking him for "living water." (Jn. 4:10)

The phrase "living water" had two different connotations to the Jews.

First, it spoke of fresh flowing water like a spring or a good flowing well, not stagnant water like that found in a pool of water by the side of the road.

Second, water was used symbolically by the Jews to refer to the great blessings God would give the Jews and that God would one day fully satisfy their spiritual thirst. (See Ps. 42:1; Is. 12:3; 44:3; 55:1; Zech. 13:1; Rev. 7:17; 21:6) In fact, the time of the Messiah was said to be a time when there would be abundant water, something very precious in Palestine. (Is. 35:7) Rabbis debated what this "living water" would be. Some taught that it was the Law which the Messiah would teach the people. Others taught that the living water was the coming Holy Spirit. But all conservative Jews would have realized by this statement that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, the one who would meet all of the spiritual needs of God's people.

Jesus' words raised the curiosity of the woman. She was not very religious or used to the symbolic understanding of Jesus' words, so her mind only thought about the water in Jacob's well. She focused upon the impossibility of Jesus to get water and laughingly said "you aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you?" Most Jews would have argued with her claim to have Jacob as her father for they saw Samaritans as non-Jews and therefore could not claim a heritage from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But Jesus was not interested in arguing, only in getting her to understand spiritual truths. So Jesus made another statement seeking to guide her thinking to spiritual truths. "I can give you water that keeps flowing in your life so that you have eternal life" he said. But still the woman had a difficult time thinking about spiritual truths. She only selfishly wanted this water to flow into her house without having to come and draw water from the well.

Jesus knew that awareness of sin had to precede belief in him so he confronted her with her sinful life. The Gospel is not "it does not matter about your sin," but "you are a sinner- but God has an answer for that problem." Although Jesus knew all about her spiritual condition and life, he told her to bring her husband. No doubt she was embarrassed by this question. She tried to avoid her sinfulness, so she just admitted that she had no husband. Jesus showed his unusual knowledge by openly confronting her with her immoral life. Jesus was not seeking to embarrass the woman, but to make her realize that she was a

sinner needing salvation. Only once we know we are sick will we go to a doctor looking for healing. And only after we know that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves will we turn to Jesus for salvation.

But the woman still was not ready to face her sins and her need to get right with God. She was willing to admit that Jesus was a prophet, for the work of the prophet in her eyes was to reveal hidden truths like he had about her life. But she did not want to have Jesus tell her more about her life. So she tried to start a religious argument. They were standing at the base of Mt. Gerizim where the ruins of the Samaritan temple was located. "Which place of worship is right? You Jews say the Temple in Jerusalem. We say here on Mt. Gerizim" she stated. (Jn. 4:19) She was not seeking to know the truth, but to involve Jesus in a religious discussion so she would not have to address her sins or think about who Jesus must be.

Jesus refused to get into a religious debate. Following Jesus is not so much about being part of the right religion, but being in the right relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus taught this woman the following truths:

1. Soon there would be a major change in who could worship God and how they were to worship. The Messiah was now on the earth. Soon he would die for the sins of all people, the Samaritans included. No longer would worship be a Jewish or a Samaritan issue. And no longer would Gentiles have to convert to Judaism to worship God. Rather, after Jesus' death on the cross, all people would be able to worship God directly wherever they lived.
2. Worship would no longer have anything to do with a specific place or a certain building. Both the Jews and Samaritans thought that worship must be located in a certain place- either Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim. They were like many of us who think true worship can only take place in a church building, and the greater the church building, the more it reveals the glory of our religion. But Jesus said whether or not people had a church building or a beautiful church building would not matter.

It does not matter if we meet in a home or in a large church building or if it is made of grass and mud or made of tin and bricks- with the coming of Jesus, God meets with his people anywhere. In fact, the early church did not build church buildings for over 300 years. We must be very careful that we do not view worship like the Jews and Samaritans. Although a meeting place is helpful, and although we can honor God by building a good church building, we must never allow ourselves to think that God is limited to worship there, or that the size or quality of church building reveals our spirituality or that God is more present there. Paul would later say that the Temple in which God lives is our hearts. (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19) [Note: Some scholars think John is using this story to encourage Jewish Christians who were being expelled from worship in the synagogue that the synagogue was not important in the eyes of God. Around this time, the Jews began to expel Christians from the synagogues and added a "curse" against Christians to their benediction at the end of their service.]

Q. 26. a) Compare the perspective of Jews and Samaritans to worshipping in a building to how many Christians understand the role of a church building today. How are these views similar? How are they different? b) If God now primarily lives in our hearts, what role does a church building play in worship of God? c) Explain the unbiblical understanding of church buildings that many church members have.

3. True worship of the living God would require two things. There must be "spirit" and there must be "truth." (Jn. 4:23-24) True worship is not revealed by how emotional we are or how loud we sing or shout, or whether the forms of worship are the same to how we have been doing it for a long time.

People all over the world in all types of religions are emotional in worship or follow forms of worship handed down throughout the generations. But their worship is not acceptable to God. All worship which God the Father is willing to accept has to have two things at the root of worship:

a. TRUTH: Jesus told the woman that the Samaritans had been worshipping in "ignorance" but because the Jews had the complete Old Testament, they were worshipping God based upon "knowledge." So true worship was not possible for the Samaritans because it was not based upon truth. For worship to be true, it has to be in line with how God reveals he accepts worship. And with the coming of Jesus, neither the Samaritans or the Jews were able to worship God the Father unless that worship involves belief in Jesus. The Apostles would later say that there is no other name (person) under heaven that can bring salvation except for Jesus. (Acts 4:12)

But Jesus also explained that worship must come from a life lived in reality with what God wants. Jesus would later accuse the religious leaders of being hypocrites because what they said and what they did were two different things. In the same way, it is true when we sing "Jesus is Lord," but it is only acceptable to God as worship if our lives reflect this truth and he truly is Lord of our lives. So acceptable worship must be based upon the truths that God has revealed in the Bible and those truths must be applied in our lives. (False worship always takes some truth and adds something false to it. As long as there is something false added to it where we knowingly refuse to live by all truth, then whatever we do is "false worship." This could be too much of a focus upon seeking to earn our way to heaven by doing good works, or thinking we are acceptable to God because we are born into a Christian home, or emphasizing Jesus wants to physically bless us rather than save us from our sins.)

b. SPIRIT: By the word "spirit" Jesus meant two major things.

First, he is teaching that true worship originates in the working of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit must work in a person's heart to cause them to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. And the Holy Spirit must cleanse and change their lives so that they are living the way God wants them to live. The Holy Spirit must also empower their minds and hearts so the worship they give is what God desires. We can never worship in an acceptable way without the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Second, worship originates not in external, observable actions or buildings, but comes from the hidden part of man, in his heart or his spirit. The Jews and Samaritans misunderstood worship when they focused upon a Temple or upon animal sacrifices or other external actions. We misunderstand worship when we think worship is defined by a building, or by a choir with fancy robes, or by an expensive keyboard or sound system. These are tools to help us in worship, but in themselves they do not define worship. Rather, worship is when the spirit of a person fellowships with God who is Spirit. The unseen part of man must meet with the unseen God. And as a Spirit, God does not need a special place for us to meet with him. So authentic worship must be based upon truth, but it must also come out of our innermost being, our hearts or spirit.

Q. 27. Evaluate the normal person's understanding of worship. a) What role do they think the two definitions of "truth" have in acceptable worship? b) What role do they think the two definitions of "spirit" have in acceptable worship? c) Where do you think the understanding of worship is deficient for many Christians?

The woman had one final question. She was probably no longer trying to escape truth, but wanted to know the answer. The Samaritans did not believe that the Messiah would come from Judah or from the line of David. Rather, they believed that there would be a great Prophet like Moses who would be the Messiah, guiding people into truth. (See Deut. 18:15) "We are waiting for this Messiah. I am confused, but he will make it all clear to us" she said.

Jesus answered "I am the Messiah." If we study the Gospel, we will see that Jesus very rarely openly admits to being the Messiah. He called himself "the Son of Man." Others called him "the Son of God" or the Messiah. But Jesus openly tells this woman that he is the Messiah. Why did he do this? Probably because to the Samaritans the word "Messiah" did not have the political connotation which it had among the Jews. The Samaritans were looking for a "teacher Messiah" not a "ruler/deliverer Messiah." So Jesus was more willing to claim he was the Messiah.

Now the woman knew the truth. Jesus, the one in front of her, was the Messiah. What would she do with him? Would she accept him, believe on him, and change how she lived in order to reflect her belief that he was the Lord of her life? Or would she turn away and continue her life of sin? God offers salvation to all. But each person must make the choice themselves.

JESUS TEACHES THE DISCIPLES ABOUT SERVING GOD WHEN HE PROVIDES THE OPPORTUNITIES (Jn. 4:27-38)

As Jesus openly shared with the woman that he was the Messiah, his disciples arrived from town where they had bought food. They were amazed to see Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman. Everything they thought about the role of a holy Rabbi went against Jesus acting in this way. But they were still too uncomfortable with Jesus to ask questions. But we can guess that like many of us, they would have thought "How can a holy person whom we believe to be the Messiah relate to such a person?"

Excited about her new faith in Jesus, the woman left her water jug and ran back into town. The disciples brought Jesus the food which they had bought. Much to their surprise, he was no longer hungry. Jesus had been teaching the woman, now it was time to teach the disciples. Jesus did not wait for a classroom to teach his disciples theoretical truth. Rather, all of life was his classroom and every opportunity he got he sought to pass on to the disciples spiritual truth. Jesus used this opportunity to teach the disciples about ministry.

1. It is more important to work for God than to look after one's physical desires. (Jn. 4:34) Jesus shared that doing God's will was his primary food. Jesus totally submitted his life to do the will of God the Father who had sent him. (The word "sent" here is the same word "apostle." Jesus was the first apostle, sent by God the Father to represent him on earth.) Jesus had put into practice what he was about to teach "Seek first God and his righteousness." (Mt. 6:33) Jesus was teaching the disciples that absolute obedience to God is what matters, not whether or not they live in comfort. Rather than a good house, convenient working hours, food when and how they want it- they were to take pleasure in simple obedience of God and service of others. That will bring them greater joy than all of the physical blessings on earth.

2. There is always a time for spiritual harvest if we have eyes to see it. (Jn. 4:35) Sychar was a very fertile area and some scholars think the crops were about ready to harvest. The Jews had a proverb stating that it was four months from the time they sow to when they harvest. But in spiritual work, God always has a harvest that is ripe. There are souls to harvest for God's kingdom, but we must keep our eyes open for

them. No one would think that there was a harvest in a small town in Samaria, or that a Samaritan woman coming to get water was worth harvesting. It was so easy to only think about our physical needs or to think "one day we will witness to these people." Or we can think a child, woman, or poor person is too insignificant to witness to. But in God's kingdom, God has prepared people who are ready for the harvest. So we must look for them and share the Gospel. How often are we so busy with our personal lives that we do not notice people around us- in our communities, in our offices, in our schools- who are ripe to hear the Gospel and believe? May God give us spiritual eyes to see the harvest fields around us.

Q. 28. a) Illustrate from your life how you have seen God has an unexpected person ready to harvest for salvation. b) Examine your life. Are you looking for souls to harvest in your place of work or school? If not, what can you do to open your eyes?

3. Unlike sowing and harvesting of crops, spiritual sowing and harvesting often take place at the same time. God has prepared someone's heart. We come along and share about Jesus (sowing) and they are immediately ready to believe in him (reaping). We sow the Gospel and reap a soul at the same time. The saving of a soul brings about the eternal life of someone.

4. Sowing and reaping is a community effort. Jesus told the disciples that often the harvest that they reap will be the results of the work of someone else sowing. The prophets of the Old Testament had been sowing the seed of God's truth for generations. John the Baptist had been sowing spiritual truth for a couple of years. Now Jesus was sowing. All of these sowed and did not receive a great spiritual harvest. When Jesus died, there were just a few women around his cross who openly followed him. The rest, even the disciples, fled in fear. But after Pentecost, as the disciples would share about Jesus, they would reap an unexpected harvest coming from the sowing work of all of these faithful people. This truth teaches us important lessons about ministry in the church:

a. We must never get prideful when we are blessed and God uses us to bring many to faith in Jesus. It is not just our work that has made the difference. There have been others who have planted the seed through their lives and words. We just happen to be used by God to reap.

b. We should never be jealous of someone else who seems successful in reaping. God is the one who determines whether we are a sower or whether we are a reaper. Since we are all working for Jesus, the Lord of the Harvest, we should do the ministry which God has given us. Some people are called to be like John the Baptist- getting people ready for the harvest. Other people are called to be like the disciples- reaping souls for eternal life.

c. We must never get discouraged when we see little fruit from our work. God is asking us to sow, and he will one day give the reaping work to someone else. What God is asking us to do is to faithfully fulfill the work of sowing that he asked us to do. If we don't sow now, someone might not be able to reap later on. It does not matter who sows and who reaps. We will all be rewarded by God for our faithful service.

Q. 29. a) Describe how you have seen this principle of sowing and reaping by different people. b) Explain why it is important for all church ministers to remember that sowing and reaping is a community effort. Describe what problems arise when someone thinks that only they have done the work.

MANY SAMARITANS BELIEVE ON JESUS (Jn. 4:39-42)

One of the ironies of life is that often those whom we think should believe on Jesus don't. And the ones we don't think will believe on Jesus do. We think the educated person who has been blessed by God will thankfully praise him. And we think the poor and uneducated will never be able to understand the Gospel or do much for God. But usually the opposite is true. It is the rich and educated who struggle coming to faith in Jesus. And it is the poor and uneducated who not only more easily trust Jesus, but more willingly serve him.

The same is pictured here. The Jews should have been the ones to most quickly accept Jesus as the Messiah. And the Samaritans should have been the ones most resistant to Jesus, the Jew. And yet the Jews were most resistant and the Samaritans and later the Gentiles were most open to believing in Jesus. As John 1:11 says, Jesus came unto his own Jewish people, but they did not accept him.

Often the most effective witnesses are those who have just put their faith in Jesus. Rather than telling new believers to wait until they know enough before they share their faith, we should encourage them to share with their friends and family what God has done. Witnessing is not a complex thing. The most effective witness is the person who says "See what Jesus has done in my life." When the Samaritan woman had met Jesus, she went back into the city. She was probably still uncertain about Jesus. In the Greek, her question "Could this be the Christ" could be "I am not sure whether or not this person is the Messiah. Come and see for yourself." Perhaps she was asking them for help in verifying that Jesus was the Messiah. Or perhaps she was phrasing her question in a way that aroused their curiosity knowing if, as an immoral woman, she openly said "I have found the Messiah" they would have just laughed and not been interested.

When the Samaritans met Jesus, it did not take long for them to recognize that Jesus was the Messiah. Breaking centuries of racial hatred, they asked Jesus to stay with them in their city. Jesus was not concerned with the views of other Jews who would now consider him as "unclean." (This is similar to how some Ethiopians consider themselves "unclean" if they enter the home of a potter or other despised castes of people.) What mattered was the salvation of these Samaritans. In the end, the Samaritans came to an amazing understanding. Not only was Jesus a great Prophet- he is "the Savior of the world." These outcastes in the eyes of the Jews became the first to acknowledge that Jesus was the Savior, the one who would deliver them from their lives of sin and whatever hopeless situations they faced.

The Gospel is for all people. It is for every tribe, both sexes, for the educated and uneducated, and for respectable people and unrespectable people like the harlots, the potters. Any time we as followers of Jesus limit salvation to those of our tribe by making no effort to take the Gospel to people of other tribes; or any time we think someone is too evil for God to care for them; or anytime we despise the poor and uneducated as being unworthy of being in our church- we go against the truth that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Have we become like the Jews- so controlled by what our cultures teach us is acceptable that we don't take the message of the Savior of the world to all people?

Q. 30. a) What lessons do you see in the above teachings about Jesus' character which as a follower of Jesus you are to emulate? b) What lessons do you see in the above teachings about how a follower of Jesus is supposed to act in the world?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) Discuss the different assumptions Christians often have about Jesus and what we studied about Jesus' life and ministry in the first day's lesson. What things about Jesus do most Christians have a correct understanding. What things about Jesus do most Christians have a distorted understanding? Discuss things such as how he would have looked like, what type of personality he would have had, and what his ministry would have been. b) Discuss specific changes Christians in Ethiopia need to make in order to be more like Jesus as he is described in the Gospels.

2. Review Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in John 3. a) List the specific truths Jesus taught Nicodemus about what brings salvation and eternal life. b) Think about the last time you heard someone, like an elder on Sunday morning, share the Gospel with a nonbeliever. Which parts of the Gospel which Jesus taught did they include? Which parts did they not include? What other truths did they add to the Gospel message? Was what they said Biblical? c) List the different truths you think need to be taught to a nonbeliever in order for them to have a clear understanding of the Gospel and place true faith in Jesus Christ.

3. a) Compare the attitude which John the Baptist had towards being popular and famous to the attitude many church leaders have today. What differences do you see? b) What changes would result in the church if all leaders and ministers had the same attitude to ministry as John the Baptist had?

4. a) Describe Jesus' attitude to witnessing to the Samaritan woman and the attitude which the Jews normally had. b) Discuss whether you think Christians' attitude towards socially disrespected people is more similar to the Jews or Jesus. c) What changes do you think Jesus would like to see in our attitude to sinful people or those who are socially outcasts? d) What specific things can church leaders do to help believers overcome their prejudices?

LESSON EIGHT

FIRST DAY

There is a story of a preacher who preached a very strong message that as followers of Jesus, we are to follow his way of sacrifice. Sitting in the back of the church was a man who had lost his job and with no work and no food was at the point of death. His wife had already died because of no money and his child was living in someone else's home until he could find work. At the end of the sermon, the man stood up and said "If you claim to follow Christ, why is it that you who have money aren't helping those of us who want to work, but can't find a job? Is this really what Jesus would do? What about helping all of the poor people living on the street and those who have no place to live? And how about going to see people in the hospital who have no one to visit them? What does "imitating" Jesus mean when you have plenty and we have little?" The preacher's and the church members' consciences were struck with guilt. The preacher invited the man and his daughter to live with him until they found a better place to live. After church, the preacher began to ask himself "What would Jesus have done if he faced this type of situation?" Over the next weeks and months, he thought, prayed, and preached about how Jesus lived and taught. He challenged his congregation to always ask themselves the question "What would Jesus do?" In a short period of time the members of the church began to live so differently that the whole community was changed.

Q. 1. Read Mk. 1:15; Lk. 4:18-29. a) What do these verses tell us about Jesus' ministry? b) Which of Jesus' ministries does your church focus upon? c) Which does it tend to neglect?

The Gospels seek to teach us how we should live as followers of Jesus. He is our model. What he preached, we are to preach. What he did, we are supposed to do. If we individually and as a church are to resemble Jesus, our ministry will always consist of two major parts. First, we will clearly proclaim the Gospel, asking people to repent of their sins, believe on Jesus, and live in obedience to him. We must help people get spiritually right with God. Like Jesus, we will challenge people "to repent and believe for the kingdom of God is at hand." Second, we must help people who are struggling. Everywhere Jesus went, he was helping those who were sick, or demon possessed, or faced some other trouble. Jesus did not help people primarily in order to display his power. Rather, because he had the ability, out of compassion he helped.

It is a rare Christian or church that keeps these two in balance. There are some churches who do a very good job reaching out to help the poor in their communities. But often they are reluctant to openly challenge people to "repent and believe." They are busy "healing" people of their sicknesses but they spend little time challenging them to get right with God. God might use them to meet the physical needs of the people, but people end up in hell having received temporarily a healthier life or more prosperity. And there are other churches who do a good job of preaching the Gospel and asking people to repent and believe, but do little to minister to those in their community who need their help. But if we are to be followers of Jesus, we must do both. We must challenge people to get right with God. We must also show compassion to those in our community who are struggling. Jesus was filled with love and compassion for people. And so he helped people overcome their problems. If we truly are the followers of Jesus, each of

us will seek to help the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the sick using whatever resources God gives us.

Becoming a follower of Jesus brings changes to our whole life. When we receive eternal life, it will bring lasting blessings after we are dead. But as followers of Jesus, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will also change how we think and live so that we can overcome the cultural and societal beliefs and practices which keep us from experiencing many of the blessings God wants to give. And the love of Christ must flow from our lives to help others.

Q. 2. a) List some examples of churches who spend all of their time and finances preaching the Gospel but do little to help the needy. b) List some examples of churches who focus their attention on meeting the physical needs of people with little attempt to get them to believe on Jesus. c) Describe what a balanced church would live like- what type of ministries would they get involved in.

JESUS' MINISTRY IN GALILEE: 27-29 AD

JESUS BEGINS HIS ITINERANT MINISTRY IN GALILEE (Mt. 4:12-17, Mk. 1:14-15, Lk. 4:14-15)

Q. 3. Read Mt. 4:12-17. a) What prophecy did Jesus fulfill when he began his ministry in Galilee? b) What did Jesus' ministry focus upon?

It was probably early in 27 AD. Jesus was now around 30 years old. (See Luke 3:23) After several months ministering in Judea, Jesus returned to his home region of Galilee. From Cana, Jesus traveled first to Nazareth, the city where he grew up. Sometime on the journey towards Nazareth, his disciples left him and returned to their previous occupations. We know that Peter, Andrew, James and John returned to their homes in Capernaum and to their life as fishermen.

Sometime later, Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum. We are not told why Jesus left Nazareth, but probably the following impacted Jesus' decision:

a. Jesus was making a clear break with his previous way of life. If he had stayed in Nazareth, Jesus would have the pressure to get involved as a carpenter to help his family. His friends, relatives, and the community people would expect him to keep acting like he used to before this time.

b. Nazareth was a small rural town, but it was located just 6 kilometers from the major political center of Galilee, a town called Sepphoris. In the Gospels, we never see Jesus ministering in the major political centers of Galilee. Perhaps these cities were dominated by Greeks and Jesus was focusing his ministry upon the Jews. Or perhaps working close to the capital city would have brought upon Jesus the attention of the political leaders like Herod, which would have limited his ability to have an open ministry.

Capernaum was a busy commercial town located on the far northern edge of Galilee. It was not only known for its fishing industry, but it was on a major trade route with many people passing through. So Capernaum was a more strategic place for ministry. Capernaum later became the center for Jesus' ministry in Galilee, even though it was a long way from where most people in Galilee lived or from Judea, which was the center of Judaism.

(Note: We must not think of Galilee as being a large territory. It was small, only 80 kilometers from north to south and 40 kilometers from east to west. This would be like the distance from Addis Ababa to Nazareth in length and less than from Addis Ababa to Debre Zeit in width. Look at the map in Appendix C at the back of the book to locate Nazareth and Capernaum. The "way of the sea" refers to the major caravan road that went from Egypt, along the coast of the Mediterranean, through Caesarea, through the middle of Galilee just north of Nazareth, through Capernaum, and on to Syria.)

The Jews would have been surprised that their Messiah would focus his ministry upon a part of Palestine which was so remote from the heart of Judaism in Jerusalem. Galilee was so unlikely place for the King of the Jews that it was called "Galilee of the Gentiles." This reflects how throughout Jewish history, Jews living in Galilee were never able to fully make the territory Jewish. In the days of Joshua, the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulum were not able to expel the Gentiles living there. As a result, this caused this part of Israel tended to mix the true worship of God with the idol worship of Gentiles. Later, when the northern kingdom of Israel was sent into captivity seven centuries before the birth of Jesus (722 BC), Gentiles were brought to live in Galilee. So Jews and Gentiles lived side by side, often intermarrying. Administratively, Galilee was usually aligned with Gentile nations, not Jerusalem. From 722 BC to 100 BC, Galilee was usually part of the Syrian territory or combined with Phoenicia which was to the west. It was only 100 years before the birth of Jesus that Galilee was forced to follow Judaism. The Maccabean king in Jerusalem conquered Galilee and the people living there were forcibly circumcised and proclaimed to be Jews. And Jews from Judea, like Joseph's and Mary's family, were sent to Galilee and settled there.

With this type of history, the pure Jews in Jerusalem ridiculed Galilee. They thought that God would never start a major work, like sending his Messiah, in this part of the world. But Matthew wanted to remind the Jews that in the Old Testament, God had prophesied that his Messiah would work in Galilee. It would be there that a bright light of the Gospel will first shine. (Is. 9:1-2)

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus began an itinerant preaching ministry in Galilee. Mark tells us that Jesus focused his ministry on preparing people for God's kingdom. *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* (Mk. 1:15) It is interesting that the Gospel writers did not say that Jesus went around healing the sick. Although he clearly did heal the sick and cast out demons, these were not the focus of his ministry. His major purpose and ministry was to preach the good news. In fact, when the people emphasized his miracles too much, Jesus would leave that area. As he said *"Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."* So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues. (Mk. 1:37-39) We can note five things about Jesus' message:

1. It was a continuation of the message which John the Baptist had been proclaiming. (See Mt. 3:2) In one sense, both Jesus and John preached the same message. Both said that God was ready to initiate his reign, or his kingdom, over his people. Those who wanted to receive the Messiah's blessing had to prepare their lives. But there were some major differences between the two messages.

a. John said that the kingdom of God was coming soon. Jesus said that the kingdom of God had arrived. Because he, the king, was there in their midst, God wanted to rule in their lives. (Lk. 17:20-21)

b. John focused upon repentance. Jesus asked people to "repent" but he also asked them to "believe." (Jn. 3:16)

c. John's message was "harsh" with strong words of judgment. "If you do not repent, God's hand of judgment will come on you." John warned. (Lk. 3:7-9) But Jesus' message was filled with grace. It is called the "good news." Jesus would later picture God as a father longing for his wayward son to return to him. (Lk. 15:11-31) Too many preachers are like John, preaching with harsh words of judgment. As a result many believers view God as a cruel leader standing over them with a stick ready to punish them. Jesus wanted people to view God as a father who so loves his children that he longingly pleads for his sinful sons to come back to him.

2. Jesus' message was "**good news**." In the Greek, the word translated "Gospel" referred to a message of victory of a war battle or other messages of good news. Rather than being a religious term like Gospel tends to be, it was used in ordinary speech (More like Good News). About the time that the Gospels were being written, this word was often used for good news about the Roman Emperor. The announcement of his birthday or the choosing of a new Caesar was called "Gospel." The early Christians knew that the message about Jesus was the best news possible. It was not something to be kept hidden but joyously proclaimed for all to hear. For the Christians, the "Good News" includes not only the death of Jesus on the cross, but the story of his whole life and what it meant. It is not only the story about Jesus which is good news, but the implications make it good news. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus meant that God was seeking to reconcile himself with mankind, forgive their sins, bring them into his eternal family, and bless them for eternity. How much greater this is than any other "good news" we might have! Why is it so easy for us to announce to everyone the birth of our son or getting a good job, but so hard to tell others that God loves them and that in Jesus, they can be forgiven of their sins and become part of God's family?

3. Jesus focused upon the **Kingdom of God**: As we saw earlier, when hearing the word "kingdom", the Jews focused upon the reign of a king over people. They did not primarily focus upon geographical boundaries. The kingdom of God refers to God's reign. When Jesus told his disciples to pray "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" it meant that just as God reigns with absolute authority in heaven where all obey him, they are to long that God's reign might also be seen in the hearts and lives of the disciples, and ultimately over the whole world. It is interesting that today when we share the Gospel, this is a part that we often leave out. We tell people to believe in Jesus so that they will receive eternal life. But we don't tell them to turn over their lives to the rule of King Jesus. Jesus started his Gospel proclamation telling people to get ready for him to be their king. They were supposed to get ready to submit to his absolute authority over their lives.

Q. 4. a) Describe how you have seen people accept Jesus so that they will not be judged with hell, but who give little thought to allowing King Jesus reign in absolute authority over their lives. b) What type of follower of Jesus does this type of message tend to bring? c) Describe how our presentation of the Gospel would change if we talked more about submitting our lives to King Jesus.

4. Jesus demanded that people **repent**: We often think of "repentance" as one of two things. First, we think of it as being "sorry" for what we did. So when confronted with a sin that we have done, we start to cry and say we are sorry. Second, we think that it is admitting that we have done something. It is confession that we are at fault. But the word repentance in the Hebrew and Greek has a much fuller understanding. The word in Hebrew focuses upon turning back from a wrong way of life to following God's path. In the Greek, it means to have a totally different understanding (to change our minds) so that we begin to believe and live in a different way. The Greek word focuses not upon the "sorrow" we have of being sinners, but the intellectual awareness that we are sinners- living in rebellion against God. This leads to an awareness

that we are guilty and worthy of punishment. And it ends with a commitment to change how we live so that it is in line with the will of God.

Again we see how different our usual explanation of salvation is to people. We rarely speak about their sinfulness. We don't help them understand how evil their selfish, disobedient, rebellious life is. We don't tell them that they must make a conscious decision to turn from their previous way of life and follow God's path for their life. Rather we tell people that it will bring them eternal life or some physical benefit like healing or material blessings. As a result, we have many people who raise their hand signifying their "belief" in Jesus, but never make the decision to turn from their previous way of life. They haven't "repented" of their sin, so they continue in a rebellious pattern of life. Jesus would not call this the "Gospel." To become his follower means that people need a very different understanding of how to live and make a determined decision to walk in God's ways.

Q. 5. a) Think about a recent explanation of salvation you heard in your church. How much of that explanation dealt with sin and the need to repent? What did the person focus on instead? b) What results have you seen in a new believer's spiritual walk when they do not first have a clear understanding of their rebellious way of life which they are to reject and determine to live in obedience to God?

d. Jesus told them to **"Believe:"** As we saw last week with Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1-21), Jesus' message also included the word "believe." Like the word "repent" the word "believe" is also misunderstood by many Christians today. For many of us, the word "believe" simply means to agree that something is true. So when we say "Do you believe that Jesus died for your sins?," many people understand this to mean "Do you believe that he died on the cross." And many, even those who make no attempt to live in a God-honoring way, will say they believe. The New Testament word for "faith" and "believe" is rich in meaning. The New Testament demonstrates that saving faith includes three major things.

First, there is being fully convinced that the facts about Jesus are true: the fact that I am a sinner, the fact that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of my sin, the fact if I turn to him for forgiveness he is willing to give it to me, and the fact that he rose from the death and lives in heaven. No one "believes" on Jesus unless they have enough knowledge of who he is, who they are as sinners, what Jesus did on the cross, and how they can appropriate what Jesus did. It is dangerous to get people to say they believe before they actually understand what they are believing in. It is not the words "I believe" that matter, but the fact that the person is agreeing that the truths presented are true.

Second, they must personalize the facts. It is not enough to believe that Jesus died for sinners, but that Jesus died for **my** sin. Many people claiming to be Christians know the story of Jesus and his death on the cross. But they never come to the personal understanding that they are sinners, that Jesus died for their sins, and that they must personally commit their lives to him for salvation.

Third, they must live their lives based upon the truth of what is proclaimed or the promise which God gives us. Many Christians mentally believe that Jesus is their Savior and Lord, but they never personally stop trying to earn their salvation by something they do. So they fast, give to the poor, keep certain holy days, are baptized- all the time thinking that this will earn their salvation. Their actions say that Jesus' death on the cross did not pay the penalty of sin for their lives. Rather, they must work off their sins by doing something. And they say that Jesus is Lord, but there is never any indication that they are seeking to give Jesus control of their lives. They do not seek to do what he wants or walk in obedience to him.

Jesus went through all of Galilee, using every opportunity he had, to tell people that he was the Messiah King. In Him, God wanted to start his reign over their lives. People must realize that the way they believed about themselves, their worship, and the Lord Jesus Christ was faulty. They must understand the truth about Jesus, the Messiah. And then they must abandon their old ways of life and belief system. They must replace it with a full confidence that Jesus is the Messiah and live out their trust (faith) in this truth by submitting their lives totally to the control of Jesus. Only then would all of the blessings- personal salvation, internal joy, reconciliation with God, and eternal life become theirs.

Q. 6. a) Compare how many Christians understand the word "believe" with what is presented above. b) What problems result when people do not have a correct understanding of what "believe" means? c) How would our presentation of the Good News need to change if people are to have a more complete understanding of what "faith" consists of?

SECOND DAY

JESUS HEALS THE OFFICIAL'S SON (Jn. 4:43-53)

Q. 7. Read Jn. 4:43-53. a) Why did many people in Galilee welcome Jesus? b) Where was Jesus when the royal official came to visit him? c) What did Jesus first say to the official and the crowd when asked to do a miracle? Why do you think he said such harsh words? d) What miracle did Jesus do? e) What did the royal official and his family do when they saw the miracle?

The Gospel stories don't tell us much of what Jesus did during his time in Jerusalem and Judea. But it is clear that Jesus performed many miracles. (Jn. 2:23) Because it was during one of the major religious holidays (Passover), there were many from Galilee who witnessed the miracles that Jesus did, or at least heard about it. So when Jesus arrived back in Galilee, the stories about what he had done quickly spread throughout Galilee. Jesus instantly became a famous person. Jesus began to travel throughout Galilee teaching. As a famous person, he was regularly asked to teach in the synagogues.

One day Jesus arrived back in the town of Cana, the town where he had performed his first miracle of changing water to wine. In the town of Capernaum there was a rich official. We are not sure what his official position was, but most likely this official was an important official of Herod Antipas' government. He could have been a Gentile for many of Herod's officials were Gentiles. If he was a Jew, most likely he was not a very religious man since most of Herod's Jewish officials would have been those who accommodated to the Gentiles, adhering to Herod's policy of honoring Greek culture and Roman governmental control. His son became sick and he was at the point of death so his father got desperate. Somehow he heard about the "healer" Jesus. No doubt asking many people, he eventually found out that Jesus was in the town of Cana, over 30 kilometers distance.

This government official had a very difficult decision to make. First, he was an "important" government official. But Jesus was just a country person. It is always hard for those in positions of authority to lower themselves before those whom they consider backward and ask them for help. Pride is one of the major reason the rich and powerful have a difficult time believing in Jesus. Second, he had only heard about Jesus. He had not personally seen Jesus do miracles. We all know how stories change as people tell it to others and no doubt he was afraid that it was so with Jesus. But eventually he decided to

walk over 30 kilometers to ask Jesus to heal his son. It would have taken the official a whole day of difficult travel over mountains to reach the city of Cana and locate Jesus.

It would have been natural for Jesus to resist helping this official. After all, it was the official's government who had recently put his cousin, John the Baptist, in prison. Jesus would later teach the people to "love their enemies." (Mt. 5:43-44) He was demonstrating this truth, helping one who represented Herod Antipas' government. Jesus did not care if a person was very poor like the couple in Cana who ran out of wine or very rich and powerful like this official, he did not care if they were supportive of his ministry or not, if he found them in need, he helped them. Jesus revealed God's heart of never showing favoritism. He had equal compassion upon all, the rich and the poor, the weak and the powerful. As followers of Christ we must be careful to maintain the same attitude. We must never favor the rich and overlook the poor. And we must never hold a grudge against those who have hurt us and refuse to help them. Our compassion must reach out to everyone.

- Q. 8. a) Describe ways Christians often favor the rich and educated and powerful over the poor.
b) Describe ways that Christians often refuse to help those who have historically hurt them or their tribe.
c) List ways that today we can be like Jesus and treat all people equally without favoritism.

When the rich official met with Jesus and asked him to come with him to Capernaum to heal his son, Jesus' response seems harsh- "All you people want are miracles- without them you won't believe" he said. Why did Jesus answer in such a way? There were at least three reasons.

First, Jesus wanted to teach the Jews and the official that he was not to be treated as a "healer" or "miracle worker." His goal was not to simply meet the physical needs of people. The Jews probably had no interest in changing their lives and submitting to the reign of God. They were not interested in his messages demanding that they repent. All they wanted was for Jesus to do miracles. Jesus never did his miracles for show or to impress people. He did them out of compassion for the individuals who were suffering.

Second, Jesus was not only concerned with helping the physical needs of people. Jesus wanted to help them grow in their understanding of what true faith was. He challenged them to have faith that he was the Messiah without having to see all of the miracles. Our faith is always weak when we only follow Jesus because he does miracles for us. It requires a much greater faith to believe in Jesus because we know he is the Messiah and Savior, even though we don't personally see his miraculous power healing us from all of our sicknesses.

Third, Jesus wanted the official to make a clear choice whether or not to trust Jesus. No doubt the official came to Jesus thinking that with a little money the miracle worker would do a miracle for him. But Jesus' harsh words probably startled him. Jesus showed no desire for his money or to heal people just to be popular. The official would be tempted to give up and go home. Why should he be reprimanded- wasn't he a mighty official who could arrest Jesus if he wanted?

Jesus desired that people like the official, have true faith rather than being known as a miracle worker. Faith does not grow when our requests of God are quickly answered. Faith only grows in times of difficulty and we need to keep trusting Jesus even when it seems that he has not answered our request. So Jesus first encouraged the official's faith to grow by forcing him to persevere in asking Jesus to come heal his son. Instead of giving up after being rebuffed, the official kept pleading with Jesus to come to Capernaum

with him. But then Jesus sought to strengthen that new faith even further. He told the official to go back to Capernaum, that his son was healed. Jesus refused to go with him. This went against the beliefs of the Jews. They assumed that a "miracle worker" could only heal when he was there in person. For Jesus to heal someone 30 kilometers away without even being with the person was unheard of. Would this important official trust Jesus and go home? How much harder it would have been for him to walk home without Jesus at his side encouraging him.

The rich official showed amazing faith. Without any further argument, he turned and left. Most likely he spent the night in Cana or one of the near by towns. And then early the next morning began the long trip back to Capernaum. When he was close to the city of Capernaum, he met his house servants coming to get him since his was now healed. This official asked the servants what time the boy's fever broke. When they mentioned "the seventh hour" he immediately knew it was Jesus, for that was when Jesus had told him that his son was healed.

The unknown rich official believed in Jesus. He and his family realized that Jesus was not just a miracle worker. Rather he was the Messiah. Scholars wonder whether this official was called Cuza and his wife was called Joanna. In Luke 8:3 we are told that Cuza was the manager of Herod's household and his wife Joanna was one of those who traveled with Jesus in his journeys and supported his ministry. Obviously Jesus must have done something for Joanna which caused her to leave her comfortable life in a rich government house to be with Jesus even though life would have been difficult and living circumstances poor.

John calls this the "second" sign which Jesus did. We know that Jesus had done other miracles before this, so it was not Jesus' second miracle. Rather, it was the second miracle performed in Galilee which John chose as one of the pieces of evidence of Jesus' being the Son of God. Jesus' power to heal was so great that distance did not limit him. He could heal those who stood in front of him, but he could also heal a person who was hundreds of kilometers away.

As followers of Jesus, we will often face situations when there is no easy solution. We pray, and the answer we expect does not come. The question is "Will we continue to trust Jesus even when things are impossible and dark?" If, like many people, we give up our faith during the times of difficulty, then we have little faith in God. We have been treating Jesus like a magician, who is supposed to perform for our benefit. We have not really trusted him as the Lord and Savior. But if we continue to trust Jesus to provide the answer, then we are true followers of Jesus. Jesus might provide the answer while we are on earth, or he might provide the answer when we get to heaven. Jesus, as Lord, can determine "when" he will answer. Job showed the greatness of his faith when he said "Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him." (Job 13:15) How about you- what is your faith like? Is it dependent upon God keeping you from all difficult situations? Or will you learn the lesson of the healing of the official's son- that Jesus seeks to help our faith grow and will answer our prayers in his way?

Q. 9. Spend time in prayer, asking God to reveal to you the level of your faith. Ask God to refine your faith so that it becomes like gold refined in the fire. (See 1 Pet. 1:6-7)

JESUS IS REJECTED IN HIS HOMETOWN OF NAZARETH (Lk. 4:16-30)

Q. 10. Read Lk. 4:16-30. a) What does the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1-2 tell us about Jesus' ministry? b) What does it tell us about what type of ministry we should have as followers of Jesus? c) What was the reaction of the people from Jesus' home town of Nazareth to Jesus?

In his travels throughout Galilee, Jesus arrived in his hometown of Nazareth. It was probably more than three months since Jesus had left Nazareth to travel to Judea. (Some scholars think about a year had passed since Jesus had left Nazareth.) Much had changed while he was gone. Jesus' hidden life as the Messiah was now over and he had begun his public ministry. No doubt wanting to visit his friends and relatives and share the Good News with them, Jesus returned to Nazareth. But those in Nazareth struggled with the changes. In their minds they could only see Jesus as the poor carpenter, the son of Joseph and Mary who had grown up in their midst. By now Jesus was famous and the people in Nazareth had heard about his miracles in Judea and in other parts of Galilee. When Jesus arrived in Nazareth, there would have been a lot of excitement. "The miracle worker has arrived. Let's go see his miracles. If he has done miracles in those areas, imagine the type of miracles he will do here in his own town" they would have said.

When Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, arrived, the whole community gathered in their synagogue. Every Jew was expected to attend the worship and the elders would reprimand those who did not attend. The word "synagogue" refers both to the gathering of the Jewish community and the building in which they gathered. This building had several important functions for the Jewish community.

1. Primarily it was the religious meeting center for the Jewish community. Every Saturday the Jews would gather there to worship. The major focus of Jewish worship was not singing and choirs as is common in our churches. Rather, the focus was on the reading of Scripture, especially the Law and explaining how Jews were to live in God-honoring ways.

2. The synagogue was also a place where people would come to pray to God for things which were troubling them. Jews believed that their prayers were more effective in the synagogue than in their homes.

3. The synagogue was a religious school where young boys and sometimes girls would come to be taught the Jewish laws and traditions. Most Jewish boys would learn how to read and memorized the important teachings of their faith. Rabbis (religious teachers) would also use synagogues as their center for training their followers.

4. The Jews used the synagogue as their community meeting place. When there was a meeting to discuss common interests or when a decision was needed by the elders on certain matters, they would usually gather in the synagogue building.

Synagogue buildings began sometime after Jews from Judah were sent into captivity to Babylon in 586 BC. By the times of Jesus, every city in the Roman empire which had a large community of Jews had a building in which the Jews would gather. If possible, the Jews would build their synagogue on the top of a hill with the entrance facing Jerusalem. The mats or sometimes the seats for the worshippers in the synagogue faced the entrance so that the Jews were praying towards Jerusalem. If the building was large with a balcony, women usually sat separated from the men. And there were special seats in the front for the elders responsible for the care of the synagogue. Also in the front of the synagogue was a wooden box

called the "ark of the covenant." In this wooden box were the scrolls containing the Old Testament books. (Note: In that time there were no "books" like we understand them. Rather, all of the scriptures were written on scrolls. There was a scroll of Genesis, another for Exodus, another for Isaiah, etc. Each scroll was written on leather or a special plant which was woven to form a writing surface. Each scroll was carefully wrapped in cloth. Because the Jews believed that these scrolls included the very words of God, they were treated with great reverence and care.) There was also a stand used for the reading of the Scriptures.

In order for a Jewish community to have a synagogue, there had to be at least 10 men (elders) who had sufficient time and personal finances to oversee the synagogue and the community. From these ten, one was chosen by the community to be the "ruler of the synagogue." He was responsible to oversee all ministries in the synagogue. One of his responsibilities was to choose who was going to read the various portions of scripture and who was going to teach. So it would have been this "ruler of the synagogue" who approached Jesus and asked him to read and teach. The other elders and the ruler of the synagogue were the judges of the community. Each synagogue also had an "attendant" who was carefully chosen as a man of integrity and spiritual concern for God. He was responsible for the upkeep of the synagogue and teaching the children. And he was responsible to take the assigned scrolls from the ark (the box containing the scrolls), carefully unwrap them and give it to the reader. After the reading, he would return the scroll to the ark. It was this attendant who would have given Jesus the scroll of Isaiah to read.

By the time of Jesus, the Jewish worship structure was very formal. Each service started with the singing of one of the Psalms in the book of Psalms. Then the ruler would say set prayers (similar to our Lord's Prayer), everyone would say Deut. 6:4-9 which was called the Shema, and repeat together 18 blessings which Jews said God would grant to those who obey the Law. The priestly blessing of Num. 6:24-26 would be spoken by a priest or the ruler of the synagogue. Then at least 7 people would be assigned to read from the books of Moses. By this time, the Jews had established an order of reading so that within 3 ½ years all five books would have been read. (Some synagogues read the Law once every year.) Not only was there a reader, but often there was an assigned "translator" to stand next to the reader. The reader would read in Hebrew and the translator interpret what was read in Aramaic or Greek, depending upon which language the people understood. Many interpreters used the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament called the "Septuagint." After the assigned passages from the Law was read, a passage for the Prophets was read. The reader of the Prophets was often the person assigned to teach. Scholars debate as to whether or not by this time in Jewish teachings the Prophets were also assigned readings. Perhaps a certain book was supposed to be read, but the teacher could choose which passage to read depending on what he wanted to teach. Like many of our churches today, the Jews carefully chose the teachers, for they wanted the most dynamic teachers possible. Otherwise, in larger cities where there were several synagogues, the members of their synagogue would go to a different synagogue to listen to someone more dynamic. Unfortunately this lead to teachers who were more concerned with being popular than to those who wanted to pass on God's Word accurately to his people. There was often jealousy between teachers as each tried to be more dynamic than the other so as to gain a better following.

Q. 11. a) Describe how you have seen a similar trend in our churches to focus upon popular teachers rather than upon those who best teach God's Word. b) Illustrate things some teachers do to become more popular with church members. c) What danger do you see to the church if we focus primarily upon popularity of teachers rather than on accuracy of teaching? d) What danger can come upon a church

where church ministers focus more upon being popular with the church members rather than on clearly proclaiming God's Word?

Jesus joined the community of Jews to worship God. Everyone would have known that he was to be asked to speak. Since the established worship was now over and the books of the Law read, Jesus came to read from the Prophets. It is not clear if Jesus chose the book of Isaiah or whether it was the assigned book for the day, but the attendant brought Jesus the scroll of Isaiah. Standing behind the podium, Jesus carefully unrolled the scroll until he came to Isaiah 61 and began to read. It would have been expected for Jesus to read a long section from Isaiah. But to the amazement of the people, Jesus only read two verses from Isaiah 61:1-2 and then quoted one phrase from Is. 58:6. Jesus probably read in Hebrew and then paraphrased the passage in Aramaic, which was the language of the Jews in Galilee.

Q. 12. a) Read Is. 61:1-2 and Is. 58:6 and compare them to what is found in Lk. 4:18-19. What differences do you see? What is added? What is not mentioned? b) Read Lev. 25:8-55. What was this special year called and what happened on that year?

Jesus chose this passage because it best expressed his complete ministry. Jesus did not choose to read from sections which prophesied the great power of the Messiah and the greatness of his kingdom as the Jews expected of the Messiah. Rather, Jesus chose a prophecy which described how he had come to help those who were downtrodden. This passage reveals the other side of the ministry of Jesus. Previously we saw that Jesus came to preach the Good News. But now we read that Jesus came to help those who were struggling in life. The complete Gospel always includes spiritual truths with reaching out in compassion. Any follower of Jesus will not only be concerned with saving people from their sins, but with helping them overcome their problems.

As Jesus read Is. 61:1-2, immediately the Jews would have realized that he was reading about the time of the Messiah. Notice the following about the passage which Jesus read:

1. Jesus was "anointed by the Holy Spirit:" The Jews used this phrase in two ways. First, the anointing referred to the prophetic anointing, speaking under the power of God with the words of God just like Jeremiah and Isaiah had done. So they understood this passage to mean that one day someone speaking on behalf of God, with his power and authority would come and minister in Israel. Second, the Messiah was also to be anointed by the Holy Spirit. (You will remember that the word "Messiah" (in Hebrew) or "Christ" (in Greek) both mean "the anointed one.") Jesus fulfilled both of these in becoming the anointed of God by the Holy Spirit. He was God's greatest Prophet. (See Heb. 1:1-3) But he was also the Messiah.

2. Jesus' ministry was to be a "herald" and an "apostle." The word "preach" is the word used for a herald who spoke out on behalf of a King. Jesus was the one appointed by God to speak on his behalf. The word "sent" is the same word as "apostle." So Jesus was the first apostle, the one sent by God the Father to speak and work on his behalf.

3. The focus of Jesus' ministry would be on those who are downtrodden in the world. As we study the life of Jesus, we will see that the people to whom he primarily ministered were those society tended to despise: the tax collectors, the prostitutes, and the poor. Throughout history the Gospel has always found its greatest response among those whom society despises. And it is Christians, the followers of Jesus,

who have always reached out to those who are despised by others. Hospitals were started by Christians who wanted to help the sick. Feeding centers for the poor have been started in many major cities of the world for the poor who live on the streets and don't have enough food to live. People like Mother Theresa and her religious society reach out to those who are abandoned and about to die, like those about to die from AIDS. How different this is, however, from the attitude many Christians today have. Some churches are embarrassed by the fact that the majority in their church are poor, or from the country, or uneducated. "We need to focus upon the educated, the traders, those from the respectable classes of society" they say. In doing so, they go against the pattern established by their Lord Jesus.

Isaiah lists several types of people who are downtrodden. These types of downtrodden are both to be taken literally as well as symbolically:

a. The poor: Those who economically do not have many resources. Jesus would later expand this to refer to those who were "poor in spirit," those who had a sense of desperate need in their hearts. Most of the people Jesus ministered to were of the poor class. There were rich people like Nicodemus and Joseph of Aramathea who followed Jesus. But the majority of wealthy people, like the rich young ruler, would stumble over the Gospel's demands that money not be the center of their lives, because Jesus wanted their full commitment.

b. Freedom for the prisoners: There is no evidence that Jesus had any direct ministry with prisoners. But Jesus did come to help prisoners. He helped those who were under captivity to Satan and were demon possessed. Jesus also came to free people from the prison of their selfish and sinful lives, and their imprisonment to the bondage of alcohol and drugs or moral addictions to sex. When a person comes to Jesus, he meets them as the one who delivers them from their imprisonment. Today Christian groups like Prison Fellowship work in prisons seeking to help the prisoners gain spiritual freedom.

c. Sight for the blind: In the Gospels we read that Jesus frequently restored the sight of the blind. (There are Christian groups today like Christian Blind Mission, who minister to blind people today.) But Jesus meant more than physical blindness. Jesus came to give spiritual sight to people who were blind to their sin, blind to their domination by Satan, and blind to the control of their culture upon them. Christians, more than any other group, are in the position to see the moral and cultural degradation in their personal lives and in society and look for solutions. For instance, it was a Christian who worked in England to outlaw slavery and bring social reform in the factories. Unfortunately most Christians don't allow the Holy Spirit to show them the evilness in their society or don't have the moral courage to work against it. So female circumcision, polygamy, drunkenness, divorce, and abortion continue in society and even in the church unchallenged. Sadly, rather than see the evilness of situations around us, we tend to close our eyes.

d. To release the oppressed: Like the release of prisoners, this refers to Jesus seeking to release any one who is oppressed by anything. (Is. 58:6)

e. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor: Scholars think that behind the original prophecy in Isaiah 61 is a practice among the Jews called the "Year of Jubilee." (Lev. 25:8-55) Every fifty years there was to be a year of special celebration. When this year came, all Jewish slaves were released from slavery, debts were cancelled, and those who sold their property because of economic problems were able to go back and reclaim their property. This year symbolized the coming reign of the Messiah where all injustices would be undone. Although the full undoing of societal injustices will have to wait until Jesus returns to

rule on the earth, among the followers of Jesus, all injustices are to be undone. Paul would later write that in the church there were to be no tribal injustices, no economic injustices, and no sexual injustices. As Paul said "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11) Unfortunately the followers of Jesus have rarely fulfilled this purpose of Jesus. Our churches are still filled with tribalism, divisions between the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, and with a sense of superiority of men over women. Groups like the potters or blacksmiths or darker skinned people still are not welcomed or don't feel equal in the church. How sad that after 2000 years of saying we are following Jesus that we still have not proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor to many in our society!

Q. 13. a) List of people Jesus said he had come to help. b) List ways that the followers of Jesus today are reaching out to each group. c) List ways that the followers of Jesus are not following the teachings of our Master. c) Describe how ministries in the church would change if we were more like Jesus in reaching out to the oppressed.

It is interesting to note what Jesus did not read. In Isaiah 61:2 God also said that the Messiah would "proclaim the day of vengeance of our God." Why did Jesus not read this? Jesus' mission when he first came was to proclaim the grace of God and the forgiveness that people could enjoy because of his death on the cross. The day of vengeance and punishment will take place when Jesus comes again to judge the nations and punish those who were rebellious against him. We live in the days of "grace" when our message to people is to be that God loves them and wants to forgive their sins and deliver them from Satan and sins' oppression in all of its forms. Knowing that the day of judgment will come, we must warn people to accept the grace of God while there is still time.

When Jews read the Scriptures, they would always stand to honor the Word. But when they taught, the teachers would sit down. So Jesus sat down and began to teach. Luke does not tell us all that Jesus said but only summarizes it, focusing on the reaction of people in Nazareth to Jesus.

Initially the people were very impressed with the teachings of Jesus. He was a skillful teacher, so they carefully listened to him. His words were "gracious"- focusing upon the grace of God and his love for people, especially the downtrodden. Notice the following:

1. Jesus said that the passage of Isaiah was fulfilled "today". All of the Jews would have admitted that these verses referred to the times of the Messiah. But they would have been startled when Jesus openly proclaimed that the Messiah had come. They immediately recognized that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah and that the messianic age had started.

This would have greatly confused the Jews for two reasons.

First, they knew Jesus for he had spent 30 years living in their small town. He was the legal "son of Joseph," a poor carpenter from a remote country village. There had been nothing in Jesus' life before this that would have indicated to them that he was the great Messiah.

Second, Jesus had done nothing which fit their understanding of what the Messiah would do. For centuries the Jews had focused their beliefs upon a Messiah who would deliver them from the control of Gentile nations. They thought that with great miraculous power, the Messiah would totally destroy all of

God's enemies and start another golden era in Palestine. But there was no evidence of this. Jesus had no armies. He did not even try to attack verbally or with political resistance the Romans and heathen governments like Herod Antipas. Even though the political center was just a few kilometers away, Jesus made no effort to attack that center. "How could he be the Messiah?" they wondered. This misunderstanding of the role of the Messiah would cause great confusion to the Jews for the rest of history. Even today Jews have a difficult time believing that Jesus is the Messiah because he did not fit their understanding of what the Messiah would do.

2. Jesus quoted a common proverb "Physician, heal yourself." After the time of teaching, Jews often had a time of discussion about the sermon. Probably at the end of Jesus' teaching (or perhaps they stopped him with sharp questions), a heated discussion arose between Jesus and the crowd. The Jews and Greeks had a proverb which meant that a person claiming to be a doctor must first demonstrate that he can heal himself before he tries to heal others. There are different ways to understand the accusation of the Jews against Jesus.

First, they could be saying "Jesus, you claim to be the Messiah. But you are very poor with none of the glory which the Messiah will have. If you were the Messiah, you would start with yourself. How you dress and live would change. And show us your power over our enemies. Do that and then we will begin to believe that you are the Messiah." Since Jesus did not look like they expected a Messiah to look, they thought it demonstrated that Jesus was not the Messiah.

Second, it could be the people from Nazareth had come to listen to Jesus primarily because they wanted to see Jesus do miracles just like they had heard he had done in other areas. "Jesus, you say you are the Messiah. Prove it to us. Do your miracles here. Why should your miracles be done in other parts of the country. If you were the Messiah, you would start everything here in your home town with us. Then you can go to other areas. Now prove to us your claims with some great miracle" they might have argued.

A similar accusation was spoken when Jesus was on the cross. "He saved others. Let him save himself." (Mt. 27:42) It would have been easy for Jesus to perform a miracle in Nazareth to impress the people and gain their acceptance. But Jesus did not want them to follow him as a "miracle worker." He wanted them to realize that he came to deliver them from bondage to sin. Jesus never did a miracle based upon the request of people to prove who he was by doing a miracle. Rather he only did miracles when he met a person who had a need that he could meet.

Miracles for the followers of Jesus is never to be a tool to astound people or impress them or cause them to follow the healer. Rather, it is to be God's tool to reach out to the hurting and help them. Indirectly miracles do prove that Jesus is the powerful God, but that is not the reason we are to do miracles. Unfortunately there are many so-called healers in the church who have this mixed up. They want to use miracles as a way to impress people. "If people see the miracles they will believe" they think. And they gain great followings and thousands come to watch them perform miracles. But what type of faith does this produce? Only temporary selfish faith which causes people to follow Jesus as long as he does miracles for them. But if the miracles do not take place as they expect, they soon reject Jesus. Shouldn't we learn from Jesus and refuse to do miracles for the purpose of causing people to be amazed? Shouldn't we use this gift to help the hurting as God brings them across our path and tells us to heal them?

Q. 14. a) Compare Jesus' attitude towards miracles to how some people want to use miracles in the name of Jesus today. b) Evaluate the impact of such focus upon miracles. Does it usually bring lasting change and firm faith in the lives of those who come to see the miracles and make a commitment of faith?

3. Jesus tells the second parable that a prophet is rarely accepted in his home territory. Jesus felt the peoples' resistance to him grow. So he quoted a second proverb: "No prophet is accepted in his hometown." Throughout the history of the Jews, almost every true prophet of God was resisted by his own people. Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel are just a few of the prophets who faced the opposition of the Jews. Therefore, Jesus was not surprised when the people of his own town resisted the fact that he was the Messiah. Unfortunately this same truth is common today as well. It is often those from another denomination and not the person's own denomination who recognize the spiritual gifting of a person. Many church leaders even work at hindering the ministry of their own members if that person becomes too popular. Gifted young men and women often end up in another denomination because their own denomination will not allow them to use their spiritual gifts. It is also common for churches to look for "experts" outside of their denomination rather than look for those within their denomination to help them evaluate something. It is still hard for us to accept the "prophets" in our own denomination.

But it was when Jesus hinted that he would give the blessing of God to others that the crowd got very angry. When there is resistance to his work in their midst, God usually blesses someone else. So the ones who would be hurt by the rejection of Jesus would be the people in Nazareth and later the Jews. Other towns in Galilee, and eventually the Gentiles, would benefit from their lack of faith. Jesus quoted two examples from Israel's history where the resistance of the Jews to his prophets led to God blessings the hated Gentiles:

a. Elijah and the Gentile widow from Zarephath (1 Ki. 17:1-15): While the Israelites were resisting God and worshipping idols, God sent Elijah to live with a widow in Sidon, the Gentile region adjacent to Galilee. God met her need for oil. But God did not show his favor to the many widows in Israel who could have benefited in the same way.

b. Elisha and the leper Naaman (2 Ki. 5): Naaman was from Syria, the region to the north of Galilee. When he was struck with leprosy, he went to Elisha and was healed. There would have been many lepers in Israel at the time, but they did not receive healing.

The very thought that God might bless the Gentiles instead of them was too much for the Jews to accept. To them the Gentiles were of no use and some Jews thought that God only created them to be like wood to keep the fire of hell burning. They were also angry that Jesus would claim that he was the Messiah and he was bringing in Messianic age when they did not think he was. He was just a poor peasant just like them, not someone great. "Who was Jesus to claim such great things for himself?" they thought. (Note: The people could also have been worried that such talk would bring the wrath of Rome upon them. Just 20 years earlier, people from Galilee had tried to rebel against Rome and captured the city of Sepphoris. When the Romans retaliated, they totally destroyed the city and took thousands of people slaves- some of whom were probably from Nazareth. The people of Nazareth did not want that to happen again. In fact, in 66 AD, when many Jews started a rebellion against Rome, Jews in the region of Nazareth refused to join the rebellion.)

With great anger the people grabbed Jesus and were going to execute him. Although only the Romans were allowed to execute someone at this time, the Jews were not worried about what the Roman officials would do. They took Jesus to one of the hills behind the city of Nazareth. One of the common ways the Jews killed a heretic was to take the person to a steep hill or cliff and push him over the cliff. While he lay stunned at the bottom of the hill they would throw stones the size of a person's head upon the body until the person was clearly dead. This is what they planned to do to Jesus. But in some miraculous way, Jesus walked away from the crowd. It wasn't Jesus' time to die yet, so God protected him.

Luke chose this story of Jesus for several reasons.

a. One of the major questions early Christians, especially Jews, were asking was "If Jesus is really the Messiah, why did his own people, the Jews, reject him?" The town of Nazareth was symbolic of what would soon happen to the whole nation of the Jews. They too would not recognize the "prophet" in their own midst. (See Jn. 1:11) The attempt by the people of Nazareth to kill Jesus would later be the attempt of the nation of Israel to kill Jesus. At that time, God did not help his Son to escape, but allowed them to kill Jesus.

b. In the words of Jesus was a "hint" of what would soon to take place in history. Jesus worked among the Jews. But they rejected him. As a result, like the widow and Namaan in the Old Testament, God would bless the Gentiles rather than his own people. God is determined to bless people. If one group, or one church is unwilling to receive his blessing, God does not force his blessing upon them. Rather, he turns to others and blesses them. Paul would later write that God works this way to make the Jews and others who are resistant "jealous" so that they are more willing to listen to God. (Rom. 11:11-12)

Q. 15. a) If God blessed the Gentiles when the Jews resisted his working in their midst, what warning does that provide to us today if our church or denomination does not listen to God and we resist his work in our midst? b) Describe ways that you have seen this truth work out in a church in Ethiopia.

c. Luke also wanted to encourage the followers of Jesus who were struggling with their families and friends not understanding them since they became Christians. One of the most difficult things a person can face is to have his family and friends with whom he grew up turn against him when he becomes a follower of Jesus. And yet Luke wants to remind us that Jesus faced that as well. His family and friends all turned against him. So Jesus does understand the pain we feel when this happens to us. And yet Jesus chose to remain faithful to God and continue the work God had given him. As followers of Jesus, we too must accept this pain of rejection and continue to follow Jesus.

Q. 16. a) Describe how you have seen becoming a Christian cause family and friends to reject a person. b) What encouragement could you give to a new Christian who has been rejected by his family and friends because he chose to follow Jesus?

THIRD DAY

Tilahun had a successful business. Although he had heard about Jesus from his church, Tilahun assumed that being a Christian was simply because someone was born to parents who were members of his denomination. Tilahun kept the minimum requirements of his church, but rarely thought about Jesus and what it meant to claim to be his follower. One day someone told Tilahun about a religious rich young

man who asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. He was struck by Jesus' strong teaching that the man had to give away his money and follow Jesus. Only then would he be a "follower of Jesus." "What would I do if Jesus told me that?" he wondered. For the first time Tilahun realized that being a follower of Jesus required a personal choice which he had to make. And it required a serious decision to put Jesus first in his life and living a life totally submitted to Jesus. After much thought, Tilahun made that decision. Not long afterwards, Tilahun felt God tell him "Tilahun, I want you to sell your business and your house. Take your family and go to the region of Gambella. Live among the people there and tell them about following Jesus as a disciple." "Where will I get enough to live on? What about the education of my children? Can't I just promise to give money and pay someone else less educated to go?" he thought as he struggled with his decision whether or not to obey God.

Q. 17. a) Explain how the choice Tilahun had to make was similar to the choice the rich young ruler in Mt. 19:16-26 had to make if he chose to follow Jesus? b) Describe a situation in your life where you had to make a difficult choice as to whether or not you would obey Jesus.

One of the major reasons the writers of the Gospel wrote the stories of Jesus was to help the early Christians understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Although we tend to focus upon "belief" in Jesus, the Gospels focus upon following Jesus as a disciple. The Gospel teaches us to believe on Jesus, and to believe on Jesus is to become a life-long follower of Jesus. The Gospel writers wanted to show that becoming a disciple of Jesus would cost a lot. As we saw yesterday, following God's plan for his life caused Jesus to be rejected by his friends and family. Today we will see the difficult decision which some of the first disciples of Jesus had to make when they chose to follow him.

Q. 18. Read Mk. 1:14-20 and Lk. 5:1-11. a) Who were the first two men Jesus called as his personal disciples? What difficult decision were they required to make in order to follow Jesus? b) What miracle did Jesus do for Peter? What was Jesus' response to Jesus' miracle? c) Who were the second two disciples to follow Jesus? What implication did their decision have upon their family?

JESUS CALLS FOUR OF HIS FIRST DISCIPLES (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:14-20, Lk. 5:1-11)

From the city of Nazareth, Jesus returned to the region alongside the Sea of Galilee. This large lake was located in northern Palestine and was also called the Sea of Gennesaret or the Sea of Tiberias. It was over 20 kilometers in length and 13 kilometers wide. The lake was rich with fish. Much of Jesus' ministry was along this lake. Most of the people in the region of Galilee were poor farmers. But alongside the lake, there were many who made their living by fishing. Jews ate more fish than they did sheep or cattle. Since fish was caught, salted, and shipped throughout much of Palestine, the fishing industry along the Sea of Galilee was one of the more prosperous types of businesses. Interestingly, 7 out of 12 of Jesus' close disciples were fishermen.

You will remember that Peter, Andrew, John, and perhaps James had already met Jesus. They probably had been the disciples of John the Baptist. This demonstrates that they were already seeking to live in purity and get their lives ready for the coming Messiah. When John pointed out Jesus, Peter, Andrew, John, and others who were John's disciples left him to follow Jesus. But after following Jesus in his initial ministry in Galilee (Cana) and ministry in Judea, they returned to their family business as fishermen and Jesus had to call them again to follow him.

The first four disciples of Jesus knew each other well and worked together as partners. (Lk. 5:10) Peter and Andrew, who were brothers, were from the town of Bethsaida. Scholars debate where the Bethsaida city was located, but it was probably on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. However, it seems that Peter and Andrew later moved their fishing business to Capernaum. Peter's Jewish name was Simeon which was changed to Simon, a Greek name which sounded similar to Simeon. Later Jesus would change his name to "Cephas" in Aramaic or "Peter" in Greek, both of which mean rock. As the church spread, Jesus' special name, Peter, would become most common.

James and John were also fishermen and worked in partnership with Peter and Andrew. There is some evidence that James and John were actually related to Jesus. Mary's sister was called Salome and she was the mother of James and John. (Mk. 16:1 says she was one of the women who visited the tomb of Jesus. Jn. 19:25 does not mention her name, but mentions Mary's sister.) James and John were from a more wealthy family since their family could afford servants to help them in the fishing industry. (Mk. 1:20) James and John had the nicknames "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17) to show that they had strong personalities and tended to get angry quickly. (e.g. Lk. 9:54)

(Note: Scholars debate whether or not the events in Mark 1:14-20 refer to the same time as described in Luke 5:1-11. Some believe that Luke describes in more detail than does Mark the events that led up to Peter following Jesus. Others believe these are two distinct events, and shortly after the calling of the four disciples in Mark 1:14-20, the four returned to their work. Jesus had to call them a third time. After Jesus performed an amazing miracle, the four disciples totally broke with their past way of life as fishermen to follow Jesus. Although we cannot be certain which view is accurate, we will treat these two stories together.)

During this time of ministry in Galilee Capernaum became Jesus' major base from which he worked. As his popularity grew, Jesus could no longer teach in the synagogue or in the town. So he often had to leave the town and go out into the countryside to teach. As Jesus was on the shore teaching the people, the crowds kept getting larger and pressing against him until it was not convenient to teach them. In the water were two boats. In the first boat were Simon and Andrew who had just returned from fishing all night with little result. James and John were in the second boat. Mark tells us that they were in the midst of fishing from their boat next to the shore. They had small nets in their hands and were throwing the nets into the water trying to catch fish. Perhaps they were listening to Jesus, but also wanting to catch more fish if possible. (Note: Jewish fishermen had two types of nets for fishing, a small one used close to shore by individuals and a large net which they used in deeper water.)

Simon and Andrew had seen some of Jesus' miracles in Judea and Galilee and no doubt they had heard some of his teaching. Jesus turned to Simon and asked permission to use his boat as his pulpit. Jesus got into Peter's boat and started teaching again- sitting down as Jewish teachers did when teaching. When he finished teaching, Jesus told Peter and Andrew to take the boat back out into the middle of the lake and put their large nets down again. (Note: Although Peter, Andrew, James and John were all involved in this story, Luke wanted to explain to the early Christians how Peter, the most famous of the apostles, met Jesus, so he focuses his story upon Peter.) Peter was tired and discouraged. He had fished all night and had caught very little fish. And no one fished during the day when the fish were deep in the water where their nets would not catch them. People always fished during the night, early morning, or late evening. Peter was the professional fisherman, so it would have been difficult for him to listen to Jesus, a carpenter, who seemingly knew nothing about fishing.

It must have been difficult for Peter to overcome his natural pride of not wanting to listen to those who had no experience in fishing and listen to Jesus. But Peter and Andrew took their boat into the middle of the lake and let down their nets. Much to their amazement, their nets soon filled up with more fish than they had ever caught in their lives. Jesus, the creator of the fish, had now commanded the fish to come into their nets! Waving their hands, they called James and John to come help them. There were so many fish that both boats almost sank.

Seeing this miracle, Peter's understanding about who Jesus was grew. Peter did three things which showed his new understanding.

First, he fell at Jesus' feet. Jews would fall at the feet of someone they considered greater and more powerful than they. This was especially true when meeting with the holy God.

Second, Peter called Jesus "Lord." This is a stronger word than "Master" which he used earlier. Although sometimes used by a slave of the master, here it reflects Peter's belief that Jesus was divine.

Third, Peter was suddenly aware of his sinfulness. Peter was not saying that he had a specific sin in his life which he was confessing. Rather, he was aware that in contrast with the great, powerful, holy Jesus, he was a terrible sinner who was not worthy to be in the same boat with Jesus. "Jesus, you are holy. In contrast I am so sinful. I have no right to be with you" he humbly said.

This story teaches us several important lessons.

First, it should remind those of us in church work that we must be careful not to enter full time ministry in the church until we have a clear call from God which causes us to understand that Jesus has complete right to rule our lives. We must give up our own dreams and desires for a convenient life. We must begin by asking Jesus "What do you want me to do?" We need to also be aware of our unworthiness to be in ministry. We are chosen simply because of God's grace, not because we are more spiritual. We are "sinners" just like Peter. We must overcome our pride, otherwise we will never minister in a way that honors God, but will seek to honor ourselves. It is only after learning humility that God can use us.

Second, we often choose to become the follower of Jesus because we selfishly want something from Jesus. We want physical healing or physical blessings. We want Jesus to meet **our** needs rather than realize that we are there to fulfill his desires. As a result we treat him as a "servant," the one we call on when in trouble. At other times as we follow Jesus we begin to think "I am educated and talented. Jesus is fortunate to have me as his follower. After all, I am not as sinful as that person who chews chatt and drinks. (Chatt is a mild narcotic used widely in Ethiopia and surrounding countries. It creates a sense of calmness and lethargy, but often means people have little desire to work. It is an expensive habit that negatively impacts the life of many poor people.) And I am not like that uneducated potter." So we come to Jesus with a sense of pride in our hearts. We have a similar attitude as the Pharisee who prayed "I thank you that I am not like this tax collector." (Lk. 18:10-14)

Both of these attitudes are opposite to the attitude we must have if we are to follow Jesus in a Biblical way. We must choose to follow Jesus with an awareness of who he is. He is the great powerful God. I am only a sinful man. I have no right to think that I can tell him to do things for me, to meet my desires. Anything he does for me is because of grace, something I do not deserve. I am his slave. Jesus is the one in control

of my life. I must come to him as "Lord," the one who gives the orders which I must obey. Too many people come to Jesus seeing him only as a "Savior" similar to an insurance policy to be used to get them out of trouble. Too few people choose to follow Jesus with the attitude that he is "Lord" and we must submit our lives totally to him. Peter had to learn this new relationship. No longer was he in the position of treating Jesus as an equal or choosing to follow him when convenient, and he could no longer go back to fishing when he wanted. (If this was the third calling of Peter, Jesus was now trying to totally break Peter of the desire to follow Jesus only when it was convenient, but also wanting to keep his comfortable life as a fisherman.)

Peter also needed to realize his spiritual condition. He might be rich. He might have followed John the Baptist and then Jesus for a short period of time and was more spiritual than others who did not do this. But when compared to the great and perfect holiness of Jesus, he was a vile sinner. To follow Jesus first requires the breaking of our pride, which is the root of all sin. In humility we must realize that it is only if Jesus saves us from sin that we have any right to a relationship with God.

Q. 19. a) Describe how many Christians choose to follow Jesus because of something physical they want Jesus to do for them rather than with the attitude that they are choosing to become the slave of their Lord and do whatever he says. b) Describe how many Christians choose to follow Jesus without first becoming aware how sinful they are and how gracious God is in saving them. c) What differences do you think there would be in how people live as followers of Jesus if they would come as Peter did with an awareness that Jesus is Lord and they are slaves, and Jesus is holy and they are sinners rather than treating Jesus as the one to meet their needs? d) Examine your life. What are ways you are not treating Jesus as Lord? What are areas of pride that you have? Confess these sins and ask the Holy Spirit to help you change.

Jesus reassures Peter that although he is a sinner, because of God's grace, he does not need to be afraid. Jesus then tells Peter and Andrew "Follow me." Jesus was inviting Peter and Andrew to become his formal disciples. This was very unusual in Jewish society. Usually parents or young men would approach a famous teacher (rabbi) and ask him if they could become his disciple. But Jesus took the initiative and chose his own followers. When Jesus initiated the call for them to be disciples, it showed that he had authority over them. The word disciple is defined as one who attaches himself to a person, accepts his authority over his life, and imitates his example. This is Jesus' desire for all who chose to follow him.

Peter and Andrew were model followers of Jesus. Their response was quick, for they immediately left their work of fishing and followed Jesus as his disciple. Their choice was costly, however. They had to leave what they were familiar with (fishing) to become something they were not familiar with- fishing for men. It cost them economically as well. They had to leave their profitable business of fishing to become poor followers of Jesus. Jesus would wander from place to place much like pilgrims seen in Ethiopia traveling to visit holy places. Jesus would later say that he did not even have a place to lay his head. (Mt. 8:20) But Peter and Andrew made the choice to become followers of Jesus.

Jesus gave them a promise- "You will become fishers of men." Jewish teachers focused upon getting people to know the Law. But Jesus asked them to be his followers so that they could fish for men. This statement teaches us three major things.

First, we are to make the decision to follow Jesus as disciples. But it is Jesus' responsibility to change us so that we resemble him and are equipped to minister for him. Jesus said he would make them fishers of men.

Second, a disciple of Jesus has a different focus in life. We should no longer primarily focus upon our own needs of how to make money and enjoy a better life. Rather, we are supposed to focus upon others, seeking to help others to also become disciples of Jesus.

Third, learning to fish for men is a process. For over three years, Jesus trained Peter and Andrew and the other disciples in what it means to be a follower of Jesus. But more importantly, they would have to change in character to become like Jesus, the Master. A disciple was to resemble the teacher, and so for them to be qualified to work as fishers of men (just like Jesus was "fishing" for them at that moment), they had to first change their character to be like Jesus. This process of changing character takes time and cannot be rushed. Only after 3 years would Jesus release them into the full-time work of fishing for men.

Q. 20. a) Describe how our understanding of being a Christian would change if we challenged all new believers to commit to becoming followers of Jesus with the goal of becoming fishers of men. b) Describe what would change in how a church functions if each church was committed to getting all of its members to be qualified in their character to be fishers of men and actively involved in sharing the Good News.

James and John had also witnessed the miracle of the great catch of fish. After landing on the shore, James and John, with their father Zebedee and some hired help, were in their boat working on a large net which they would have used to catch fish, getting it ready to go out fishing the next night. Jesus' called them as well to follow him as disciples. Their choice to follow Jesus was even more difficult. First, they were more wealthy, for they had servants. Second, they chose to follow Jesus rather than follow the wishes of their family. The Jews taught that one of the most important ways obligations was to honor the wishes of their parents. Zebedee would have expected James and John to take over the family fishing business from him. But now James and John turned their back on the expectations of their family and followed Jesus.

Although we are told in the Bible to take care of our family, becoming a disciple of Jesus always demands that we must give priority to following our Master, Jesus. Jesus would later describe this choice to be a disciple as "hating his mother and father, brother and sister." (Lk. 14:26) One of the major deterrents to following Jesus is "What will my family say?" And one of the major hindrances to serving Jesus wholeheartedly is the expectation of family members upon us. James and John chose Jesus over their family. All other disciples of Jesus must make the same choice.

Q. 21. Describe how you or someone you know have chosen following Jesus over family. If you are struggling with this issue, ask the Holy Spirit to help you make a firm decision to follow Jesus and give him your priority allegiance.

So why did Jesus start to choose his disciples? Later he would select 12 key men to be with him. No great work can ever take place unless there are men and women who are committed to the work and give their lives for its success. Jesus wanted to reconcile people from all over the world with God. So now he is gathering people around him to whom he could pass on the same vision so that they joined in the work.

One scholar writes that in choosing his disciples Jesus was saying "Give me 12 ordinary men, and if they give themselves totally to me, I will change the world with them." And that is what happened. The 12 disciples, most of whom died for their faith, were able to impact the whole Roman empire in just one generation. Jesus wants to do the same today. He is looking for ordinary men and women who are willing to give themselves totally to him. He is not looking for many- just a few. Working through them, Jesus wants to change the whole world. Will you be one of those few?

JESUS DRIVES OUT AN EVIL SPIRIT AND HEALS PEOPLE (Mk. 1:21-28, Lk. 4:31-44)

Q. 22. Read Lk. 4:31-44. a) What caused the people to be amazed at Jesus' teaching? b) What did the demon say about Jesus? What did Jesus say to the demon? c) What was the response of people to Jesus' expelling the demon? d) What ministry did Jesus have to the sick? e) Why did Jesus refuse to stay in Capernaum?

When Jesus taught in the synagogue of Nazareth, he described his ministry as one of releasing captives. (Lk. 4:18) Although Jesus focused his ministry on teaching, he also began his ministry of releasing captives of Satan.

1. Every Sabbath, Jesus taught with authority in synagogues (Lk. 4:31-32)

We are not told by Luke here what Jesus taught. But Luke describes to us the reaction of the people to Jesus as a teacher. They were not impressed by Jesus' teaching because he shouted loudly or was very demonstrative and emotional as many preachers today try to impress the crowds. Nor were they impressed by the skill of Jesus' teaching, although Jesus was clearly a skilled teacher which teachers and preachers should copy. What impressed the people was the way Jesus spoke with "authority."

The people in Jesus' day were used to two types of teaching:

a. They were used to the religious teachers (rabbis) quoting famous men as the basis for their statements. In Mark 1:22 Mark adds the phrase "he taught them as one who had authority, *not as the teachers of the law.*" Religious leaders would preach saying "Rabbi 'so-and-so' said" believing that this gave their view authority. We can have this same attitude when we preach or teach when we quote famous authors as if what they say makes it right, or by saying "so-and-so" is from this seminary or has graduated with this degree, believing that this means that what they say is correct. Although we should listen to those who have spent time studying and have become experts in different topics, we must be careful never to think another person's views are the ultimate authority.

b. They were used to people quoting Scripture as their authority. Like us, the Jews believed that the 39 books of the Old Testament came from God. Preachers would quote the Law or Prophets as their proof. This was much better than quoting people. Ultimately, our authority as preachers and teachers only comes from accurately interpreting God's Word and applying it correctly. To the level that we do not seek to interpret it correctly or apply it accurately, it becomes our "opinion" and not God speaking. Many preachers and teachers claim they are preaching God's Word when in fact they are only passing on their own opinions because they do not properly interpret and apply God's Word as the basis of what they say.

Jesus did use Scripture to verify what he taught. However, he went beyond this. As Jesus taught, he would boldly say "The Bible says...but I say to you." (See Mt. 5:21-22) In his teaching, Jesus claimed to have

equal authority to the Old Testament. In fact, he claimed to have a deeper understanding of the thoughts and intents of God than did Moses. Moses, he said, only permitted divorce because of people's hard hearts, but God's intent in marriage was for a permanent union of husband and wife. (Mt. 19:1-10) Jesus could teach with authority because he knew the very thoughts and desires of God. As Heb. 1:1-3 teaches, Jesus is the final, and most accurate communication from God.

Q. 23. a) How is the authority of Jesus' teaching different from the authority we have when teaching? b) Which of the two types of authorities Jewish teachers used should we focus on today? c) Describe how some teachers and preachers misuse Scripture so that it is no longer the authority of the Bible, but their own opinion that is being taught.

2. Jesus has authority over evil spirits (Lk. 4:33-37)

Jesus never went looking for ways to confront evil spirits or demons. (Note: These two words mean the same thing and refer to the evil spirit beings controlled by Satan who stand in opposition to God and seek to fight God by destroying what is good in the world and in people.) We never read of Jesus claiming "you have a demon." Rather, Jesus always waited for the demon to reveal himself before addressing him. Jesus, the king, had arrived. Through his teachings and healing, he was indirectly undoing what Satan and the demons had done. So the demons would often reveal themselves to Jesus and he would use his authority as the divine king to drive them out of a person.

During the New Testament times, the belief in demons was widespread. People especially associated demons with the use of magic as used by witchdoctors. Demons were also believed to be closely associated with disease. People believed that demons could enter into a human body through one of 36 parts of the body. So a demon would enter through the ear causing inability to hear, or through the tongue causing lying and vile talk, through the leg causing a person to be crippled, etc. The Jews taught, however, that if a person was walking in obedience to God, no demon could touch them.

Because so many people were involved in magical practices, there were many demons during the times of Jesus, although often people assumed the cause was a demon when it wasn't. So there were many "professional exorcists" who would travel through the country trying to cast out demons from people. They would use different strategies to get rid of the demons. Some would try to do something to frighten the demon so that he would leave. Or they would try to do something that made it inconvenient for the demon to stay. For instance, one common thing they would do was to put something very smelly up the nose of the person believing this vile smell would cause the demon to leave. There was also a special root that they believed had great power and would cause the demon to leave. There were some who used special magical words to cause the demons to leave. Others would often invoke the name of a greater spirit being (like Gabriel or Michael) believing this would force the demons to leave. But none of these so-called exorcists gave a simple command "Get out" and expected the demon to leave.

Jesus knew that there is a spirit world with both good and evil spirits hidden from the view of humans which impacts life on earth. Frequently, in his ministry he was confronted with the evil spirits and Satan their chief. When describing this confrontation, the Gospel writers always picture the total authority that Jesus had over this spirit world. Notice the following in this story:

a. It was the demon who cried out to Jesus. Jesus made no effort to go into a room and determine if someone had an evil spirit. The major way that Jesus confronted and overcame the kingdom of Satan was

through his teaching and by getting people to put their faith in him. We never see Jesus or the apostles go on prayer walks where they cast demons and spirits from a certain town. We never see Jesus or the apostles directly attacking Satanic places of worship. Rather, they always indirectly attacked Satan by focusing upon sharing the Gospel with people which would deliver them out of Satan's captivity. But when they were directly confronted with a demon or Satanic attack, they would then use the authority they had to command that the evil spirit leave.

b. Using the possessed man's voice, the demon cried out loudly in fear and anger. He knew that he had met the King and Controller of the universe. The demons knew more about Jesus than us. This demon knew that Jesus was "the Holy One of God." Probably this title means "the One to whom God has given full power and authority- God's right hand person." They also know that Jesus is the divine Son of God and that Jesus is the one who will "destroy" them by throwing them into the pit. (Lk. 8:31) But the demon's knowledge was limited, for he did not know "when" Jesus would pronounce judgment upon the spirit world. He did not know that the coming cross would break the power of Satan over people. (See Col. 2:15) And he did not know that the eventual destruction would not take place until the end times when Jesus comes to reign for eternity. (See Rev. 20:1-3, 10) Jesus never pronounced eternal judgment and destruction upon the demons which he met since he knew that time of judgment was still in the future. It is Biblically inaccurate for people to pray against evil spirits and caste them into the pit, or to tie them up so that they will never work again. They can only ask the demons to leave the person. God has allowed the spirit world to function under his authority until Jesus returns.

c. Jesus used his authority to command the demon to leave the person. The word "rebuke" means "to subdue." Jesus did not argue with the demon. There was no struggle between two powerful forces. Rather, as the Son of God who controls the spirit world, Jesus told the demon not to talk and to immediately leave the person. We, of course, do not have the same direct authority as Jesus does to command demons to leave. Our authority over demons is "in Jesus' name." This expression is the language of an ambassador. Just as the ambassador of Ethiopia working in another country works with the authority of the Ethiopian government, in the same way we work under the authority of Jesus Christ who is Lord of lords and King of kings. We must never use the words "in Jesus' name" as if it is magical. Rather, it is our acknowledgment to the demons that Jesus has given us his authority, and by Jesus' authority alone we command them to be gone.

d. In one final display of power, the evil spirit threw the person onto the ground and then left him. The deliverance was instantaneous, not gradual.

e. It was the use of command and its power which amazed the crowd. Other people used many tricks to try to get demons to leave a person, with limited success. But Jesus, both in his teaching, and in his relationship with the spirit world, had authority. There was no need to shout, hiss, or do other things which try to emphasize power. Rather, a stern command "Get out" was enough to force the demons to leave with no debate.

Q. 24. a) Describe some principles about our relationship with Satan and demons which we can learn from this passage. b) Contrast how Jesus related to the spirit world with how many Christians try to overcome Satan and demons today. What is similar? What is different?

This story is an example of how Jesus delivers people from captivity to Satan as prophesied in Is. 61:1-2. The news that Jesus had such power and authority spread from person to person, and from village to village. During this first year of public ministry of Jesus his popularity grew. Initially there was little resistance from political or religious leaders. But as his popularity grew, the resistance of those in leadership also increased.

3. Jesus has authority over diseases (Lk. 4:38-41)

Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon and Andrew. (Mk. 1:29) No doubt Jesus was tired from teaching in the synagogue and the dialogue that would have continued long after the sermon was over. He had also confronted the demon. He no doubt was looking forward to some quiet time with Peter, Andrew, James and John.

Most likely Peter's wife's father had died, and Peter had brought his mother-in-law to live in his home. Jesus probably knew about her illness but made no effort to heal her. Only rarely would Jesus initiate healing. Rather, he usually waited for people to ask for healing before meeting their physical needs. Revealing their faith in Jesus, Peter and others in the home came and asked Jesus to heal her from the very severe fever she had. Jesus went to her and "rebuked the fever." This is an unusual expression. It means that Jesus used the same voice of command to expel the fever from her that he had used with the demon. Jesus' spoken word was the tool of his authority, just like it was the spoken word of God which created the world in Genesis 1. Unlike many healings today where healings are partial and temporary, when Jesus healed, they were almost always complete. Simon's mother-in-law was immediately healed and got up and began to serve Jesus and the other guests.

The Jewish Sabbath lasted from about 6 PM on Friday to 6 PM on Saturday. To the Jews, the day always started at 6 PM of the previous day. (i.e. Saturday started on Friday evening) Until 6 PM on Saturday, the Jews were not allowed to do any work. They were not allowed to carry a sick person to the doctor or to Jesus. So as soon as it was 6 PM, all of those in the city of Capernaum came with their sick and demon possessed people. It did not matter to Jesus if they were sick or if they had a demon, his authority was equally over both. In the Jewish way of passing on a blessing, Jesus would often lay his hands on the sick person. (Note: Jesus did not have to place his hands on a person to heal them. Many times he didn't. If we examine Jesus' and the apostles' healing styles, we will see that they never used only one method. Sometimes they put their hands on the sick person. Other times they just declared them to be healed. Sometimes they put oil on them, but not at other times. One time Jesus even used spit and mud. This should caution us against thinking that there is any one thing which we must do for healing to work.) We can see the following about healing ministries from this passage:

a. Jesus did not go looking for the sick. Rather, the sick came looking for him. Jesus made the choice to teach and always looked for opportunities to teach. But Jesus responded to people's requests for healing. He usually waited for people to come to him and ask him for healing.

b. To ask Jesus for healing was a sign of personal faith that Jesus could heal. Jesus did not spend time challenging people to have "enough" faith for him to heal them. The only time when Jesus did not do miracles was when there was someone had clear lack of faith in him. (Mk. 6:5-6) It was not that he was not able to do a miracle. Rather, God usually chooses not to work where people doubt him.

c. Jesus dealt with the sick one by one. He never healed in mass, unlike what healers today often attempt. So each person had to come and ask him for healing. He would then touch each one and heal them.

d. There is no evidence of great dramatics when Jesus healed. He did not shout, or tell people to come to the front so that all could see the miracle. He used none of the things which many "healers" today tend to use to demonstrate their healing power. He gently and with authority commanded healing. That was enough.

e. When demon possessed people came to him, he always stopped the demons from declaring who he was. Luke tells us these demons would shout out that Jesus was the "Son of God." But Jesus would always stop them. Why did Jesus stop them? One reason would have been that Jesus did not want demons to be his witnesses telling others that he was the Messiah. He wanted people whose lives had been changed by Jesus to be his witnesses. Another reason is that for the Jews to hear demons shouting out that Jesus was the messiah would have given the wrong impression. Jews would have immediately thought Jesus was a political deliverer. Anyone with power over the spirit world would also have power over the kingdoms of man. But Jesus was coming as the suffering Messiah- to die for sins. Jesus was also teaching his disciples that ultimately defeat of Satan and demons did not come from arguing with them until they submit. Rather, the great victory would come after the cross. It is the message of the cross that truly defeats Satan, not the casting out of demons.

We can see Jesus' heart for ministry in this story. Not once did Jesus tell the people that he was tired. In fact, in the Gospels, not once does Jesus indicate that he is too tired or too busy to deal with people. Any time a person came to Jesus, no matter if they were important in the eyes of the world or not, Jesus would stop what he was doing and help them. Jesus put the needs of others before his own needs. In the same way, those of us who are ministers on Jesus' behalf are to put the needs of others above our own needs. Serving others with the attitude of Jesus means that we are constantly willing to help them.

4. Jesus defines his priority in ministry as sharing the Good News with all people (Lk. 4:42-43)

Most villages and towns in Galilee would have been crowded with people. Usually there would be four or more houses sharing the same courtyard. And some houses would have up to 20 people living in them. So it would have been very difficult to get personal time to think, pray, and listen to God. Although he was God's Son, Jesus knew that he needed to talk with his Father. The more busy he got, the more he needed to pray. One saint once said "I am very busy today, I think I will get up two hours earlier to pray." So frequently Jesus would leave the house and the village long before dawn and go out to some lonely place. (Mk. 1:35)

People in Capernaum were excited about Jesus and his miracle ministry. Perhaps the news had reached areas around Capernaum who had not been able to bring their sick and demon possessed to Jesus the night before. So they came to Peter's house looking for Jesus. Peter and the disciples then went looking for Jesus and found him on the mountain praying. They expected Jesus to come down and continue his healing ministry. But Jesus refused. Jesus wanted the disciples to understand priorities in ministry. Jesus' priority was not to be a healer seeking to only to meet the physical needs of people. Nor did he want to start a large church in one area. Jesus told the disciples:

a. He "must" preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Out of compassion he would help people who came to him. But that would not be the focus of his ministry. Rather, he had to fulfill his primary responsibility to share the Gospel with as many people as he could.

There was once two speakers at a conference. One was a healer and the other had the gift of evangelism. The healer was asked to take the first session and the evangelist the second session. However, the healer not only used his time, but the evangelists' time to speak as well. The program leader came to the evangelist and said "Sorry but we are out of time. Just give greetings to the people. They need to go home." The evangelist looked at the program leader and elders and said "Until now we have only heard about the deliverance of a persons' body. What about their souls? I won't leave here without giving people the chance to believe on Jesus and escape hell." He quickly shared the Gospel and many people believed who would have gone home physically healed, but spiritually lost. Jesus did not want this to happen, so when people began to focus upon his miracles too much, he would leave and take the Good News somewhere else.

b. Jesus was "sent." Jesus knew that he was under the authority of God the Father. God had sent him to take the Good News to the Jews. So Jesus refused to become distracted from his calling. Even if he was popular in Capernaum and had a fruitful ministry there, God had told him to take the good news to others, so he moved on. Popularity was not important to Jesus. Rather, he wanted as many people in Israel as possible to hear how to be reconciled to God.

Q. 25. a) Describe why someone becoming a believer is a greater and more important miracle than someone being physically healed. b) Describe ways that church ministers can get distracted from their most important work and do another work because it brings more popularity.

c. Jesus was not satisfied with showing love. He wanted to proclaim God's truth. There are some Christians who say "I don't need to say anything to people. I will just love them. They can see my good life." It is important for us to show people love, just like Jesus helped all who came and asked him for help. And it is important for us to live lives which are holy. But ultimately, until we open our mouths and tell them about Jesus, they cannot know the Gospel. Paul said that it was not by doing good deeds that a person is brought to salvation, but by the Word which is proclaimed. Without the Word, no one will be saved. (Rom. 10:8-15) All of us are to be showing our love to all around us. But let us also share the Good News.

What is important matter to the disciples of Jesus is not popularity or convenience. Rather, what matters is that we are "sent" by God to work on his behalf. We must faithfully fulfill what he has called us to do. It is Satan who tries to distract us from the best to something less important. Yes, Jesus continues to heal people today. And he continues to deliver people from demon possession. Both are ways that Jesus came to free captives. However, ultimately whether a person hears and accepts the Good News is what is important. That is the deliverance that is the most important.

Many of the followers of Jesus, and many churches have forgotten this important truth. It is so easy for all churches to become unbalanced. Some people only preach and never show love. Others want to show love or heal but never explain the Good News. Jesus, our model, shows us that both are necessary. But most importantly, we must do all we can so that as many people as possible will hear about Jesus so that they can have eternal life.

Q. 26. a) Evaluate your life. List ways you are keeping the two ministries of showing love and proclaiming the Gospel in balance. What do you need to do differently to be more balanced like Jesus? b) Evaluate your church. List ways the church is showing both love and proclaiming the Gospel. What are things the church could do to become more balanced?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) What was the core message Jesus proclaimed? (Mk. 1:15) b) Discuss each part of Jesus' message; the kingdom of God, repent, and believe. What does each mean? c) Compare Jesus' message to what we commonly say to those wanting to follow Jesus on Sunday morning. What is the same? What is different? d) What are things we need to add to our explanation of what it means to become a follower of Jesus to make it more similar to Jesus?

2. a) How does Jesus describe his ministry in Lk. 4:18-19? b) List examples of how Jesus fulfilled each ministry described there. c) Discuss ways individual Christians and churches can also fulfill each of these different ministries.

3. Jesus said that a prophet is often not accepted in his own home. a) How was this true for Jesus? b) Discuss how this is true today. c) What changes need to happen in our churches so that this attitude is destroyed? d) List talented individuals in the church who need to be encouraged to develop and discuss ways to encourage them and their gifts.

4. a) Suppose you had been Peter, Andrew, James, and John and Jesus asked you to give up everything and follow him. What would have made this command by Jesus hard to obey? b) Describe different situations normal Christians face where Jesus asks them to make a similar decision today. c) Discuss the difference between asking someone to believe and asking someone to become a follower of Jesus. Which do you think is more Biblical? Discuss ways we should change our presentation of the Gospel to include the call to be a disciple. d) Jesus promised he would make Peter and the others into fishers of men. What can we learn from this about Jesus' expectations today for those who choose to follow him?

5. a) How is the truth that Jesus taught with authority and had authority over diseases and demons important to us today? b) Compare and contrast how Jesus teaching and healing ministry is similar or different to what we see in the churches today. c) Discuss why Jesus refused to stay and heal people but stated he had to go to other villages. How was Jesus' attitude different from the attitude seen in some healers today?

LESSON NINE

FIRST DAY

Q. 1. a) List some of the despised classes of people in Ethiopia- those most people do not want to marry, eat with, or even touch. b) Why are these people scorned? c) Describe how these people are treated by believers if they come to church.

Almost every society on earth has a group of people who are despised by the rest of society. In India they are called "the untouchables." In the Philippines it is those who live where all of the garbage from the city is thrown. In Ethiopia, it could be the potters or the blacksmiths. In one part of Ethiopia there are a group of people called "menjas" (usually potters and blacksmiths who work in despised trades.) No one will shake their hands, sit on something on which they sat, and they won't eat with them. In Jewish society, the people who were despised the most were the "lepers."

One of the things that Jesus wants to teach his followers is that there are no "despised" people. All people stand as equals before God. It does not matter if they are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, religious or not religious, from an honorable class of people or respectable tribe or from a despised group like the menjas. Jesus created them all, loves them all, and died for them all. All stand equal before God as sinners at the foot of the cross. And all are equally acceptable in his family where there are no classes of people. Whenever the church forgets this truth and does not go against what their society teaches about some people, they stop following their Master, Jesus. In today's lesson we will see how Jesus knowingly went against all Jewish traditions to show a despised person that he was loved, and physically and spiritually healed by Jesus.

Q. 2. Read Mk. 1:40-45. a) What did the leper ask Jesus? b) What did Jesus do for him? c) What warning did Jesus give the leper? d) What did the leper do instead of obeying Jesus and what was the result? e) Read Lev. 13-14. List some of the things lepers had to do.

JESUS HEALS THE LEPER (Mt. 8:1-4, Mk. 1:40-45, Lk. 5:12-16)

Throughout history, one of the most feared diseases is leprosy. Although the Biblical word "leprosy" refers to many different types of skin diseases, the most feared was what we call leprosy today. Leprosy can take different forms. It can form lumps on the face and body of a person making him look hideous. These bumps break open and get infected. Usually they get medicine, usually people die within 9 years with this type of disease. Another type of leprosy is one which attacks the nerves of a person so that a person can no longer feel anything in his hands or feet. Because the nerves on their feet or hands don't work, the person cannot tell when he burns himself or cuts his feet. Infection sets in and eventually the person will lose his toes and hands, or even the nose or ear. Praise God, doctors have discovered the cause of leprosy and are now able to stop the spread of the disease. If you know anyone with leprosy, encourage them to go to a hospital so that they can get the drugs which will stop the spread of the disease in their bodies.

The Old Testament gave careful guidelines what to do with a person who was suspected to have leprosy. Lepers were expelled from the camp or town and could no longer live with their families or talk to

people. They would wear black torn clothes, not comb or cut their hair, and cover the lower part of their faces. Some people called them "the walking dead" since it would not be long until they died- and because it was as if they were dead to society. Should anyone approach them, lepers were to cover their faces and cry out loudly "I am unclean." And a person with leprosy could never go to the Temple to worship God. So a person with leprosy faced great physical pain from the disease. They also faced social pain by being expelled from their families and the community. And they felt hopeless religiously because they could not worship God with others. The Jews believed the healing of a leper to be as great a miracle as raising someone from the dead. They believed only God could do these two miracles.

During the days of Jesus, there were many lepers and Jesus often healed them. The first leper to be healed was a man in Galilee. Jesus was ministering in many different villages in the northeastern part of Galilee, along the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly a leper came running up to Jesus. This would have angered all of the crowd around Jesus, for he was supposed to keep his distance crying aloud "I am unclean." It took a lot of boldness for this man to break tradition like this. The man bowed in humility before Jesus and said "If you are willing, you can make me clean." This leper did not doubt Jesus' ability to heal him. But he did not know if Jesus was willing. Ever since he had become a leper, this person had been despised by people who believed his leprosy was the result of his sin. People would not talk to him or touch him. "Will Jesus despise me in the same way?" he wondered. "Yes, Jesus heals others who are loved and accepted. But what about me, a leper?" he thought.

Any time society or we treat others as "despised" it affects how they view themselves. When parents tell their daughters that they are worthless because they will get married and join the family of the husband, the girls grow up thinking they have no value in God's eyes. When potters or menjas grow up being told that they are not as valuable as regular people, they believe this lie of Satan. Cripples or physically deformed people are often emotionally scarred by people laughing at them. We must be careful we do not continue these practices. Such a view that people are despised is one of the types of "captivity" that Jesus had come to free people from.

Q. 3. a) Describe how you have seen being despised or one of the outcasts psychologically impact people like described above. b) What is your church doing to try to free them from this negative understanding that they and society have?

Mark says that Jesus was filled with compassion. No matter how much disease and poverty Jesus saw, he never became callous or indifferent. When he saw the results of the sins of society and the fallen world, Jesus always felt pity for the people. One of the biggest dangers we face is that as we see people like this leper, or people begging on the street- our hearts become callous to their situation. We might give them a little money so that they will leave, but rarely will our hearts hurt for them. This is one thing we will need to change if we are to be like Jesus, our Master.

Jesus reached out and touched the leper. This was strictly forbidden by Jewish law. By touching the leper Jesus was opening himself up to the possibility of becoming a leper. And by touching the leper, Jesus became ritually unclean as well and would have to offer a sacrifice just as if he had sinned. But Jesus placed compassion for people over keeping ritual or societal laws. Jesus could have healed him without touching him- he did this for others. But the leper needed to know that he was valuable to God and Jesus, and for the first time in years, the leper felt someone touch him in friendship and compassion. Instantly the man was healed.

Having healed the man, Jesus told the man to do two things.

First, he was to go show himself to the priest who would verify that he was in fact totally clean from leprosy. Having examined him, the priests would give him a certificate stating that he was clean. He was then to offer the required sacrifices so that he would be totally accepted back in community. Jesus always honored the commands of God, but he did not honor the traditions and prejudices of society.

Second, Jesus told him not to tell anyone what Jesus had done to him. It seems that this miracle was done with very few people around to witness it. Why did Jesus tell the person not to tell others about the miracle? There were three probable reasons.

a. Jesus did not want his reputation to be known as a healer. Jesus had already shown displeasure at the way people followed him just wanting their physical needs met without accepting his message of repentance. They wanted the blessings of God, but did not want to get their life into a proper relationship with God by repenting and following Jesus as their Master. Too many healers today fall into this trap of getting excited about the reputation of being a healer and place little emphasis upon getting people into a right relationship with God.

b. Jesus did not want the growing popularity to limit his ministry. If the crowds grew too large he would not be able to minister effectively in urban areas. Because the leper disobeyed Jesus and told others about the miracle, we are told Jesus could no longer travel in towns or teach in their synagogues. He was forced to spend most of his time in rural areas which made ministry more difficult.

c. Jesus did not want to attract the attention and resistance of religious and political leaders. As long as Jesus' ministry was inconspicuous, the religious leaders and Herod Antipas, the political ruler of Galilee, would not attack Jesus. But once Jesus became popular, the resistance of those who were threatened by him would increase.

Jesus sets the example of how we are to treat the despised people in our society. We are not to shrink from them in revulsion. Nor are we to treat them as if they don't exist. We are not to allow the prejudice of society to keep us from openly relating with them. Compassion and the realization that they too are the creation of God needing salvation and that Jesus accepts them as equals means we must relate to them as equals. Throughout history Christians became known for those who willingly and joyfully related to those despised by others. They resembled their master, Jesus. It was only Christians who would reach out to lepers. Other people would expel them from communities, but it was Christians, usually missionaries, who would live among them and help them.

Have we forgotten this attitude of Jesus? Today our problem might not be the lepers. But what about those with HIV/AIDS? Will we treat them as outcasts? Will we be like the Jews who saw their sickness as punishment from God and so not needing our love and compassion? Or will we be like our Master, reaching out in compassion to help them?

Q. 4. a) Compare the Jew's attitude towards lepers to how many people view people who have leprosy or HIV/AIDS. What similarities are there? b) Describe how many Christians today refuse to follow the attitude of Jesus to lepers in how they treat lepers or AIDS patients. c) List ways you and people in your church

could better resemble Jesus in his attitude towards lepers, AIDS patients, and other outcasts in your community.

JESUS HEALS A PARALYZED MAN (Mt. 9:1-8, Mk. 2:1-12, Lk. 5:17-26)

Q. 5. Read Lk. 5:17-26. a) Who does Luke say was included in the crowd listening to Jesus teach? b) What did the four men do in order for their friend to be healed? c) What did Jesus say to the man before he healed him? d) What controversy did this cause with the religious leaders? e) What did Jesus claim his miracle proved about his ability to forgive sins?

As the reputation of Jesus grew in Galilee, religious leaders throughout Galilee and Judea heard about him and went to observe him. The majority of the religious scholars and Pharisees would have come from Jerusalem for that is where they resided. But every major town in Galilee would have had a religious leader and scholar responsible to teach the people about the Old Testament Law and traditions of the elders. It could be that the religious leaders in Jerusalem sent representatives to see what Jesus was doing and bring a formal report to them. Initially they went to listen to Jesus and observe his miracles to verify that Jesus was a true prophet. It would not take long until these religious leaders would turn into the bitter enemies of Jesus.

The "Pharisees" were a religious party who wanted to strictly obey the Old Testament laws and the traditions established by religious leaders over the centuries. The "teachers of the law" were scribes who were educated in the Old Testament laws and traditions. They would be equivalent to having a graduate degree in theology. They functioned in Jewish society as "lawyers" for the political leaders explaining how people should apply the Old Testament laws in their specific case. Many of these scribes were also members of the Pharisee party since both groups had a strong desire to maintain the Old Testament laws and the traditions. These religious leaders did not come with an open heart to listen to Jesus so that they could believe him. Rather, they came to evaluate Jesus so that they could pronounce judgment against him.

Jesus was teaching in what was probably a large house. People had already filled the house and were standing outside around the doors and windows. Although they were happy to listen to Jesus teach, no doubt most of them were there to see what miracle he would do. For them, Jesus was not someone who would help them change their lives and get prepared for God's kingdom. Rather, he was there to help them with their problems by providing miraculous answers. As Jesus was teaching, four men arrived carrying their paralyzed friend on a mat. Because there were so many people crowding around the door, it was impossible for them to bring their friend to Jesus so that he would be healed. These four men knew that Jesus would heal if they could only get him to where Jesus would see him.

Palestinian homes are different from our huts with grass roofs or homes with tin roof. The homes were built out of stones. For a roof, they would have many poles which they covered with branches on top of the poles. Then they would cover the branches with mud to keep the rain out. The roof was almost flat, with just enough slope so that the rain would run off. On the outside of the house was a stairway to the roof. When it was hot people often slept on the roof or hung their laundry out to dry on the roof.

The four men were determined to get their friend to Jesus. So they climbed up the stairs and dug through the branches and mud roof. Then they lowered the paralyzed man with ropes down to where Jesus

was teaching below. Imagine how startled people would have been as they heard people digging on the roof with sticks and dirt probably falling on them and they watched the mat being lowered to the floor.

Jesus' response, however, was totally unexpected. He did not heal the person like normal but said to the man lying on the mat "your sins are forgiven." Because we are so used to Jesus being the Savior, these words do not shock us like they would have the Jews. Jews believed only God had the right to forgive. A prophet or priest could say "in God's name your sins are forgiven" as they passed on God's forgiveness. But they would never say directly "your sins are forgiven." Jesus was indirectly claiming here that he was God with the right to forgive sins. (Note: To "forgive sins" means that the person will not be punished for his sins. We are to "forgive" sins which someone commits against us. When we do that we are saying that we will not hold their sins against them or punish them in any way. But only God can "forgive" sins in the sense that they will not be punished by God. No person has the ability to say "your sins are forgiven" with the power to cause God to not punish them. Rather, as church leaders when we "forgive sins" we are simply passing on God's promise to forgive them if they fulfill the requirements which God has established for forgiveness, namely repenting of their sins and believing that Jesus has been punished on the cross on their behalf.)

We do not know what sin this man had committed. Jews thought all disease was the direct result of sin in the life of the person or his parents. But Jesus refuted this understanding. (See Jn. 9:1-3) However in this case, it seems there was some sin which had caused God to punish the paralyzed man.

For the first time in the Gospels we read of a relationship between faith and healing. Faith is not just an acknowledgement that something is true. Rather it demands actions based upon what we believe. These four men demonstrated their faith not just by believing that Jesus could heal their friend. Rather, they acted based upon their beliefs in Jesus' healing power and got the paralyzed friend to Jesus. Jesus did not only see the faith of the paralyzed man, but the faith of his four friends and honored their faith. It is not as if having or not having faith stops Jesus' power to do miracles or forces him to do miracles. In our study about Jesus, we will see that there are times when Jesus healed without any indication of faith on the part of the individual. (Lk. 6:6-10) But lack of faith provides a environment where Jesus refuses to work. And faith provides the environment where Jesus often chooses to work a miracle. Seeing their strong faith in him, Jesus forgave the sin and healed the man.

The ones most aware of what Jesus was claiming by saying he forgave the man's sin were the religious leaders. Although they did not openly argue with Jesus, in their minds they were thinking "this is blasphemy." To blaspheme is to say something or do something that insults God or to claim to be God. Blasphemy was the most serious sin to the Jews. In the Old Testament, there was no sacrifice and forgiveness for someone who blasphemed God. It was this sin which the Jews believed Jesus committed at his trial and made him worthy of death. (Mt. 26:65)

Jesus immediately knew the thoughts of the religious leaders because he knows the hearts and thoughts of all people. The religious leaders had come to evaluate Jesus and no doubt take a report back to the religious leaders in Jerusalem. So Jesus forced them to make a choice as to whether or not he was the Messiah. By claiming to forgive sins, they could not now go back and say "he is a good person" or "he is a healer" or "he is a good teacher." They had to struggle with this question "who is Jesus?" Was he the divine Messiah? Or is he a false blasphemer?

Jesus wants all of us to answer this question. "Who am I?" he asks us. A scholar once said that Jesus left only three choices to people as to what they could believe about Jesus.

First, we can think that Jesus was insane for only an insane person will say "I am god just like Jehovah."

Second, we can think Jesus was an evil person who knowingly sought to trick people into thinking he was a god.

Or third, we can believe that Jesus is who he says he is, God's very Son with the authority to forgive. Because of statements like "I forgive your sins" or "before Abraham was I already existed" Jesus does not let us think that he is simply a good teacher who was unfortunately caught up in a power struggle with religious leaders and killed. Unfortunately many people throughout the world are willing to say that Jesus was a good man, a great prophet, a great teacher, even a miracle worker. But they are not willing to believe that Jesus is divine. But the Gospel writers want us to know that this is not an option. Jesus openly and clearly claimed to be equal to God. Either he told the truth or he was lying.

Jesus forced the religious leaders to think through what they were seeing. "Which is easier to say 'your sins are forgiven' or 'get up and walk'" he asked. It is easier to say "your sins are forgiven" because there is no evidence whether or not the person is forgiven. Forgiveness is hidden to us, something that God does in his relationship to a person. However, it is harder to accomplish; only possible with God. To say "be healed" is risky and therefore harder. It is soon obvious to all whether what was said happens. Either the paralyzed person is healed and gets up off the mat or he remains unhealed, still lying on the mat. However, it is easier to accomplish, because it is easier to bring physical healing and many throughout history have done it. Spiritual healing, however, is only possible to God. The religious leaders did not struggle with Jesus' ability to heal. But they did struggle with his statement about forgiving the person.

We have seen how Jesus has power and authority over demons and disease. Now Jesus wants us to realize that he also has authority over the forgiveness of sins. In order to prove to the people that he had the power to forgive sins, Jesus healed the paralyzed man in front of all of them. When Jesus pronounced healing, the man picked up his mat and walked out of the house instantly and totally healed. Hopefully the man's four friends repaired the roof before they left! (Note: Jesus calls himself "the Son of Man" which is his favorite Messianic title for himself. Others called him the Messiah, but Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man. This title originates in Dan. 7:13-14 where in a vision, Daniel saw one "like the son of man" come to God the Father (the Ancient of Days) to receive an eternal kingdom. During the times after Malachi and before the birth of John the Baptist, in different Jewish writings, this title "Son of Man" was used more and more for an almost divine person whom God would use to initiate his eternal kingdom.)

Having watched the miracle, except for the religious leaders whose animosity towards Jesus grew, people were amazed and praised God for his mighty actions among them. Jesus' popularity continued to grow. Unfortunately, the peoples' attraction to Jesus was more because they enjoyed listening to his teaching and watching his miracles than to personally committing themselves to become followers of Jesus. Soon Jesus would change his teachings, making them increasingly more difficult so that people would understand that following Jesus was not so that Jesus could selfishly meet their physical needs, but because they were aware of their spiritual need for Jesus, even if it brought a "cross" of suffering.

In separating out "forgiveness" and "healing," Jesus wanted to teach all of us an important lesson. Like the crowds following Jesus in Galilee, many of us follow Jesus because of the physical benefits we hope he brings us. "Believe on Jesus and you will be healed. Become a Christian and you will become rich" we sometimes hear from preachers. But this type of preaching encourages people to follow Jesus only for selfish reasons. We become like the crowd, amazed at Jesus' miracles, but never focusing upon "forgiveness" for sins. No matter how many blessings we get in life, if we don't address the sin in our lives, we overlook the major blessing which Jesus wants to give us. The story of Jesus is not primarily a story of physical blessings which he gave, but how he came to bring "medicine" for the sins which we commit.

Q. 6. a) Describe how we often focus more upon physical healing and blessings than spiritual healing and spiritual blessings. b) Explain why spiritual healing is more important than physical healing.

SECOND DAY

Not only do Christians tend to follow the world in what we consider socially acceptable people and socially unacceptable people, we often think there are some people who are so sinful that God is not concerned about them. So when we see a prostitute or a troublemaker in the market chewing chatt, we think "They are so evil, God has no desire for them to believe." It is very rare for Christians to relate to and witness to this type of person. And even if they believe on Jesus, people we consider extremely sinful are rarely accepted as equals in the church by most Christians. There are stories of former prostitutes who have gone to a church to worship. When the Christians find out that they used to be prostitutes, they go to the elders and say "we don't want this type of person in our church. It will ruin the church's good testimony." It is rare that a new believer who was formally was a prostitute is warmly welcomed into one of our churches.

Q. 7. If you have witnessed this type of attitude in a church, describe it.

The Jews had a similar attitude as many Christians have today. There were some people who were so sinful that no righteous person would ever relate to them. One such "sinful" person was a tax collector. But Jesus went totally against the understandings of people and knowingly related to people like prostitutes and tax collectors. He would eventually earn the reputation by the religious leaders of being a "friend of tax collectors and sinners." How far we have fallen today from the attitude of our model, Jesus, who was the "friend of sinners." (Lk. 7:34) How easy it is to become like the Pharisees.

JESUS CALLS MATTHEW, THE TAX COLLECTOR, TO BE A DISCIPLE (Mt. 9:9-13, Mk. 2:13-17, Lk. 5:27-32)

Q. 8. Read Mk. 2:13-17. a) Whom did Jesus call to be his disciple? b) What type of people did Jesus eat with? c) What reaction did this cause among the religious leaders? d) What was Jesus' response?

Jesus continued his ministry along the coast of the Sea of Galilee where there were many small towns. Most of his ministry was based out of Capernaum, which was a border town. It was inside of Galilee which was the territory of Herod Antipas. But just a short way further was the territory called Gaulantis which was ruled by Herod Philip, Herod Antipas' half brother. The major trade route from Syria to the coastal towns of Caesarea and then down to Egypt ran through Capernaum.

There were two types of tax collectors. First, there were those responsible to collect the yearly taxes and property taxes which each family paid. Second, there were those who were appointed to collect customs from the merchants as they traveled through the territory of Galilee. Scholars think Levi was this type of customs collector. He was probably appointed by Herod Antipas to collect money from the traders going through Galilee north to Syria and those traveling from Syria south through Galilee.

Collecting customs and taxes was a lucrative job. However, it was viewed by Jews as one of the most despised trades. Those who performed this work were hated by the rest of the Jews for several reasons.

a. Most tax collectors were known to be cheaters. They were supposed to collect a certain amount of money. But since most people did not know how much taxes they were to pay, tax collectors often told the people that they had to pay more than was required and kept the extra money. As a result, people saw them as greedy, dishonest, evil people who took advantage of people. Even the Greeks classified tax collectors as being as despised as prostitutes.

b. Tax collectors were seen as supporting the foreign government. They were collecting money on behalf of Rome who was in political control. So they were supporting the Roman control over the Jews. Or they were supporting the government of Herod Antipas who was collaborating with Rome.

c. Tax collectors were often ceremonially unclean according to Jewish standards. Jewish beliefs were that any time a Jew, like a tax collector, related closely with a Gentile, as they shook their hands, or ate with them, they would become ceremonially unclean. This meant they could not go into the synagogue to worship with others.

One day Jesus was walking by the place where Levi was collecting taxes. Jewish teachers did not teach in a classroom like we are used to. Rather, they would walk from town to town and their disciples would follow them around. As they walked, the rabbi would teach. That is what Jesus was doing when he came across Levi who was sitting at the booth where he was collecting taxes from the traveling traders. Jesus called out to Levi "Follow me." This is the fifth person Jesus called to become one of his followers. Because Levi was not a fisherman, Jesus did not add the second phrase "and I will make you a fisher of men" as he had the other four who had been fishermen.

"Who was Levi?" is a question scholars debate with no clear answer. In Matthew 9:9, Levi is called Matthew so the most probable answer is that Levi and Matthew are the same person. It is doubtful that this was the first time Jesus and Levi had met. Most likely Matthew had gone to listen to Jesus teach or perhaps sat outside the synagogue listening to him since he would probably not have been allowed in the synagogue. He would have stood at the edge of the crowds as Jesus taught, not wanting to be close to Jesus where he would face the looks of anger and hatred from the Jews. Obviously, what Jesus said and did had made a deep impact upon Matthew.

When Jesus called Matthew, he had a very difficult choice to make. He had one of the best financial jobs available. His job brought him many physical comforts; a good house, good clothes, lots of special food, good education for his children, and servants to take care of his needs. To leave all of this to follow Jesus would mean that he had no job and would become poor. Unlike Peter and the other fishermen, he could not go back to his job if things did not work out since there were many who wanted such a job so that they could become rich. Once he left his job it would be given to someone else. But Matthew turned

his back on material wealth and earthly blessings. He immediately got up and followed Jesus. The blessings of being part of the kingdom of Jesus was more important to him than all of the earthly blessings he enjoyed.

Q. 9. What does the call of Matthew teach us about the cost of becoming a follower of Jesus?

We don't know why Jesus chose Matthew out of all of the other followers. Jesus knew how people hated Matthew and his type of people. But Jesus did not care about what other people thought about Matthew. Jesus saw in the heart of Matthew a desire to be cleansed from his old way of life and become part of Jesus' kingdom, and that was enough. And did Jesus know that Matthew, who was educated and trained to carefully track financial information, would one day write what early Christians considered the best of the Gospels, the book of Matthew? I wonder how many like Matthew we overlook as being too sinful for God? How many Mary Magdalene do we despise because we don't welcome saved prostitutes into our church? Sadly, how different we are from Jesus!

That night, Levi (Matthew), who was very wealthy, held a big party for Jesus. He called his friends and fellow tax collectors and "sinners" to meet Jesus. This word "sinners" is used in two ways. First, it is used for those who were, like prostitutes, considered by society to be evil and socially unacceptable. Second, it was used by the religious leaders for those who paid no attention to the religious regulations and traditions. Most ordinary Jews could not adhere to all of the regulations the Pharisees established since they made life too inconvenient. So they obeyed the major laws of the Old Testament and not the man-made regulations. The Pharisees despised these common people, calling them "sinners." Most likely both type of "sinners" were present at the feast. It was as socially unacceptable for Jesus to eat with these people as it is for us to eat with prostitutes, potters or menjas today. By eating with these types of people, Jesus was extending to them the same forgiveness that Matthew enjoyed. But amazingly there was not one "righteous" or religious person invited to the party!

Rich people often had homes with a large room for banquets. As the tax collectors and sinners were eating in this room with Jesus, religious leaders stood outside in the courtyard. They could not believe what they saw. To them, a righteous person demonstrated his righteousness by being far away as possible from "sinners". You didn't shake their hands. You didn't talk to them unless necessary. And above all, you didn't eat with them. In Jewish society, to eat with another person was a sign of being friends, of being socially equal. "How could Jesus who claimed to be righteous eat with such evil people?" they wondered. It is one thing for such people to stand in the crowd with Jesus teaching them. Jesus could not control that. But it was totally different for Jesus to choose to eat with sinners.

The Pharisees met some of Jesus disciples and complained to them. (Note how the opposition of the Pharisees and religious leaders now increases against Jesus. They no longer came only to look, they began to question Jesus' actions. Jesus later talked with the religious leaders. Using a well-known proverb he said "You totally misunderstand God and me. I am like a doctor. A doctor does no good if he keeps himself separate from those who are sick. Or it does not good for him to relate to only healthy people. It is only when he sits with the sick person that he can understand his sickness and offer him a way to be healed. In the same way, I am the healer of peoples' souls. I must relate with them so that I can offer them medicine for their souls. But if people think they are well (righteous), then I have nothing to offer them" he said. Of course the Pharisees were in need of spiritual healing as much as the tax collectors were. But as long as someone thinks that he is "righteous" (self-righteous, self-satisfied people like the Pharisees who

saw no need to repent and believe) they won't come to Jesus, the healer, to have their sin sickness taken care of. To become part of Jesus' kingdom, one has to always come with the attitude of a sinner looking for forgiveness and spiritual healing. The Jews believed that a person must first clean up their lives and then God would forgive them. The uniqueness of Christianity is found in the belief that God saves sinners without their first having clean up their lives enough for God to accept them. God saves sinners while they are still in the state of sinfulness. He then cleans up their lives.

Could it be that we have become like the Pharisees? Are we afraid to relate to the "sinners" in our society, afraid of what others will say about us? Or are we afraid that somehow their sin will rub off on us and make us sinners? "If you a good Christian, you won't talk to that type of person. You won't befriend that type of person" we tell our youth. So we are creating a church full of Pharisees.

And do we view our church as "This is where only the 'righteous' gather." Could it be that we have a totally wrong understanding about our churches? A writer once asked a woman who was living with another man to whom she was not married but was struggling, "Why don't you go to church? They can help you." "I can't go there. They will make me feel worse by telling me how evil I am" she said. We think church is where the "holy people" gather and no sinner is welcome in case it causes us to be less than holy. So we welcome those who think that they are righteous to come. But Jesus is saying that a church is more like a hospital. It is the place where the sick gather in order to get help from a doctor. It is where the prostitutes, the liars, the adulterers, those addicted to chatt, and those struggling with anger all are welcome. There they can meet with Jesus, the Doctor of their souls. Rather than giving people the feeling that "You have to be good before you come to church," shouldn't they realize that "Everyone is welcome here with all of their problems. Come and meet the Savior. He will heal you and help you to stay healed. We too were sick just like you, but are now healed. Join us as the community of changed 'sinners' who have been healed."

Q. 10. a) Describe how we often have the same attitude towards sinners that the Pharisees did. b) Do you think a prostitute or chatt chewing youth in the market would feel welcome in our churches? If not, why not? c) What do you think would need to change in our churches so that "sinners" would feel welcome to come there to receive the medicine for their spiritual sickness?

Are you letting the views of society to keep you from relating to all types of people? May God give us the boldness to be more like our Master, who was a friend of all people.

JESUS IS QUESTIONED BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS ABOUT FASTING (Mt. 9:14-17, Mk. 2:18-22, Lk. 5:33-39)

Most religious leaders become concerned when the traditions of the church are broken. When people do not follow the same style of worship or wear something that is not considered the right type of clothing, or don't attend the expected meetings, some leaders are deeply offended. And they soon question the spirituality of those who do not follow the normal pattern which others hold. The Pharisees and teachers of the law during Jesus' time clashed with Jesus as he refused to follow their understandings of spirituality as seen in fasting. This non-conforming to traditions was one more reason why the Jewish religious leaders began to hate Jesus.

Q. 11. Read Lk. 5:33-39. a) What question did the Pharisees ask Jesus? b) Summarize Jesus' answer.

In the Old Testament times, there was only one time per year when Jews were commanded to fast. That day was the Day of Atonement, the day when the sins of the nation were done away with by a carefully prescribed ritual where the high priest would sacrifice for his own sins and the sins of the nation. (Lev. 16) The purpose of the fast was to help a person reflect on his sinfulness and God's gracious forgiveness. This special fast for the Jews meant not eating ANY food, not only abstaining from eating meat or other animal products.

Individuals or the nation would occasionally fast when facing a crisis in their lives as they focused their attention on prayer to God. So David fasted as he prayed that his son would not die. (2 Sam. 12:22) And the nation fasted when facing a crisis. (Judg. 20:26) The purpose of this type of fasting was to focus peoples' attention upon God asking for his special help. Unfortunately, people began to think that fasting was a way to force God to do something for them and guaranteed God's help even though their lives were not in line with God's desires. (See Is. 58:3-4)

After the exile of the Jews to Babylon, they added four other fast days when they remembered a disaster in their history. (Zech. 8:19) After Malachi, people turned fasting into a regular practice. So the Pharisees would fast twice a week, on Monday and Thursday. They would put white powder on their face and go out in public with long faces to demonstrate to all that they were fasting. They fasted from when the sun came up to when it went down, eating no food during this period. They expected all "spiritual" people to fast regularly. Even John the Baptist followed this practice.

But Jesus did not follow any religious practice just because others were doing it. The only time he fasted that we read about was during the 40 days when he was in the wilderness being tempted. He assumed that his followers would later fast (See Mt. 6:16-18), but strictly warned them that fasting was a private practice between them and God, not an external sign of spirituality.

Neither Jesus nor the disciples followed any of the ordinary fasts that the Pharisees and even the followers of John the Baptist practiced. This was so unusual that the religious leaders became concerned. And so they asked Jesus why he didn't fast. Jesus gives two major reasons why he and his disciples did not fast:

1. Jesus did not fast since with his coming, the time of sorrow was over and the time of rejoicing had arrived. (Lk. 5:34-35) The purpose of ritualistic Jewish fasting was to sorrow over the past. In 586 BC, the glory of Israel fell, Jerusalem and the Temple was destroyed, and the people were taken into captivity. Not since that time had there been a Davidic king or lasting independence from Gentile domination. So the Jews looked back with sorrow at all they had lost because of their rebellion against God.

But Jesus insisted that he was like the bridegroom in the middle of a wedding. Even the Jews knew that in the middle of a wedding, no one fasted, even if it was Monday or Thursday. Most Jewish weddings lasted for up to a week. During that week, there was a lot of celebration and feasting at the groom's family's house. Everyone who was at the wedding was to come and celebrate and no sad faces were allowed. In the same way, Jesus, the bridegroom had come and the Messianic kingdom had arrived. So no one should be fasting in sorrow. It was a time of celebration, and Jesus and the disciples were celebrating in joy.

The fasting and sorrow would come later "*when he is taken from them.*" This is Jesus' first prophecy that he was going to die and be taken from the disciples. Scholars debate whether or not the fasting time

is limited to the time between Jesus' death and his resurrection or whether it refers to the time between Jesus' death and when he comes again to reign on the earth. It would seem that it primarily refers to when the Messiah would die and be buried causing great sorrow to his disciples. But with the resurrection of Jesus, God's kingdom in the church was available. So ritualistic fasting in sorrow had no place any more. The godly sorrow of repentance was not to lead to a sorrowful attitude towards life, but a rejoicing in ones' forgiveness and new life with God. Fasting was to return to its original purpose, setting aside time for consecrated prayer to God during a time of crisis.

Jesus meant that Christianity is to be a religion known for its joy, not for its sorrow. Too often we believers are known for our long faces and our unwillingness to have fun. Or we are like the Pharisees, thinking that following Jesus is viewed as keeping a list of rules and regulations that take away joy. Many people assume becoming a follower of Christ will mean that they cannot enjoy life any more. But it is the opposite. With the internal peace that Jesus gives as he rules over our lives, there is a level of joy that is better than any joy the world gives.

Q. 12. a) Do you think non-Christians view Christianity as being a religion of "joy?" If not, why not? b) What would we need to change for us to be known as people of true joy?

2. The teachings Jesus brought were not a simple repair of what was wrong in Jewish worship; it was a whole new way of understanding and belief. (Lk. 5:36-38) The Pharisees and the followers of Jesus were tempted to view Jesus and his teachings as a "patch" over some of the wrong things that had developed in Jewish worship and life. But Jesus insisted that he was teaching something totally new. It could not be kept within the existing understandings of Judaism. Jesus used two proverbs to illustrate this truth:

a. Sewing a patch of a new unwashed piece of cloth on an older torn cloth. A used cloth that has been washed many times no longer shrinks. But a new unwashed piece of cloth will shrink when washed. If you were to sew on a new patch on an old piece of cloth, as soon as the cloth is washed, the new piece will shrink bringing an even worse tear and making the patch useless. In the same way, if the Pharisees want to take Jesus' new teachings and try to fit them into how they traditionally understood their relating with God, both Jesus' teachings and Judaism would be ruined.

b. Putting new wine into old wine skins. One of the major crops for the Jews was the harvesting of grapes. When the grapes were ripe, the farmers would collect them. Putting them into a stone pit, they would crush the grapes and collect the juice. One way to store the juice was to put it into a new sheep or goat skin carefully sown to make a waterproof container. As the juice fermented, the new skin would stretch. But should the farmer put the new wine into an old skin that had already expanded and had become hard, the fermenting wine would cause the old skin to split. The wine skin would be destroyed and the wine would spill on the ground. Jesus was teaching the Pharisees that his teaching would require a totally different way of looking at things, a totally new structure not found in Judaism. It would consist of the church made up of people from every nation, tribe, and class of people. You aren't born into God's Kingdom like the Jews were born into Jewish families. You had to accept it individually by faith in Jesus Christ. And you didn't work to get it by keeping old traditions like ritual fasts. Rather, it was a gift from God for those who repent and believe on Jesus.

Jesus is warning that it is impossible to put the Gospel of Jesus within any manmade system of religion. To do that destroys the Good News of the Gospel. And yet people often try. They try to put the

good news of the Gospel within existing religions. Many in Africa combine their traditional worship with Christianity and people claim to be Christians but visit witchdoctors or use magic. Or Christians in the west try to combine Christianity with the thought that money and an easy life is what is important. But Jesus offers a totally different way to believe and live. It is not to be used to combine or patch up the other faiths. Rather, it is to totally replace the old with something new, something which is only found in Jesus.

Q. 13. a) Describe ways you have seen people try to combine Jesus and his teachings with what they already believe rather than realize it is something totally new. b) How did this destroy the Gospel message?

Jesus ends with one final proverb. *"No one after drinking old wine, wants the new, for he says 'The old is better.'"* Old wine tends to be more fermented and have a richer flavor, so it is often more tasty and people prefer it to new wine. This proverb was a warning to the Pharisees and the Jews during the days of the early church. They were tempted to prefer the old way of doing things, the Jewish traditions passed on to them for generations rather than the new teachings of Jesus. But in rejecting Jesus, they will miss out on the blessings the Messiah wanted to give them. Just being "old" does not mean it is better when it comes to the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, most people still prefer the "old wine" of their old ways of worship and their old religion. It is always the minority who, like the disciples of Jesus, would choose his "new wine."

As followers of Jesus, we must have a clear understanding about fasting. It is easy to turn fasting into a "ritual" just like the Pharisees did. We can not eat certain foods on prescribed days, never once thinking about why we are fasting. Or it is easy to turn fasting into something we think we can use to force God to do what we want. In the New Testament, we see that fasting was never to be a time to show off our spirituality. Rather, it was to be used as a time to focus upon our relationship with God. We put aside all of the normal activities like work and food, and we focus our attention on confessing sin, getting right with God, and asking God to work in power for his glory. This is the type of fasting that Jesus supported. The leaders fasted when they wanted to send out missionaries. (Acts 13:2-3) And they fasted when they chose new leaders for the church. (Acts 14:23) But there is no evidence of a ritual fast on certain days of the week. We must be careful that traditions do not hide the real purpose of fasting.

Q. 14. Ask three Christians (one an elder, one a youth, and one an evangelist) whether or not they fast. a) If they fast, how often do they fast? b) Why do they fast? c) Compare their answers to what the Bible seems to indicate the purpose of fasting. In what way is it similar or different?

THIRD DAY

"Why did the Jewish leaders resist Jesus?" is a question that no doubt many Jews and Gentiles were asking during the times of the early church. If he was a Jew, if he did miracles and never did anything to hurt religious or political leaders, why would they crucify him like a common criminal? Each of the Gospel writers describes the growing animosity between the leaders and Jesus. These religious leaders initially were curious about who Jesus was. But after a short time their curiosity turned to hatred which ended up with a strong desire to kill Jesus. The Gospel writers give the following reasons for the religious leaders' anger at Jesus:

- They were jealous over the popularity of Jesus with the people.
- They were angry that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, but was not the type of political messiah that they wanted.
- They were annoyed because Jesus refused to follow the religious traditions like fasting which they believed were essential to being truly spiritual.
- They became irritated because Jesus openly related with people they believed were evil "sinners" and not worthy of Jesus' attention. They thought if he was really from God, he would not relate to sinners.
- They got angry at Jesus' openly disobeying their laws about keeping the Sabbath holy by healing on this day.
- Their greatest anger came when Jesus claimed to have a special relationship with God the Father and that he was equal to God.

Q. 15. List some reasons why religious leaders today tend to resist gifted men and women.

In today's lesson we will see the animosity of the religious leaders against Jesus grow. Jesus no longer "hides" the fact that he is not simply a man, but he is the Son of God. In statements that the Jewish leaders understood to be claims of deity, Jesus responds openly to the accusations of the leaders.

Q. 16. Read John 5. a) Who did Jesus heal? b) What day of the week was it that he healed on? c) List the statements in Jesus' answer which demonstrate his equality with God the Father. d) List four things that Jesus says testifies to his being who he says he is.

JESUS HEALS THE PARALYZED MAN AT THE POOL (Jn. 5:1-15)

Although the majority of Jesus' ministry took place in Galilee, the book of John describes several trips which Jesus made to Jerusalem. Every time he went to Jerusalem, Jesus clashed with the religious leaders. John 5 tells us that Jesus went to Jerusalem for one of the feasts of the Jews. He does not mention which feast it was. There were three feasts which Jews were strongly encouraged to attend: Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Most likely it was not the Passover, but one of the other feasts.

Jesus walked the two or three day journey from Galilee down to Jerusalem. There is no evidence that Jesus' disciples were with him at this time since only Jesus is mentioned. Some scholars think perhaps John was with Jesus since he reported this event. Probably after his morning worship at the Temple on the Sabbath (Saturday, the Jewish day of worship), Jesus walked out of the Temple complex towards the north. Not far from the Temple were two pools of water called Bethesda. Surrounding the pools of water were special shaded areas. Under these shaded areas many sick people gathered because the Jews had a traditional belief that occasionally an angel would come and stir the water and the first person into the water would be healed. It was common in ancient times, especially among the Greeks, to believe there were special sites where holy water would bring healing. The Old Testament never encouraged the Jews to believe this, so most likely the Jews' belief came from the Greeks. John is not saying that this tradition and belief was true. Rather, he is explaining the reason why this paralyzed man was waiting at the pool. Sadly, the people were no longer looking to God to heal them. They were looking to some magical pool. How easy it is for us to stop trusting God for our healing. We trust doctors, or we trust special healers, or we trust special water. In doing so, it is a clear act of refusal to believe that Jesus is our healer.

Q. 17. a) List some things people in Ethiopia use to bring "healing." b) When Christians focus upon special people, certain acts, or holy water or holy oil, explain why this is usually an act of refusal to believe on Jesus as our healer.

From among the great number of sick people, Jesus picked out one man. We don't know why Jesus chose this man and not any of the other sick people. Perhaps he was the most hopeless person in the crowd of sick people. It is interesting that Jesus did not look for a rich person to spend time with. Rather, he went looking for a poor helpless man. How different from us- don't we often want to spend time with friends, or with the rich and powerful? But Jesus would spend his time with those who needed his help, whether they were sick or "sinners."

The man had been paralyzed for 38 years. For many years he had lain besides the pool waiting for it to be "stirred." Most likely, the "stirring" was when the water from underground springs came out with great force and "bubbled" the water. Not understanding what was happening, the people claimed it was an angel. Imagine the pushing and shoving as each sick person tried to be the first into the water. "Only the first will be healed," they thought. Being paralyzed and with no friend or relative to help him, every time the man had tried to drag himself into the pool, someone got there before him. This man must have been extremely discouraged.

Jesus came to him and asked "Do you want to get well?" Why did Jesus ask the man this question? Jesus was testing the man's desire to be healed. The paralyzed man was no doubt a beggar and he would get more money being paralyzed. There are some crippled people who do not want to be healed or get a prosthesis- either hands or legs, because they have found that the worse they look, the more money they can get from begging. They would rather beg than find a real job. So Jesus was verifying that this man actually did want to be healed.

The man did not answer Jesus' question about wanting to be healed. He was so demoralized that he simply explained that his situation was hopeless. He complained that he had waited for so long and no one would help him. This man was indirectly blaming others who did not help him to be healed. Jesus did not seek to correct the man's wrong beliefs about the power of water to heal. Rather, Jesus ordered the man to get up and take the mat he had been lying on and go home. The man felt strength return to his legs and standing up he was totally healed. Jesus did not have to touch him to heal him. His word of command was enough. And the healing was total and instantaneous. He picked up his mat and began to walk home. Jesus left the area without even telling the man who he was. Jesus was not trying to draw a crowd by his healing. He simply was responding in compassion to the need of the man.

A problem developed however. The day was the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, the Jews had strict rules what they could do or not do so that they did not "work." To throw a stone at a bird was classified as work. To even have a needle pinned on their clothes was work. For Jesus to heal on the Sabbath was work. And to carry a mat on the Sabbath was clearly breaking the regulations about the Sabbath. A person openly disobeying the rules like this could be killed. So the religious leaders quickly grabbed the man and asked him why he was carrying the mat. "I have just been healed. The man who healed me, he told me to do it," he said. But he could not tell the leaders who had healed him. It is interesting that all the religious leaders could see was the disobedience to their rules, not the great miracle that Jesus had done in their midst. They didn't ask who had healed the man, but only why he was carrying his mat. Focusing our attention on obeying rules can blind us to the amazing work of God in our midst.

Several hours probably passed and it was getting close to the afternoon time of sacrifice. Jesus went to the Temple to worship and there he found the man whom he had healed. Jesus went up to the man and strongly warned him to "stop sinning" or he would face worse judgment. This statement could reflect two things. First, it could mean that there had been a specific ongoing sin in the man's life. Jesus was telling him that he had better get rid of that sin or God could punish him again. Just because God healed him did not give him the right to continue on in sin thinking he wouldn't be punished again. Second, Jesus was telling the man that he must renounce his selfish sinful life. He needed to "repent" and live in a way that glorifies God. Otherwise, he would one day face the judgment of God.

It is interesting to compare the response of the healed blind man in John 9 and this man. In John 9 the healed blind man testified to the religious leaders and defended Jesus. Here, the healed paralyzed man showed no appreciation for what Jesus did for him. In fact, once he found out that it was Jesus who healed him, he quickly ran to the religious leaders and reported on Jesus. Probably he wanted to get the anger of the religious leaders focused upon Jesus and not him. It is doubtful that this man ever became a follower of Jesus. He remained selfishly concerned only about himself. He might have received physical healing, but his soul was not healed. His final judgment would be severe. Like many today, he was healed physically, but never allowed God's gracious act to turn him into a faithful follower of Jesus. To the one whom much has been given, much is required, Jesus said. (Lk. 12:48) Those who witness God's amazing power in this way will be judged more severely when they stand before God to give an account of their lives.

Q. 18. Describe how you have seen someone healed by God and yet he never becomes a true follower of Jesus.

JESUS RESPONDS TO THE ACCUSATION OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS (Jn. 5:16-47)

Eventually Jesus met the angry religious leaders. The details of this discussion could reflect that John was there and witnessed the exchange between Jesus and the leaders. Although the initial issue which caused the clash between Jesus and the religious leaders was the fact that he healed on the Sabbath, the religious leaders soon forgot that as Jesus made clear claims to be equal with God. For the first time, Jesus reveals to people that he is not just a human who did miracles. Rather, he is God; equal to God the Father, doing the works which his Father had told him to do. This so angered the Jews that they wanted to kill him for the sin of blasphemy.

1. Jesus explains why he "works" on the Sabbath (Jn. 5:16-19)

The Jewish religious leaders knew that after God had created the world, he really did not stop working. He stopped creating, but he did not stop his activity. On the Sabbath God gave sunlight and rain. He gave life as people and animals were born on the Sabbath. So clearly God does not totally "rest" on the Sabbath. His "Son" was just like God the Father. He "worked" as he healed people who needed his mercy. Jesus is arguing that since God works out of compassion and mercy even though it is the Sabbath, and since Jesus is God's representative, he is right in working and healing and doing good on the Sabbath.

Jesus called God "My **Father**." This was amazing to the Jews for two reasons.

First, no Jew would ever call God "Father." They would see this as disrespectful. In fact, they would usually not even use the name "God" because they were afraid of disobeying the command not to take the name of God in vain. (Ex. 20:7) They would use words like "the one in heaven" or "the throne."

Second, Jesus said "**My** Father." He did not say "Our Father" or "Your Father." He did not claim that the Jews had a similar type of relationship with God as he did. And the Jews realized that Jesus was not just claiming a similar type of "sonship" relationship which David claimed. (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7) Rather, by saying "My Father," Jesus was claiming to have a unique relationship with God that no one else could claim. As the unique Son of God, Jesus had a special relationship to God the Father which involves doing his type of work. But Jesus always worked in subordination to God the Father, doing what the Father told him. He never worked independently of the Father. Jesus also claimed that God's working and his working were the same.

The religious leaders immediately knew what Jesus meant. They were no longer angry just because he had healed on the Sabbath and told the man to carry his mat in disobedience to Sabbath regulations. Rather, they were even angrier that Jesus "called God his Father, making himself equal with God." After this the religious leaders were determined to kill Jesus. It would be two more years before their desires were fulfilled and they were able to have Jesus crucified by the Romans. But already opposition to Jesus began.

2. Jesus does all of his actions, including healing on the Sabbath, in obedience to His Father (Jn 5:19-20)

Jesus is not a "god" who worked independently from God the Father. Rather, he is so closely related to the Father that he only does what he has seen the Father do and what the Father has given him to do. The activities which Jesus does are actually the activities of God the Father being done through God the Son.

3. God the Father has given Jesus, His Son, divine works to do (Jn 5:21-30)

a. Jesus will raise the dead to life. All Jews knew that only God had the power to raise someone from the dead back to life. Sometimes God gave someone like Elijah the power to raise a dead person to life. (2 Ki. 4:8-37) But Jesus' was different. He had the power in himself to give three types of life. First, he gives spiritual life. He takes a spiritually dead person and gives them spiritual life. Second, Jesus has the ability to raise physically dead people like Lazarus and return their physical life. Third, Jesus has the power to raise all people from the dead at the end times. (1 Cor. 15:20-28)

b. Jesus has been given the authority to be the judge over all people. Not only will Jesus raise people from the dead to face judgment, the one they will face to have their lives evaluated is him. He is the judge, determining both where they spend eternity and what rewards they will be given.

Jesus' relationship to God the Father is not defined by God the Father using power and authority to command Jesus. Rather it is based upon a loving relationship. Love is defined by one person seeking the best for another person. Jesus loves God the Father, so he does everything possible to glorify God the Father. (Jn. 17:4) But God the Father also loves Jesus so he is happy for Jesus to be honored and glorified. (Jn. 17:5) Out of love, the Father gives Jesus the right to give life and to judge. It is this relationship between God the Father and God the Son which provides leaders a model for what servant-leadership should be like. The world sees leadership as authority over someone with the power to command them to do things.

Jesus demonstrates that true leadership finds its root in love, the seeking to do what is best for others, whether they are in authority over us or the people we are responsible for in the church.

These statements clearly show that Jesus claimed to be God, equal to, but subordinate to God the Father. In his person, he is fully God. He has all of the attributes and character of God. But Jesus is always in obedient subordination to God the Father. Although we do not know how God can be both "One" and "Three" (Trinity), verses like this clearly prove that Jesus claimed to be distinct from God the Father (unlike what the Jesus Only people teach) but also divine. The fact that he sees what the Father does, the Father gives him the right to judge, etc. all indicate that Jesus is not just another word for God the Father, but distinct from him. It is not our role to understand and explain the Trinity. In humility, we must accept the evidence of the Bible. (e.g. Mt. 28:19-20)

Q. 19. a) From John 5, list the statements which show that Jesus is distinct from God the Father. b) List the statements which indicate that Jesus is divine.

c. Jesus is the one who gives eternal life to all who believe on him. Jesus told the religious leaders that believing in him would bring them "eternal life." The quality of life which they would have as his followers would be much greater than anything they knew in the world or in how they used to live when they followed the Old Testament laws. And that special life would go on for ever. They did not have to work at keeping thousands of laws for them to get this special life. All it took was "faith." In the New Testament, saving faith always includes two major things. First, it includes believing that Jesus is who he says he is, as the Savior and Lord over all. Second, it means to live out what we say we believe in our daily lives. If we claim that Jesus is Lord, then we must live our lives totally under his authority. We accept his way of life, even if it brings persecution.

But Jesus also warned the Jews of the implications of their refusal to believe on him. If they refused to acknowledge who Jesus claims to be, then there will be judgment coming against them. How they relate to him determines what happens to them in eternity. If they believe on Jesus, they not only receive the blessed life now, but when Jesus raises them to life, they will escape the condemnation of being sent to hell. But if they refuse to believe on Jesus, they too will rise to life, but they will be punished with eternal condemnation.

Jesus said that judgment will also be determined by the works which people do. What we do here on earth before we die has eternal implications. After we die, we can't change things. Jesus said *"those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."* (Jn 5:29) We must be careful how we understand this verse. Jesus is not saying that we can do some special work like giving to the poor or fasting which will earn us salvation. The New Testament teaches that salvation is a gift of God. (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 6:23) But what Jesus is teaching is that a person who has true faith in Jesus will demonstrate their faith through a changed life. The person's character will change. His motivation for why he does things will change. And his actions will change. Because we are changed, then we will do works which honor God. This means that if a person who claims to believe on Jesus does not live a transformed life, it probably indicates that he does not have saving faith. If we claim to believe on Jesus, but knowingly and willfully live in an ungodly way, we need to ask ourselves whether or not we have ever truly believed. As Paul said, we must confess that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9-10) - so we come to him with the understanding that we will live in submission to him as our Lord.

Q. 20. a) Do you think most new Christians have a proper understanding of what it means to believe on Jesus? Explain your answer. b) When a new believer confesses that Jesus is Lord, do you think he is thinking saying the words is what saves him, or does he focus upon submitting his life to the Lordship of Christ? Explain your answer. c) What truths should evangelists stress so that all people understand what true faith in Jesus is and that they are to submit their lives to his Lordship?

4. Jesus has four witnesses who verify that he is divine (Jn 5:31-40)

The Jewish judicial system was that no judgment can be made based upon only one testimony. There had to be two and preferably three witnesses. Not only is this found in the Old Testament (Deut. 19:15), but in the New Testament as well (1 Tim. 5:19). We must be very careful not to form opinions based upon scant evidence. And especially as leaders, we must never put a person under church discipline if we don't have adequate witnesses.

The Jewish leaders would have said to Jesus "You claim to be God. But that is only your personal testimony. You don't have any witnesses. So your testimony is not valid." Jesus agrees to the need for witnesses and lists four witnesses (even more than was necessary by law) who verify that he is who he claims to be:

a. John the Baptist: John the Baptist, like a light, had pointed people to Jesus. John verified that Jesus was the Messiah and the Lamb of God. Although the Jewish leaders did not believe John was a prophet, the majority of the people did.

b. The works that Jesus did: The fact that Jesus healed people like the paralyzed man, drove out demons, and even raised people from the dead were proofs that Jesus was greater than a man.

c. God the Father: God the Father testified when Jesus was being baptized that Jesus was his "Son" in whom he was pleased. Those who had a close relationship with God, God moved in their hearts to confirm to them that Jesus was God's Son. The fact that the religious leaders could not hear God the Father witnessing about his Son is an indication that they did not know God the Father.

d. The Old Testament: To the person who is observant, the Old Testament points towards Jesus Christ. Jesus would later use the Old Testament scriptures to show how he fulfilled them to two doubting disciples. (Lk. 24:13- 32) The religious leaders were the blind ones, for they couldn't understand God's spiritual truths which all point to Jesus.

5. Jesus reprimands the religious leaders for their unbelief (Jn. 5:41-47)

The religious leaders had attacked Jesus for claiming to be God. Now Jesus in turn reprimands them. Unlike Jesus whose sole concern was to glory God the Father, these religious leaders were controlled by the opinions of others. The things they did, even how they worshipped, was determined by their desire to be praised by people. "So-and-so is spiritual" was what they wanted to hear. So they prayed in a special way to draw attention to their supposed spirituality. Or they fasted long hours with very sad faces to show how serious they were in their following God. They multiplied laws making life very difficult. "We can't live like that, but isn't he spiritual. Look how he denies himself comfort," was what they liked to hear. Unfortunately, by looking for the praise of men, their minds and ears were closed to the most important thing of trying to please God.

It is very easy for church leaders, evangelists, pastors, choir members, and program leaders to start to think like these religious leaders. We lead the church or preach or sing in a way that seeks to show off our supposed spirituality to the congregation. Or we do things that is primarily seeking to please the members of the church. We need to be concerned with the views of the church members. However, we must always make our primary concern to please God. If we do, then we are true disciples of Jesus who also sought to do only what would bring happiness to God the Father.

Q. 21. Describe ways we can become like the religious leaders, focusing upon pleasing people and not on pleasing God.

The religious leaders honored Moses more than any one else in Jewish history. Their focus was upon obeying the regulations in the five books of Moses. "Jesus can say what he wants, but we will obey the laws Moses gave us," they thought. But Jesus told these leaders that even Moses had prophesied about Jesus, calling him the Prophet to come. They were therefore disobeying what Moses had said, so Moses himself would testify against them on the day of judgment before God.

Sadly, the religious leaders had already formed their opinions about Jesus. They were not willing to listen to what Jesus claimed. Rather than look at the facts before them, they closed their minds and focused upon getting rid of Jesus. How hard it is for those whose minds are closed to believe new things! Like the religious leaders, hardened hearts makes it difficult for the Gospel to penetrate. But we can also get hardened hearts. We can be so determined that God will only work in a certain way that we are blind to his workings in different ways. How often we resist the Holy Spirit's work simply because he is doing something in an unexpected way. May God keep us from becoming like the Pharisees!

FOURTH DAY

Why would church leaders force a gifted young preacher out of the church? And yet that is what many churches do. If there is a godly, gifted young man in a church, often the church leaders will refuse to accept him and will limit his ministry or ruin his reputation so that he leaves and goes to another church. And why would someone hate a person who taught what was true, who loved everyone, especially the poor and those struggling in life? There was no one filled with love for all people as much as Jesus. And his teaching was so powerful that people would travel for many kilometers to hear him. And yet, it would not be long until people began to work against Jesus. The Gospel writers describe to us why the Jews hated Jesus enough to kill him like a common criminal.

Jesus' reputation and acceptance by the ordinary people increased from day to day. But the opposition of the religious leaders increased as well. Today we will see how religious leaders began to actively work against Jesus.

JESUS' DISCIPLES EAT GRAIN THEY PICKED ON THE SABBATH (Mt. 12:1-8, Mk. 2:23-28, Lk. 6:1-5)

Q. 22. Read Mt. 12:1-8. a) What were the disciples doing which upset the Pharisees? b) Summarize Jesus' response about why he would not reprimand the disciples. c) What authority does Jesus claim?

There were three major pillars to Jewish religion during the days of Jesus.

First, there was circumcision of male children. Like the string around the neck is a sign of being an Orthodox believer in some areas, in the same way, circumcision was the major indicator that the Jew was a recipient of the covenant God made with Abraham. Although Jesus did not attack this pillar of Judaism, it would be one of the major issues the early church would have to address as they took the Gospel into Greek areas among people who were not circumcised. "Do Gentiles need to be circumcised in order to become true children of God?" was a question the early church struggled with. (Acts 15)

Second, there was the need for Jews to keep themselves ritually pure. So there were elaborate washing practices, they refused to relate to Gentiles who would make them ritually unclean, and above all, they would only eat foods permitted in the Old Testament. Just like Orthodox Christians emphasize eating only meat slaughtered according to their traditions, the Jews made sure that they only ate food that was killed in an approved way. Plus they did not eat many of the things like pig meat which the Gentiles ate. Although Jesus did not often attack this pillar of belief, he did teach that ritual purification and eating only proper food did not influence a person's spirituality, for spirituality was an issue of the heart. (Mk. 7:1-5, 14-23)

Third, there was the need to strictly keep the Sabbath as holy. During the days of Jesus and the early church, the Gentiles worked seven days out of the week. But the Jews saw as one of the major distinctive of their being Jewish, the need to carefully obey the command to "Keep the Sabbath Day holy." (Ex. 20:8-11) Not only did they not work on that day, the religious leaders had thousands of man-made laws classifying what was allowed and not allowed on that day. Walking beyond one kilometer was classified as work. Carrying anything that weighed more than a small orange was work. In fact the Jews were so strict about this command that even if their enemies attacked them on the Sabbath (Saturday) they could not protect themselves. Knowing this belief, several times in history Gentile armies attacked the Jews on their day of rest. Rather than defend themselves, thousands of men, women and children were killed.

As the Jews made more and more laws regulating what they could not do on the Sabbath, often they found their rules too inconvenient. So they made other rules to help them get around their original rules. For instance, although they were only allowed to walk one kilometer, on Friday, if they would put some dirt from their land one kilometer away, then they could walk on another kilometer since the "dirt" was still their land, and so they were only walking one kilometer from their land. It was this pillar of Jewish teachings which Jesus knowingly attacked. He was willing to spend the day in worship of God. But he refused to follow the practices which the Jewish religious teachers had made up. Naturally, his open disobedience of their rules greatly angered the religious leaders.

Unfortunately, making up many rules to define spirituality has been a tendency of the church throughout history. There are some Christians in America who will not use electricity or travel in cars because that is too worldly. Others refuse to use medicine for that would be lack of faith in Jesus, even though it was God who gave man the wisdom to make the medicine. We must be careful that we too don't fall into this trap of thinking our human rules define true spirituality.

Q. 23. a) List some rules churches have which they think is an evidence of spirituality but are not clearly taught in the Bible. b) Explain why making rules to define spirituality is dangerous.

One Sabbath Jesus and his disciples were walking through the countryside. Like rural Ethiopia, the Jews had small fields adjacent to each other and there were small footpaths between these fields. The

disciples were hungry, so they ate some of the heads of wheat which were ripe. This practice was culturally permitted to them. (See Deut. 23:24-25) However, this practice was strictly prohibited in Jewish religious teachings on the Sabbath. The disciples broke four rules: they "harvested" when they picked the wheat; they "threshed" the wheat when they rubbed their hands together; they "winnowed" when they blew on the chaff; and this all was classified as preparing food to eat which was not allowed on the Sabbath.

It seems that some Pharisees were walking with Jesus and the disciples. Since Jesus was the leader of the group of disciples, the Jews saw him as responsible for their actions. So they asked Jesus why he had allowed the disciples to so openly disobey the Sabbath rules. Jesus gave four major reasons why he would not reprimand the disciples and why the religious leaders should not get upset.

1. The needs of people are more important than keeping the details of the law. (Mt. 12:3-4) Jesus reminded the Pharisees of an event in the life of David. (1 Sam. 21:1-6) David was fleeing from Saul and very hungry. He went to the priests who were serving in the Tabernacle and asked them for something to eat. They didn't have any food except for 12 small loaves of bread that were in the Tabernacle on the Table of Shewbread. Once a week the priests would cook 12 small loaves of bread and put them in the Tabernacle to signify their thanksgiving of God for giving the 12 tribes their daily bread. At the end of the week, when they put the new bread on the Table, only the priests were allowed to eat the old bread. (Ex. 25:30; Lev. 24:5-9) However, the priest gave this bread to David and God did not punish David. This shows that in times of need God overlooks keeping ritual rules. So Jesus would not reprimand the disciples since in their hunger, they were eating. And if David, a godly man, felt free to interpret God's commands in this way; Jesus, who is greater than David, also has the right to interpret human regulations so that human needs are met as well.

2. Those who minister before God are in a position where ministry forces them to work. (Mt. 12:5) If God was so concerned that no one work, why would he demand that the priests work on the Sabbath? The priests who were on duty at the Temple did not take the Sabbath off. They still had to carry wood to the altar, light the fire, sacrifice the animals, and perform all of the required rituals. In fact, on the Sabbath they had to sacrifice twice the number of animals. Even the Jewish teachers were forced to teach that the law of sacrifice took precedence over the law of the Sabbath. Jesus and the disciples were like those priests, for they too were ministers of God. Therefore the regulations did not apply to them either.

3. The Old Testament clearly said that God was more concerned with mercy rather than sacrifices. (See Hos. 6:6) By focusing upon the laws rather than the needs of people, the religious leaders had forgotten the very heart of God. In God's view, showing mercy to those in need is more important than keeping ritual laws like sacrificing animals. So if the Pharisees were to really represent God, they would focus upon "mercy" and the needs of people, not upon laws which cause inconvenience and do not honor the very purpose for which God gave the Sabbath regulation.

4. Jesus, the Messiah, was the "Lord of the Sabbath." More important than anything, the Pharisees must understand who he is. He is not just a simple man like another religious teacher. Jesus is God. They needed to know two facts about him:

First, they should realize that he is greater than the Temple in which the priests ministered. This statement must have greatly shocked the Jews. They were very proud of their Temple which was so beautiful that it was considered one of the greatest buildings in the ancient world. And it was in the Temple

that God met with them. But Jesus claimed that he was greater than that place of worship where the priests sacrificed.

Second, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Pharisees might not know it, but he is God in the flesh. He is the spokesman and representative of God, so he speaks and works on God's behalf. He is the mighty "Son of Man" from Daniel 7:13-14. He, and not the religious leaders who made up all of the regulations, was in the position to understand God's very purpose of the Sabbath and define what is permissible and what isn't. And as the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus did not believe the disciples were guilty of breaking God's understanding of the Sabbath. Next week we will see how Jesus felt free to interpret the true intent of the Old Testament commands like "Do not murder" or "Do not commit adultery." (Mt. 5:21-22; 27-28)

The early church recognized that as the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus changed the understanding of how to keep the Sabbath holy. Not once in the New Testament is it taught that Sunday worship took over the understanding of the Sabbath.

1. The early church changed their day of worship from Saturday, the last day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week. (Jews counted the weekdays starting from Sunday and ending with Saturday.) The apostles did this to honor the amazing fact that Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday.

2. The early church undid all of the ritual obedience of the Sabbath and the Old Testament holy days. Gentile Christians were not able to take a day off work until around 300 AD when the Roman emperor, Constantine, became a Christian and set aside Sunday as their day of worship with no formal work. So, for the early church, keeping Sunday like the Sabbath would have been impossible for them. Paul wrote that all days of the week are honorable to God and people can worship on any day they want. He warned Christians not to focus upon keeping special holy days like the Sabbath or Old Testament holy days. (Col. 2:16-17; Rom. 14:5-6) This means that in countries like the Middle East which do not have a Christian heritage, the believers should joyfully worship on Friday or Saturday. If that is the legal day of rest, they should use it to worship Jesus.

3. Sabbath rest was given for the benefit of humans, not to make life more difficult for humans. (See Mk. 2:27) It was given by God so that humans could enjoy a day off from work. Scientists today have found that humans are much more healthy and happy if they take one day off per week from all of the pressures of their work. The Sabbath was also given to encourage us to spend time focusing upon our great God. God knew that humans tend to get so caught up in their daily lives that they do not stop and thank and worship their Creator. So God set aside one day per week when humans could spend more time reflecting upon his goodness in their lives and worship him. The author of Hebrews would later warn Christians not to forget their need to get together to worship God. (Heb. 10:25)

As followers of Jesus, we must be careful not to become like the Pharisees, making up rules and regulations for Sunday which take the joy out of the day. God has given us a day of rest for our benefit. There are two basic guidelines about Sunday that we should remember if we are to let God's gift of a day of rest have its beneficial work in our lives.

First, God wants us to use the day to focus upon him. We are to gather with others to joyfully worship and thank God for his rich blessings in our lives. When Christians do not take one day off and worship

Jesus, they usually find that their spiritual lives begin to drift and the things of the world take priority over their relationship with God.

Second, we should make sure what we do brings true rest to us. Women should not be so concerned with cooking that they do not get a rest. And how we use the day should be restful. We don't go out plowing on that day like other days or going to the market or shopping. We don't fill up the day with church meetings. If our job demands that we work on that day, we should use our day off to get proper rest. The rest of the week will go much better if we honor God's principle of taking one day per week to rest.

Q. 24. a) Describe how Christians can have a similar attitude as the Pharisees to what they think believers should do on Sunday. b) Describe how Christians can take too careless of a view on Sunday that they do not give enough time to personally and corporately reflect on God's grace in their lives. c) Describe how Christians can turn the day of legal "rest" which the government has allowed us and filled it up with other types of "work" which do not give us true rest like God wants.

JESUS HEALS THE MAN WITH SHRIVELED HAND ON THE SABBATH (Mt. 12:9-14, Mk. 3:1-6, Lk. 6:6-11)

Q. 25. Read Mt. 12:9-14. a) Where did Jesus meet the man with the shriveled hand? b) What day of the week was it? c) What did the religious leaders ask Jesus? d) How did he respond? e) What was the attitude of the religious leaders towards Jesus after he healed the person?

One day Jesus went into the synagogue to worship with the rest of the Jews. In the crowd was a man whose hand was shriveled up. Most likely the religious leaders had brought the man into the synagogue. The Pharisees never doubted that Jesus could heal the person. They were not interested in the person and getting him healed. Rather, they were using the man as a way to demonstrate to people that Jesus was a "law breaker." There is no evidence that the man even asked Jesus to heal him. He just stood there in front of everyone as a "trap" prepared against Jesus. "See, he is not the Messiah as you think. He openly disobeys the rules of God. He deserves to be punished, not followed," is what the leaders wanted the people to see.

Jews also had strict rules about what someone could do on the Sabbath when a person was sick. No doctor was allowed to go visit a sick person unless he was on the point of death and he would die before Saturday was over. Some Jews even thought that the person should die rather than disobey the Sabbath regulations. If a man had a sore which would get worse by the next day, they were not even allowed to put medicine on it. They could put a cloth over the wound, but no medicine on the cloth. Clearly this man with a crippled hand was not about to die. Would Jesus wait until tomorrow to heal him? Or would he show mercy to the man, heal him, and so break the Sabbath command as they understood it and become a lawbreaker?

The Pharisees wanted to force the issue with Jesus. "Are you allowed to heal a person on the Sabbath?" their actions asked. In his response Jesus used the teachings of the religious leaders against them. The Pharisees taught that if a sheep or cow fell into a pit on the Sabbath, it was permissible to go rescue the sheep so that it would not die. No doubt they did not want to face the economic implications of losing the sheep. "If you show 'mercy' to an animal who, in the view of God, is of less worth than a human, how can showing mercy to a human who is worth much more ever be wrong?" asked Jesus. It is

always acceptable to God to do good on the Sabbath. Regulations that limit people helping others go against God's desire for the Sabbath to be a day of mercy and helping others.

Jesus could have waited one more day to heal the man. But mercy meant taking care of the man's needs as soon as possible. Mark 3:1-6 tells us that the attitude of the Pharisees and their hardened hearts angered Jesus. And Jesus wanted to teach the Pharisees the lessons that Sabbath was made for man's benefit, showing mercy was good, and the Sabbath is not meant to imprison people by rules. Jesus, without touching the man, commanded him to stretch out his withered hand and it was immediately and completely healed. All in the synagogue witnessed the shriveled hand return to normal.

We would have thought the Pharisees would rejoice at the miracle they witnessed and praise God. But their focus on regulations had blinded them to the work of God in their midst. All they could see was that Jesus had broken their rules. So the Pharisees started to look for ways to kill Jesus. It is amazing how deeply they hated Jesus. The Pharisees were not in political power so they had no authority to arrest or kill Jesus. Instead they would have to gain the cooperation of others like the Sadducees, who were their enemies, so that Jesus could be killed.

Sadly, we are often like the Pharisees. God does something amazing in our midst. People are saved. Or they are healed. And yet, because it is not in the way we think is right, we often resist the work. This means that we fight against the Holy Spirit. We end up focusing upon our rules rather than on mercy.

But this does not mean that Jesus is giving us the right to live outside of his explicit commands. There are some who live in sexual sin or steal time or money or pens from work thinking God does not really care. What Jesus was reacting against was the focus upon man-made laws which hinder helping others in mercy. He is not saying we have the right to gratify our fleshly desires or disobey God's commands. Nor is Jesus giving us the right to do anything we want without thinking about others. We should be willing to lovingly limit actions which cause others to stumble into sin. Paul would also later teach that we should do nothing that hinders the spiritual life of others. The law of "love" means that we limit what we do so that others are not hurt or the name of Jesus is not defamed. (1 Cor. 8-9)

Q. 26. a) Describe a situation where church leaders focused upon "rules" more than mercy. b) Describe ways Christians can become too lax in how we live so that we cause others to stumble in their faith. c) Describe ways that people claim to have the right to do something or dress in a certain way but forget how they bring disrepute to the name of Jesus.

JESUS' REPUTATION SPREADS BEYOND GALILEE (Mt. 12:15-21, Mk. 3:7-12)

Q. 27. Read Mk. 3:7-12. a) List the regions people came from to see Jesus. (Look up these regions on the map in Appendix A in the back of the book.) b) Why did they come to see Jesus? c) What was the attitude of demon to Jesus and what was his response to them?

Although Galilee was far away from other parts of Palestine and people did not tend to travel far from their homes, over time the word that Jesus was a mighty healer spread. People walked many kilometers to see Jesus. The crowds grew so large that Jesus could no longer teach in the synagogues so Jesus had to teach in the open, often along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. No longer were the crowds only from the

region around Capernaum or Galilee. Some people walked over 150 kilometers to see Jesus. Notice the regions that they came to see Jesus:

a. Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews and major city in Judea.

b. Judea, the region around Jerusalem where the majority of the Jews lived.

c. Idumea, the region south of Judea. The Edomites had migrated to live south of Judea when their territory was taken by other tribes. During the times of the Maccabees, they had been forcibly converted to Judaism when all men were forced to be circumcised.

d. Regions across the Jordan: This would refer to Perea, a region that was on the east side of the Jordan River. It was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, and had a combination of Jews and Gentiles. Today, this would be in the country of Jordan.

e. Region of Phoenicia: To the northwest of Galilee were the Phoenicians people. In modern day Lebanon, their major cities were Tyre and Sidon. There would have been some Jews living in there territory.

Mainly Jews, but not doubt some Gentiles, gathered around Jesus. Interestingly, Mark makes no mention of anyone from Samaria, the region just south of Galilee or Decapolis which was immediately to the east of Galilee just over the Jordan River. The large crowd had little desire to listen to Jesus' teachings and get ready to enter the kingdom he had brought. Rather, they wanted to see miracles and to be healed. No longer were they patiently waiting their turn to come to Jesus and ask him for healing. Now they were pushing and shoving so that they could touch him and be healed.

When this pushing and shoving became too much, Jesus got into a little boat that someone had by the side of the lake. From there he continued his ministry of teaching and healing. Jesus did not have to go looking for people who were demon possessed to cast out the demons and free them from Satan's captivity. Rather, whenever the demons saw Jesus, they immediately recognized his great power and authority. Using the bodies in which they were inhabiting, they would bow before Jesus in fear and submission. And they would cry out "You are the Son of God." They knew that Jesus was the Messiah and they also knew that he was God's divine Son. Before him they knew they had no power and authority. Jesus would immediately stop them from revealing who he was. Jesus did not want the testimony of demons. But above all he did not want the people to misunderstand who he was. It would only be after Jesus' death and resurrection that he would allow people to openly proclaim him as God's special Son. Only then would people understand what type of messiah he was.

What Jesus had earlier not wanted to happen was now taking place. (Mk. 1:43-45) People were coming to him with no desire to repent and believe. They only wanted the physical benefits that Jesus could give them, especially his healing power. In selfishness they had no concern for him, only pushing and shoving to get their desires met. In compassion Jesus still healed them and released them from Satan's power. But soon after this Jesus would change his approach and teaching. Rather than the crowds, he would start teaching 12 ordinary men who were always with him. And he would start talking what it really meant to be a follower of Jesus and the cost his true followers would have to pay.

Could Jesus be concerned about us today in the same way? So many come to him wanting his physical blessings and healings. They don't come with a spirit of repentance for their sinfulness and a desire to live under Jesus' authority. They want the easy road of blessings, but not the narrow road of total obedience to Jesus' teachings and the path of the cross. Jesus is still looking for disciples who will give their all to him. Are you one of them?

Q. 28. Spend time thinking about why you claim to be a follower of Jesus. Are your motives selfish, or is it because you want your sins forgiven and have committed yourself to follow his narrow path? If you have selfish motives, confess these to Jesus. Ask Him to show you more ways to follow and obey and become more like Christ.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) Describe how Jesus treated people whom Jewish society considered as outcasts. b) List the outcasts in Ethiopian society, those who are often not accepted as respectable people by the majority of individuals. c) Contrast how these outcasts are treated by Christians as compared to nonbelievers. How is it similar? How is it different? d) Discuss ways that Christians can improve in their attitude towards outcasts to be more like Jesus.

2. a) Why did Jesus tell the paralyzed man that he was forgiven before he healed him? b) Why is salvation the most important miracle God performs for people? c) Discuss whether or not there is an overemphasis upon physical healing and not spiritual healing in many churches. d) List things church elders can do to bring a proper balance in the church so that believers primarily focus upon spiritual healing.

3. a) Why do you think Jesus chose Matthew to be one of his 12 disciples? What made this choice unusual? b) List people in Ethiopian society who are viewed similar to how the Jews viewed tax collectors and sinners. c) Describe how Christians often view some people in the same way the Pharisees viewed tax collectors and sinners. d) What was the cost Matthew had to pay in order to become a follower of Jesus? e) Discuss some of the costs to following Jesus believers in Ethiopia need to pay today. f) Discuss whether or not most believers today understand these costs and are willing to pay the price.

4. a) Why did the Pharisees get angry at Jesus when he did not fast? b) Describe why Jesus didn't fast. c) What was the purpose of the Jews when they fasted? d) What should be the purpose of Christians when they fast? e) Discuss why believers today fast and how they need to change their understanding or practices to be more in line with Jesus' teaching.

5. a) Describe the ways that Jesus went against Jewish laws and cultural expectations. b) Discuss ways that Christians sometimes put church regulations or man-made rules above God's desires of mercy. c) What can we learn about Jesus' teaching on the Sabbath to what he desires of Christians on Sunday?

LESSON TEN

FIRST DAY

Silewondim was a recent graduate from a prominent theological college. Through his studies he had gained many useful ideas which would help his church. "I want to bring great change in my church," he thought. "I will organize conferences where thousands of people can come and I will teach them. By teaching the masses, I can bring the greatest change to the church," he decided.

Q. 1. a) Describe how church leaders often focus upon conferences believing that they will bring the most effective change in their churches. b) Think about the impact conferences have made in your church. Do you think the conferences brought lasting change or just temporary excitement but little change? Explain your answer.

Most of us think that the more people we can teach at one time, the more effective we will be. Isn't it more efficient to teach thousands once than just a few people several times? Many teachers evaluate their effectiveness by how many people they teach. But teaching many people lots of facts rarely brings lasting change to their lives or to the church.

Jesus chose a very different approach. "I want to reach the world with the Gospel. I want people all around the world from every tribe and nation to become my followers." Jesus thought. So Jesus chose 12 men and spent three years carefully teaching them. Then these 12 men were able to teach others who would teach others until within one generation, most of the known world had churches filled with people who were willing to die for their faith in Jesus. The secret to Jesus' ministry was to choose the right people, train them well, and then release them to minister. This process of training a few who will also train others is seen in 2 Tim. 2:2 where Paul, about to die for his faith, tells Timothy one of the secrets to his success. Paul said he had trained Timothy. For over 15 years they had worked together and Paul mentored Timothy in how to be an effective minister. Paul now tells Timothy to carefully choose men who were faithful to Jesus and who could in turn train others. Timothy was to train them, they would train others, and Paul's church planting ministry would continue.

Q. 2. Read Luke 6:12-16. a) Where did Jesus spend the night? What was he doing? b) Why do you think Jesus chose out 12 from out of all his followers?

JESUS CHOOSES THE TWELVE APOSTLES (Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 6:12-16)

Many scholars think that more than a year had passed since Jesus was baptized and began his public ministry. It was now 28 AD. In Judea, but mainly in Galilee, Jesus had taught people and worked many miracles. He was well-known to the Jews and thousands were following him. Most in the crowd were following Jesus to watch him do great miracles and entertain them. Others were attracted to his powerful teaching as he warned them to repent and get ready for the kingdom of God. But there was a significant number who had committed themselves to become his disciples. We read later that Jesus sent out 70 disciples to teach- so Jesus had at least 70 disciples following him constantly. (Lk. 10:1)

At the height of his popularity, Jesus changed his strategy. Rather than focus upon the crowds, Jesus chose a select few whom he could train more deeply and then invest them with authority and power to work on his behalf. Jesus did not hurry his selection. Instead, Jesus went up a mountain so that he could be alone with God in prayer. And we are told that Jesus prayed all night. No where else in the New Testament do we read that Jesus spent the whole night in prayer, so this shows us that this was a major concern for Jesus. What was he praying about? Clearly, he was asking God the Father to reveal to him whom he should choose to be his special apostles. A church is only as strong as the quality of its leaders, so Jesus wanted to be sure that he chose those who could carry on his ministry after he went back to heaven. It is interesting how in the New Testament we are told that the major times when people fasted was when they chose leaders. The church in Antioch fasted and prayed before Paul and Barnabas were chosen to be their first missionaries. (Acts 13:2) And when Paul and Barnabas appointed the first leaders for the new churches, they too fasted and prayed first. (Acts 14:23)

Q. 3. a) Describe how leaders in your church are chosen. Do you think choosing leaders today is taken seriously? b) On what basis do most people use to choose their leaders?

Does your church spend concentrated time asking God to reveal his choice of leaders? Usually not. Could it be that one of the major reasons we struggle in our churches today is that we do not take leadership selection seriously? Do we declare a time of fasting and prayer? Not usually. And rather than honestly asking God to reveal his choice, we pick those we like; those from our tribe, or someone who is educated or has a good reputation with the government or is popular with people. And then we wonder why we are disappointed by many of our leaders!

When Jesus came down from the mountain after a night of prayer, he immediately chose 12 men to be his "apostles." Why did Jesus choose the twelve apostles?

1. Jesus was starting a new people of God, who would become his church. Just like God had started the nation of Israel by using the 12 sons of Jacob, so now Jesus was starting a new people of God by choosing 12 men. In Revelation 21:12-14 we are told that in the eternal Jerusalem, not only are the Old Testament people of God represented by the 12 tribes whose names are written on the gates of the city. But the 12 apostles names would be written on the foundations of the city. This symbolizes that both the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God will be found in heaven.

2. Jesus wanted to have a few people close to him whom he could carefully train to become the leaders of his church. These leaders had to be well trained for Jesus' ministry to continue after he returned to heaven. The quality of leaders determines the spiritual maturity and the success of the church.

3. These 12 men were to be "apostles." The 12 men were changing their status from "disciples" to "apostles." A disciple is someone who follows another person and seeks to resemble him. The word "apostle" means someone sent with the authority of another person. The Greeks used this word to refer to delegates they sent to Rome to represent them before the emperor. Or the emperor used this word for ambassadors sent with a specific mission and message to one of the provinces. The word always included the idea of being sent with the authority to speak and work with the authority of the sender; a person responsible to work on behalf of the one who sends him.

In the New Testament the word "apostle" is used in three ways.

First, the New Testament teaches that all followers of Jesus are "sent ones." (Jn. 20:21) Jesus has sent us into the world with the message of salvation and to minister on his behalf.

Second, there was a general meaning. Key men who seem to have worked under the authority of the church leaders were called apostles. Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7) were called apostles when they were the formal representatives of the church.

Third, there was a select group of 12 men who were given a special role in the church. Just like God the Father had "sent" Jesus to the earth to act on his behalf and with his authority, now Jesus chose 12 men to act on his behalf with his authority. They had to have started to follow Jesus shortly after he was baptized and had to have witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. (Acts 1:21-22) And they had to have been chosen specifically by Jesus. By calling these 12 his apostles, Jesus was establishing his formal delegates. In the New Testament these 12 were often called "the Twelve." When he returned to heaven, they would be the ones who would pass on the authentic message of salvation. They would have the authority to determine what was truth and error, and be the official guardians of the truth which Jesus taught. They alone had the authority to define who Jesus was as the God-man. And they were the authorized representatives of Jesus to the church. That is why when there was a question whether or not the Gentiles had to be circumcised, the matter was taken to the apostles in Jerusalem for a decision. (Acts 15) Although there might be people today who perform an apostolic type role in the church similar to Barnabas, the church teaches that the role of the 12 Apostles is unique. Once the 12 apostles died, this authoritative apostleship ended. For instance, when James was martyred, the early church never sought to replace James with another apostle. Today, all church leaders should turn to the written teachings of the New Testament as their authoritative definition of what is truth and what isn't. We must never allow people who claim to be "apostles" to have the powerful authority that these 12 original apostles had.

It is helpful to learn from the types of people Jesus chose to be his followers. As we look at the list of men who were chosen to be apostles there are four types of people missing whom we usually think must be present in church leaders today. First, there were no trained "theologians." Not one of these 12 was chosen from among those the Jews would have considered the trained people in understanding the Old Testament. (Paul would later fulfill this role.) Second, there were none who were rich. It would have been easy to choose a rich person who could then finance his ministry- but Jesus did not think this way. Matthew would have been the closest person to being rich, but most likely Jesus made him leave his riches behind and become poor before he could follow Jesus. Third, there were none who had political connections. We often look for people who can work in the government for our benefit, but Jesus did not think that way either. Fourth, Jesus only chose one person, Judas Iscariot, from the more respectable part of the country, Judea. The rest came from Galilee, a part of the country that people from Judea viewed as being backward.

Q. 4. a) Describe how we often choose people for church leadership from these four categories of people today. b) Why do you think Jesus did not focus upon these four criteria? c) Read 1 Cor. 1:26-29. What does Paul say about those whom God usually chooses as his disciples? d) Explain how have you seen this truth in your church.

One of the amazing things about the kingdom Jesus started is that Jesus knowingly chose those the world considers as unimportant and unable to do anything great. As Paul said, not many were considered "wise" in the eyes of the world. In the same way, Jesus chose those to lead his church whom most people would have thought unqualified. They were not among the educated or rich or famous. The mystery of the

kingdom is that God places his gospel in jars of clay. (2 Cor. 4:7) In this way, all know that the growth of the church is dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit. The history of the church in Ethiopia is a clear example of this fact. As the Gospel entered places like Wolaitta, it was the farmers with little education who took the Gospel throughout southern Ethiopia despite much persecution. This should be a strong warning to us today not to use the standards of the world as the basis of our choosing leaders. Jesus' example reveals that God still uses those people who are little respected by the world to do his great work. One scholar says that Jesus was teaching us "Give me 12 ordinary men who are totally committed to me and I will change the world." Today, Jesus is still looking for people who are totally surrendered to him. He still wants to change our world today. Will you be one of them?

Following is a list of the 12 men whom Jesus chose:

1. Simon whose name Jesus changed to Peter: By trade, Peter was a fisherman, which was a respectable business and brought a good income. But he left it all to follow Jesus. Peter is always listed first in all lists of the 12 apostles. This is because he was the most famous, the one God choose to play a major role in the formation of the church. He was the leader of the 12 disciples. He was also one of the three, together with James and John, who were the key men whom Jesus would take with him for special training and ministry. It was Peter who preached the first sermon which brought 3000 people to faith in Jesus. And Peter introduced first the Samaritans and then the Gentiles into the church. Church history teaches that a little over 30 years after Jesus called him, Peter was in Rome. He was taken prisoner by the Roman emperor, Nero, condemned to death by crucifixion, and at his request was crucified upside down because he did not feel worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus had.

2. Andrew, the brother of Peter. Andrew is listed second because he was the brother of Simon Peter. He too was a fisherman and he started to follow Jesus at the same time as Peter. The New Testament gives us little information about what Andrew did in the early church. Some church history books claim that Andrew was responsible for taking the Gospel into southern Russia. Later, he was crucified on a cross in northern Greece, preaching from the cross until he died.

3. James, the son of Zebedee: Sometimes he is called "James the Great" to distinguish him from another James who was one of the disciples. James was also a fisherman and worked in partnership with Peter, Andrew, and his brother John. But he left what was a good living to follow Jesus. Together with his brother John, he was nicknamed "son of Thunder" to show his tendency to get angry or perhaps his great zeal. He too was one of the closest friends of Jesus. James was the first of the disciples to die for his faith. Just 10 years after the resurrection of Jesus, in 44 AD, Herod Agrippa I had him executed by cutting off his head with a sword.

4. John, the son of Zebedee: John was probably the youngest apostle chosen by Jesus. He was working with his brother James as a fisherman when Jesus called him. He too was known as "son of Thunder" to reveal his strong nature. With James, John wanted a town in Samaria to be punished by God for their treatment of Jesus. (Lk. 9:54-56) John had a special relationship with Jesus and in the Gospel of John calls himself "the disciple Jesus loved." (Jn. 13:23) Sometime around 70 AD, John moved to Asia Minor and ministered in the region from the church of Ephesus. He was captured by Emperor Domitian and exiled to the prison island of Patmos where he wrote Revelation. He was later released and most likely died of old age.

5. Philip: Philip was from the Galilean town of Bethsaida which was also where Peter and Andrew were from. So they probably knew each other. He had a Greek name indicating that his parents were in favor of adapting to the Greek culture. Later, Greeks chose him to introduce them to Jesus. (Jn. 12:20) Like Peter, Andrew, James and John, he was a follower of John the Baptist before he began to follow Jesus. Church history indicates that Philip later took the Gospel to Phrygia (in modern Turkey) and was killed in Turkey.

6. Bartholomew: There is little information in the New Testament about Bartholomew. Many scholars think Bartholomew was also called Nathaniel. One church tradition is that he took the Gospel east into India, and was whipped so severely that he died.

7. Matthew: Matthew was a tax collector by trade. This meant that to the ordinary Jew, and especially the religious Jews, Matthew was part of a despised and hated group of people. However, out of all of the disciples, Matthew had the most lucrative job. And yet when Jesus called him, he turned his back on all of his wealth and accepted a life of poverty with Jesus. God would later use his training in writing and keeping records to be the author of the Gospel of Matthew. One church tradition is that Matthew took the Gospel to the regions south of Egypt, known in ancient times as Cush or Ethiopia. He died there by the sword.

8. Thomas, also called Didymus: Both Thomas (Hebrew) and Didymus (Greek) mean "twin" so Thomas was probably a twin. We know little about Thomas in the New Testament. He is most famous for refusing to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, demanding that he had to touch Jesus' wounds before believing. (Jn. 20:25) One church legend is that Thomas took the Gospel to India. It is believed that Thomas was killed by being speared to death.

9. James, the son of Alphaeus: Sometimes he is called James the Lesser to distinguish him from James, the brother of John. We don't know where he worked or how he died.

10. Simeon the Zealot: The Greek word "zealot" could have two meanings. Some think it is simply a title given to Simeon to show that he was zealous in his practice of Judaism. Others think that Simeon was called Zealot because he was like those Jews who were strongly opposed to Roman rule. Later, from 66-70 AD, a group of Jews who started active resistance against the Romans were called the Zealots. But this group probably had not formed yet when Jesus called Simon. We do not know where he worked or how he died.

11. Judas, son of James: He was also called Thaddeus. We do not know how he died.

12. Judas Iscariot: Whereas all of the other apostles came from Galilee, it seems that Judas was from Judea in the south. The name "Iscariot" probably means that he was from the town of Kerioth which was south of Jerusalem. (Note: Some scholars think that the word "Iscariot" is related to a Hebrew word meaning "traitor" or "false one." This could mean that Matthew was saying "Judas the traitor.") Jesus chose Judas knowing that one day he would betray him. But for the rest of the two years before Jesus was crucified, he treated Judas just the same as all of the other disciples. It is doubtful that Judas showed any external sign that he was not truly committed to following Christ. In fact, Judas was so respected that he was given the responsibility to be treasurer of the money that was given to support Jesus. Judas showed that he was not really a changed person by stealing from this money. (Jn. 12:6) In fact, every time he is mentioned in the Gospels, it relates to money. He even complained that the woman who anointed Jesus

with perfume should have given the bottle to be sold- no doubt hoping he could get some of that money. Judas is a good example of someone who claims to be a follower of Jesus, but never changes in his heart. Often such people look like Christians and act like Christians. But it is only when a crisis, like persecution, comes that they show through their actions that their faith was never real.

Q. 5. a) Why do you think Jesus knowingly chose someone who would one day deny him and cause his death? b) What can we learn about how to treat those who renounce their faith from the way that Jesus accepted Judas?

(Note: We will study the Sermon on the Mount in depth because it shows us how to follow Jesus.)

INTRODUCTION TO JESUS' TEACHING DISCIPLES HOW TO LIVE AS HIS FOLLOWERS

Having chosen 12 men whom he could train more deeply to prepare them to lead his church, Jesus began to teach his disciples how they should live as his followers. Jesus knew that the on-going success of the church would depend upon his followers not just pretending to following him for some blessing they might receive, or follow him just because their parents were Christians. Rather, true Christianity requires people who have a clear idea of what it means to become a follower of Christ and how they should live as followers of Jesus. Those choosing to become disciples of Jesus must then make a firm choice to believe on Jesus and submit themselves totally to obey him. Matthew 5-7 consist of the major teachings Jesus gave to his disciples outlining how those who follow him are to live. Although this teaching was mainly given shortly after he chose his apostles, many scholars think that Matthew also included other teachings which Jesus taught during the next two years before he died. Matthew's Gospel was not written chronologically, but topically. Matthew arranged all of Jesus' teaching into five major sermons, perhaps to teach the Jews that Jesus was the new Moses, and he was giving new a new "law" which defined life for the new people of God.

Throughout history, Christians have wondered how this sermon applies to Christians today. Following are some ways this important sermon has been understood:

1. Jesus was giving impossible commands with no expectation that people would obey them. Rather, Jesus wanted to illustrate to people how impossible it is to work to become his follower. Rather, they must come to him seeking his grace and mercy. Jesus was showing people that salvation is always a free gift, never something humans can work for.

2. Jesus was describing how people would live when he comes to rule on the earth in his millennial kingdom. Only then would people be so changed that they will fully obey God from their hearts rather than live in partial obedience as is true now.

3. Jesus taught his disciples how to live as his followers. When they repented and submitted to his rule over their lives, they would change in their hearts. Jesus was giving his followers examples of what a truly pure life is like. People change in their character becoming poor in spirit and meek. And they work on the source of sins from their hearts, removing things like lust and hatred. And they treat others differently, accepting even their enemies in love. Jesus knew that no one will ever totally obey these teachings. But throughout their lives, with the help of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' followers will seek to grow in spiritual purity

in the way Jesus describes in this sermon. This is the best way to understand Jesus' teachings on the Sermon on the Mountain.

Q. 6. Read Mt. 5:1-2. Whom did Jesus focus his teaching upon?

Jesus was at the peak of his popularity, and every day there were crowds around him listening to his sermons and watching his miracles. In order to get to a place where he could teach, Jesus climbed a hill probably somewhere close to Capernaum. Since he gave this sermon on a mountain, this sermon is often called "the Sermon on the Mountain." He gathered around him two types of disciples. There were the ordinary disciples like the seventy-two whom he would later send out as his messengers. (Lk. 10:1) But probably sitting very close to him were the 12 Apostles. From a distance, the people no doubt listened in to what Jesus was teaching. It is important to remember that this sermon is not being given to those who want to become followers of Jesus in the future. It does not express pre-conditions to becoming a follower of Jesus. Rather, this sermon was given to those who had already made the choice to follow Jesus as his disciples. Jesus is telling those who chose to follow him what life in his kingdom will be like. As we study the truths that Jesus teaches, we will be amazed how different it is to what the world teaches about success and blessing.

Jewish rabbis taught many things as they were walking. However, when they had a very important truth which they wanted to teach, Jewish teachers would sit down. Jesus wanted his disciples to clearly understand him so he sat down. Although he spoke loud enough for the crowd to hear, Jesus' teaching was directed to his disciples. "How are we to live as followers of Jesus? Are we to be like the Pharisees- seeking to earn God's favor by keeping laws? And what is our reward going to be? Will we become rich and famous?" was no doubt on their minds. In Rom. 12:2 Paul tells us that all spiritual growth starts with a change in the way that we think, so Jesus taught his followers that to follow him will be radically different from anything they had ever heard or been taught by their previous religious leaders. He started his teaching by listing eight characteristics which bring true blessings in his kingdom.

Before we study each of the beatitudes, it is helpful for us to summarize what Jesus was trying to teach his followers.

1. We must recognize that Jesus' teaching is very different from what we were taught growing up. The world teaches that those who are strong and powerful and rich like the Romans or the US are blessed. That is why people from around the world look for an opportunity to move to one of the more wealthy nations. The world teaches that those who are highly educated, those who have land and a good house- they are the ones who are happy. But Jesus taught that those who are humble, poor in spirit, meek, and persecuted- they are the ones who are truly blessed.

2. Jesus wanted to teach his followers what true success is like in his kingdom. It is opposite to the type of success which the world offers. The world honors those who have the power and authority to get their own way. Or the rich, the educated, and those in political power are able to manipulate situations so that they succeed- often by taking advantage of the poor. But Jesus says that God looks at the world differently. God honors those who humbly depend upon him for all things in life, those who are meek and do not manipulate things to get their selfish desires met, or those who try to make peace with others rather than competing with others for special privileges and benefits.

Whereas the world teaches the importance for a person to become educated, rich, and powerful, Jesus actually teaches that these people are disadvantaged when it comes to his eternal kingdom. God desires both the rich and the poor to come into his kingdom. He never plays favorites. (Lev. 19:15) However, riches and worldly power usually cause a person to have attitudes that keeps them out of God's kingdom. And the poor often have attitudes that help them understand and live in God's kingdom in a way that God honors. Someone has said that the poor have the following advantages over the rich when it comes to life in Jesus' kingdom:

The poor often know they have an urgent need for God's help, especially God's salvation. They know that they have to depend upon God for all of their needs otherwise they would not live. So rather than depend upon money or power, they turn to God. The rich, however, tend to depend upon themselves, thinking they are good enough and can solve their own problems.

The poor usually have an easier time understanding the Gospel than the rich. The poor know that life is a "gift" from God. They don't earn it or deserve it. They know that if God does something for them, it is because of his grace and mercy. The rich, however, tend to think that salvation is something they "earn" because they are special. God refuses to accept such people who think that they are doing God a favor by believing. He demands that all people come to him knowing that they are sinners who deserve punishment and not forgiveness. It is difficult for the rich and powerful to humble themselves this way.

The poor often have an easier time to choose to totally follow Jesus no matter what the cost. They more willingly accept the way of the cross and the persecution often associated with those who follow Jesus. The rich, however, might want to believe on Jesus, but they only want to follow Jesus when it is convenient.

The poor usually know the value of focusing on people and not upon wealth. They focus upon relationships with others, knowing that if they have a problem, people will come and help them. They have learned to live in community and help each other. So the poor believers tend to have a much closer community than the rich who depend upon their wealth rather than God or others. Poor people tend to put a high value on helping each other rather than competing with each other. God wants his people to work together as a family. However, those deemed rich and educated often look at life as a place of competition, so they do things to get ahead of their neighbors.

The poor usually don't have a tendency to get proud or think that they are better than others. It is easier for them to be humble. God says he will lower the proud, like many rich and educated, who think they are more important than the common person. (1 Pet. 5:6; James 4:6)

The poor often know how to persevere through trials. They trust God to help get them through. And they realize the benefits of those trials in developing their character. The rich, however, do all they can to escape trials, trusting in their money or their political friends and not God.

3. Jesus wants to assure his followers that one day things will be very different. Often the followers of Jesus are poor. They are mocked by people in their community and persecuted. But life will not always be like that. One day when Jesus' eternal kingdom starts, things will be totally different. Those who are poor in spirit, meek at heart, and persecuted by others because they are Jesus' followers will be the ones who

are truly blessed. And those who refuse to believe, even if they have the power, are rich, and are among those persecuting believers, will be punished.

Jesus is warning his followers not to be attracted to the things the world says brings happiness. These things might seem important now, but they will not be important in his eternal kingdom. Heaven will be far better than anything imagined. Only there can his followers expect true justice, when the proud are humbled and the humbled lifted up, and evil will be overcome. Jesus is saying that no matter how things might appear now, it will not go on forever. God's eternal kingdom with all of its blessing will come. In comparison, the temporary blessings of the world seem like nothing. (See 2 Cor. 4:17-18) So followers of Jesus should not get discouraged when life now does not seem fair and they are suffering, but faithfully wait for the blessing that will one day be ours.

4. Although Jesus focused the blessings upon what his followers would receive in full only once his eternal kingdom starts, deep within people is something that honors those who are like Jesus described as the "blessed." Few of us deeply respect those who are rich and famous. Part of us might long to be like them, but we do not respect them. But we respect those who, despite their poverty, have the type of character Jesus described. The world honors Mother Theresa who gave up a comfortable ministry to live with the most poor people in India and help them. Even the presidents of wealthy nations honored her. And amazingly, those who have these character are the happiest in their hearts. Few of the rich and famous are truly happy. But those who are poor and have developed a life of close relationship with God and service for others have a type of joy nothing in the world can give them. By "losing their lives" they have found lives of true blessing.

Q. 7. a) Review the list of ways that the poor have an easier time understanding and living according to the Gospel. What other things could you add which show how the poor have an advantage to the rich in experiencing how to follow Jesus? b) If the above list is true, why do many Christians still feel becoming rich and famous is the ideal, a sign of God's blessing? c) Describe how you have seen those who are rich struggling to be truly happy and those who are poor able to find true happiness.

SECOND DAY

Q. 8. Read Mt. 5:1-12. a) List each character that brings blessing and describe explain how a person with this characteristic would act. b) List each reward and explain what you think it will be.

THE EIGHT BEATITUDES (Mt. 5:1-12, Lk. 6:17-26)

The Jews would have expected Jesus to proclaim something like, "Come to me you who are poor and I will make you rich. Come to me you who are persecuted- I will destroy your enemies." For the Jews, riches were a sign of God's blessing and poverty was a sign of God's curse. And the Messiah was the one who would destroy their enemies. Unfortunately, many of us Christians still think this is what Jesus promises us today. But Jesus gave no hint of any of the external blessings which people assume comes with following him. Instead he said almost the opposite. Most of those who were following Jesus were from the poor class of people. They were under the control of Gentiles or rich landlords and politicians who often made life difficult for them. Imagine their surprise when Jesus claimed "You are blessed when you are poor, especially poor in your heart. You are blessed when you don't resist those who oppress you or hate them." When Jesus called his disciples, he never promised them anything in this world but a unique type

of joy and peace in spite of persecution (Jn.;) and persecution. (Jn. 14:27, 15:11, 15:18-19; 16:33) The rewards which he promised them focused upon blessings after death, which they would receive when they got to heaven.

Q. 9. a) Contrast what Jesus said to how many preachers present the Gospel to new believers or make promises to church members. b) What difference do you think it would make in peoples' following Jesus if we told them before they believed that to follow Jesus would bring them increased difficulty and perhaps no added physical blessing?

Jesus starts his teaching by describing "characteristics" which he wants his followers to have. Although we tend to focus upon externals like giving up alcoholic drink or not committing adultery, Jesus focused his attention upon the character of believers. Paul would later describe how the Holy Spirit would produce in the hearts of believers "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Gal. 5:22-23) Jesus wants to remind those of us who follow Jesus today to focus upon our character, not just our external actions. One of Satan's major tools is to get us to focus upon certain external actions thinking that is what is important rather than looking into our hearts to see whether or not we are pure.

The Greek word "blessing" means to be happy or fortunate. It was often used of gods who had no concerns and could do whatever they wanted. But Jews realized that true blessing depended upon following God's desires for their lives. (See Ps. 1:1-2) The Pharisees taught that being blessed meant keeping the rituals of the Old Testament Law and the traditions of the fathers. And they assumed that the reward for such a life was primarily seen in external blessings like wealth. Jesus is telling his disciples "If you want a life that is truly blessed, a life of deep inner joy, it starts with a change of character." This blessing Jesus promises us does not depend upon pleasant circumstances. Rather, it is a deep inner joy and feeling of being blessed by God even when things are not going well.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit (Mt. 5:3)

Jesus, his disciples, and most of those listening to Jesus teach were classified as the poor. Like many today, the Jews saw being poor as a curse. They thought God's blessing was shown in material blessings. They often looked with longing to those who had a lot of money, a good house, and the ease of not having to be concerned about what to eat or where they would get money for their clothes. The world teaches "blessed are the rich for they have all of their needs met." But Jesus said just the opposite- "those who are poor are the happiest." Suppose someone preached in your church- "those of you who live on the streets with no house, those of you who don't know where you will get something to eat- you are the ones who are truly blessed." Imagine the shock and disbelief. No doubt that is how people would have reacted to Jesus. But the disciples would have been encouraged, because many of them like Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew had chosen the path of poverty to become Jesus' disciples.

There are two words for poor in the Greek language. One word means to have a few material blessings and just enough to live from day to day. The other word means to be extremely poor so a person's condition is desperate and all one could do was ask people for help. It is this second word that is used here. Notice that Jesus did not just say "blessed are the poor" but "blessed are the poor in spirit." Jesus is not focusing so much upon economic poverty, but a certain attitude in our hearts. Usually it is the poor who learn this attitude easiest.

Some Jews recognized that God's favor was not just focused upon those who were economically poor, but those who were dependent upon God during times of trouble. Even King David classified himself among the "poor." (Ps. 40:17; 86:1) The Jews realized that the economically poor and the people God really honored had a trait that was similar. Both were totally dependent upon God to meet their needs.

So Jesus was teaching his followers that if we really want to be joyful, we must develop an attitude where we realize we are totally dependent upon God for all things. In our hearts, we focus upon God and his daily strength. We know that in us is no good thing. We can't earn our salvation. We can't even survive without God. David expressed this attitude in Ps. 123:1-2 *"I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven. As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy."*

Jesus said that the reward for those who have this attitude is *"theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Notice he did not say "one day you will get the kingdom of heaven." Rather, he tells them that the kingdom of heaven is already theirs. (Note: Matthew uses the Jewish phrase "kingdom of heaven" but the other Gospels use the phrase more understandable to Gentiles, "kingdom of God." They mean the same thing.) For us, the word "kingdom" usually refers to a nation over which a king rules. But the Jews used the word to refer to the reign of the king. So anytime God is reigning, that is his kingdom. His kingdom is in heaven- for God is reigning there. And one day Jesus will return to reign without any opposition over the world. But the Gospels say that the reign of Jesus has already begun. Jesus would later say that the kingdom was "among" them or "in" them. (Lk. 17:21)

What Jesus meant when he told the disciples the kingdom of God was for the poor in spirit was that anyone seeking to be a follower of Jesus must come to Jesus with an awareness of their spiritual need for salvation which only Jesus will meet. And they submit to the rule of the king over their lives. When they do this, they will have a life that is filled with joy. And the person has joined the community of followers where Jesus is king. Those who are spiritually "poor" and dependent upon God for his work in their lives will receive all of the blessings God wants to give them. The blessed life of deep satisfaction of being part of God's eternal kingdom is not for those who are rich, or those who belong to a certain tribe, or those who have military or political power. Rather it is to those who know that they are "poor in spirit." As we will see in the life of Jesus, the "rich" like the Pharisees or the religious and political leaders did not come to Jesus for salvation. Rather it was the despised people; the poor, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, and the lepers who came to Jesus for the salvation which he offered. They brought nothing to God. All they could do is cry out for his mercy- and so they received the kingdom Jesus offered to them. But the rich missed the blessings God offered.

Q. 10. a) Do you think most people come to Jesus with this attitude of being "poor in spirit" when they want to believe? Explain your answer. b) How would you change what is being said to new believers if you were to express this truth to them?

2. Blessed are those who mourn (Mt. 5:4)

The Greek word used for mourning here refers to the deep sorrow one feels when someone they love dies. Jesus said that those who are truly happy, will have a similar deep sense of sorrow. But what were these blessed people to be mourning over? Jesus is talking about spiritual character, not just sorrow. There are probably three levels of meanings here.

Primarily, Jesus is referring to those who have deep sorrow over their personal sins, both those before they became a believer and the ones after they start to follow Jesus. Jesus had previously told them to enter God's kingdom they must "repent," and the first part of repentance is a sorrow over sinfulness. How many of us are like this today. We tend to approach our sinfulness with the attitude "Everyone sins, so what is wrong?" But Jesus said that true blessedness is for those who realize how much Jesus hates sin. After all, it is our sin which caused Jesus to die on the cross. Every time we sin, our hearts should mourn over how we have hurt Jesus.

Second, Jesus is probably also referring to the deep sorrow we should feel when people in the church sin. Whenever we see any unrepentant sin among God's people, we are supposed to be deeply sorrowful.

Third, Jesus no doubt also included the need for his followers to have a deep sorrow over the sinfulness and suffering in the world. Jesus does not expect us to shrug our shoulders when we see injustices in the earth. He expects us to have great sorrow about them.

What is the reward that Jesus promises to those who mourn this way? He says "*they will be comforted.*" Do we cry over our persistent sinfulness? Then Jesus says we will be comforted as we receive his full forgiveness. But we will also be comforted as we begin to see our lives change so that we sin less. It is doubtful that any believer will ever grow in holiness until he is first aware of the many ways he sins and is sorry for his rebellious actions. This then helps him turn to God to plead for the strength to change. And he makes choices which help him change. And when we are sorrowful over the sins in the church, God uses us to help people become aware of their sinfulness and change. Even when we see the sins of the world and their fruit, we become involved seeking to change the situation. For example, slavery caused Christians in politics to determine to undo this evil. Medical needs on the battle field challenged Christians to get involved and some people started the Red Cross. Some Christians began to help those who were in bondage to drink or who suffer with HIV/AIDS. Sorrow leads to getting involved so that things change. Those God has called into politics must know that God is putting them there to help undo injustices. They are not there to support the party. And churches who sorrow like this look at ways they can impact their societies around them by undoing injustices.

Q. 11. a) Is your life characterized by mourning over sin? If not, what attitude does this reveal you have towards the sin in your life? What does it show about your indifference to the sin in the church or in society? b) Describe ways that a follower of Jesus could turn his mourning over sin and injustice into a tool to bring change in the church or in society.

3. Blessed are the meek (Mt. 5:5)

The world does not consider the character trait of meekness very highly since it seems to mean that we allow others to abuse us and we do nothing. But Jesus says that his followers are to highly value meekness. The word "meek" is very difficult to understand. First, it can refer to someone who gets angry at the right things, like the abuse of others. But he never gets angry because of selfish reasons. Second, the word meek refers to bringing something under control. So a powerful horse which had been tamed so that it obeys the rider with just a touch of the bridle was called meek. A meek person is one who is under control of himself- he controls his passions so not to fall into sin, his time so he does not waste it, or his temper so he does not get angry. Or more accurately, he is under the control of the Holy Spirit so he does not allow circumstances or the views of others to control him. Third, the word meek refers to those who are humble and teachable. They have no pride in their riches or education or tribe. They do not feel like

they have to push themselves forward to get something or demand the respect of others. They are happy with all that God does for them and they trust him to give them what he wants to give them. One scholar put it this way "O the bliss of the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time, who has every instinct, and impulse, and passion under control because he himself is God-controlled, who has the humility to realize his own ignorance and his own weakness." It is interesting that when Jesus gave a description of his own character, this is the character which he said he was. (Mt. 11:29) This shows how Jesus highly valued this character.

What is the reward this person can expect? Jesus said that he would "*inherit the earth*." Often those who have learned self-control like this and walk with humility become highly respected and receive positions of authority. But Jesus was primarily talking about the future. On earth the followers of Jesus will often find themselves being controlled by others. They will have people who abuse them. Many listening to Jesus had no land since it had been taken over by the rich, powerful land owners. They were forced to work as day laborers for these rich land owners. But one day things would be greatly different. Jesus promises that when he comes to reign over the earth, those who follow him with meekness will be greatly rewarded. We will rule with him. (Rom. 20:6)

Q. 12. a) Examine your own life. Does the word "meek" describe you? Explain your answer. If not, what needs to change for you to become "meek?" b) Are most believers described by "meek?" If not, what needs to change in how people understand following Jesus so that this character is recognized as being important?

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Mt. 5:6)

Only the very poor truly understand the feelings of hunger and thirst. We might temporarily have feelings of hunger when we do not get to eat lunch when on a trip. Or we might feel a little thirst when we have worked in the hot sun and have nothing to drink. But those listening to Jesus really understood what it meant to hunger and thirst. Many of them knew that if they did not get work for that particular day, there would be nothing to eat at night. And they had worked under the hot sun where there was nothing to drink for water was often scarce. When a person doesn't eat for a few days or when a person goes without water for a few days, their whole being focuses upon getting something to eat or drink. Jesus challenged his followers that this is the type of deep feeling that we should have for "righteousness."

The word "righteous" can have three meanings in the New Testament. First, it refers to God declaring us "not guilty" when we repent and put our trust in Jesus. This is the righteousness Paul talks about in the book of Romans. Second, the word can mean "living our lives in alignment with the desires of God for our lives." It refers to those who live in obedience to what God has commanded in the Bible by not doing things God tells us not to do. And it refers to living in a way that God wants us to live. So we help the poor, or read God's Word, or pray to God. Third, the word can also mean "just." It can mean living in way that is fair to all people. So we do not abuse the poor, we pay workers a fair wage, and refuse to allow favoritism for our tribe over others.

Jesus is focusing upon the final two meanings of the word "righteous." Jesus taught that to have a life that is truly blessed in the eyes of God, his followers must long that they personally and the community of believers live their lives in total obedience to God's desires. We long to see God's standards established and obeyed in all parts of our lives. We obey the commands of God and do the "good deeds" that demonstrate we are allowing Jesus to rule in our lives. Followers of Jesus must also have a deep passion

that things be just. We help the poor and underprivileged (orphans, widows). We long that the church be a place where tribal identity or economics and educational levels make no difference, but all are treated with dignity and love. And as we live in society, we notice those whom society abuses and work to help them.

What is the reward Jesus promises to the righteous? *God will fill them*. We will see our lives change so that increasingly we will be characterized by righteousness and justice. And we will see our churches become more obedient to King Jesus, helping things to be just for all. We will also see changes in society as we work to right unjust situation. But ultimately we will be filled when King Jesus returns to start his eternal kingdom. In that kingdom, all we long for will be fulfilled. There will be no selfishness, tribalism, lack of love and respect for only some in society. Evil will not triumph- but righteousness will. So we wait patiently for Jesus to come.

Q. 13. a) Describe how you and your church "hungers and thirsts for righteousness." b) Describe things in you, your church, and your community that are not just. c) List things that you personally can do, and your church could do, to increase the amount of righteousness and justice there is in you community today.

5. Blessed are the merciful (Mt. 5:7)

The word "mercy" has two connotations in the Bible. First, it refers to forgiving those who have sinned against us. When we say God is merciful we usually refer to his forgiving our sins rather than punishing us like we deserve. Second, it refers to helping those who are in trouble and cannot help themselves, helping people while expecting nothing back in return. Most likely Jesus is talking about the character of helping those in need, who might be sick, or poor, or without work. So he graciously and generously gives to help them. One scholar says that the Hebrew word which Jesus used means to understand what the other person who is suffering feels, empathize with him, and seek to help him. So it is not indifferent helping, but helping because we feel in our own hearts the pain they are feeling.

What is the reward for those who show mercy? Jesus said that they in turn "*will receive mercy*." As we forgive people who hurt us, people will be open to forgiving us when we hurt them. When we are judgmental of others, they in turn become suspicious of us and judge us. But when we openly accept others even when they know that they have hurt us, people will be more willing to overlook the times when we hurt them. And when we are in a situation which brings us hurt, people will reach out to help us. But most importantly, God will show us mercy now and in eternity.

Q. 14. a) Are believers in your community known for being merciful in the two meanings of the word? Explain your answer. b) What are some things you need to do personally to increase in mercy towards others in your life?

6. Blessed are the pure in heart (Mt. 5:8)

The word "pure" in Greek means to be totally clean and unmixed with anything impure. It was used for dirty clothes that have been washed so well that no dirt is left. Or it was used of milk to which no water was added or wheat with no chaff. Jesus meant that his followers will experience the truly blessed life when they make sure the motives of their heart are totally pure, with no hidden selfish motives. God is not only concerned that we do the right things. He wants us to do things for the right motives. This is very hard for us to do. When we help someone, we often have mixed motives. Part of us wants to help the person,

but the other part of us wants to be honored for helping. Or when we preach, we want to proclaim God's truth, but another part of us wants people to honor us for what we say. Jesus was teaching his disciples to look deep into their hearts to dig out the wrong motives that are hidden there. We need to see the ways we tell small lies to get something. Or the way we despise those who are not educated or are poor. Or we look for ulterior motives of seeking honor from others when we pray before others in church or when we sing in the choir. We must work hard at getting rid of the selfish motives that are usually in our lives, seeking to be totally pure in our motives. We need to learn to desire only God's glory, not our own.

What is the reward to those who are pure in heart? Jesus said that we "*will see God.*" When we have a pure heart, our relationship with God is so close that it is as if we can see him. We will see his hand of blessing in our life. We will feel his presence in the midst of problems. And we will see God work in power in us and through us. But above all, there will come a day when we get to heaven that we will see God face to face. Gone will be the sin that we have struggled to overcome, the impurities we worked hard to purify. Now we will see Jesus whom we love with none of the hindrances to seeing God that face us now. And at that time, we will be happy that we gave Jesus our hearts and sought to keep those hearts pure for him.

Q. 15. a) List 5 things you do for God where your motives are often mixed when you do them. Describe what your conflicting motives are b) List things you can do so that your motives are pure.

6. Blessed are the peacemakers (Mt. 5:9)

Notice that Jesus did not say "blessed are those who live at peace with people." Rather he is saying that those who are blessed not only make sure they are living in a right relationship with others, but whenever they see relationships strained between people, they look for ways to heal the relationship problems so that peace returns. As followers of Jesus, we seek to bring peace in two directions.

First, we seek to bring peace between God and people by sharing with them the Gospel of how Jesus died for their sins so that they can be forgiven when they submit their lives to Jesus. People might not want to hear about Jesus; they might be happy in their existing life with their own religion. But we know that means that they and God are not relating to each other. So we do all we can to convince them that only in Jesus can they have their relationship with God restored. (Acts 4:12)

Second, we seek to bring peace between people. (Note: Some scholars think that Jesus was hinting here that the way of the Zealots who fought against Rome was not the way his followers were to take. Jesus never approved of any use of force to make people become Christians or follow Christian standards. We can only use the preaching of the Gospel to change peoples' minds so that they willingly change. The testimony of the church is almost always ruined when Christians join with politicians to force people to become Christians or follow a Biblical standard meant for followers of Jesus.)

The Hebrew word for "peace" refers not just to situations where people are fighting. Rather, peace is when a person is in the right relationship with God, enjoying all of the blessings God gives for their whole lives. Often when we struggle to relate to someone, we say "I will ignore them and they can ignore me." Or when we see two people or groups in the church fighting, we don't want to get involved so that the people do not get angry at us. So we let people live in a situation that is not the best for them. For them to have broken relationships with others means that they are not in the right relationship with God. Jesus said that his followers need to have the character of desiring the best possible relationship between people. They do not gossip about others. They do not just pray about the problem. They get involved. They do all they

can to get people right with God once again. And they also get people back into a harmonious relationship which helps each person or group to enjoy God's blessing once again in their lives.

It is important that we are not compromising God's standards when we make peace. So we do not say to the person who has stolen money "that is OK. What you did was not too bad." Rather, we know that true healing in relationships and blessing from God will only come when a person acknowledges his sin of stealing, confesses the sin to the one from whom it was stolen, and returns the money.

What is the reward for the peacemakers? They will be called "*sons of God*." The Jews used the expression "son of" to describe the character of someone. So the early church called Barnabas "the son of encouragement" to describe how he was an encourager. By being called "sons of God" Jesus was saying that those who seek to bring peaceful relationships have a "god-like" character. Just as Jesus came to bring peace between God and people and between people by dying on the cross (See Eph. 2:14-18), so also his followers are to be like Jesus in giving of themselves in order to bring peace. But could we not turn this around and say that whenever we allow ourselves or people in our church or between our denomination to fight, we are "Satan-like" in character? One of the saddest truths about our churches today is that we spend more time fighting each other than struggling against Satan. How can we expect people to listen to the Gospel if we are so busy fighting each other that we can't show people that Jesus is the Lord of peace?

Q. 16. a) Describe whether or not you and your church are known as "peacemakers." b) What are ways you could be better at this? c) If being a peacemaker is an evidence that we have "god-like" character, what does all of the struggles we face in relationships within our church and between denominations reveal about our characters?

8. Blessed are the persecuted (Mt. 5:10)

"You are very blessed when people spit on you, make fun of you, beat you, imprison you and even kill you" said Jesus. If we were to say this at church, people would think we were crazy. Of all of the statements that Jesus made, this must have startled the disciples the most. The Jews had been under the cruel domination of the Romans and other Gentile nations for centuries and knew what it meant to be persecuted. So who would classify such persecution as blessing? And not just a blessing- but something that they should rejoice about with great joy like they would at a wedding. Humanly, all of us want to escape from anything like persecution which brings us pain. But Jesus said that to be persecuted should be a reason for deep joy.

To those who had committed themselves to follow Jesus, Jesus warned them that following him would bring many different types of persecution. There would be insults, being made fun of, prejudiced against at work or school, imprisonment, and even death. There were different reasons why Christians were strongly persecuted in the early church, especially as it spread to Gentile nations. First, most jobs were related with idol worship. If you were a metal worker, you were obligated to honor the god of the metal workers. To become a Christian meant that you were expelled from the group since you would no longer worship with them. Second, maintaining social relationships would be difficult. Whenever the community got together for a wedding, funeral, or feast, when they slaughtered an animal, part of that animal was sacrificed to a god. It would be impossible for Christians who wanted to be faithful to Jesus to join in this type of celebration. And Jewish Christians would be expelled from the synagogue. Third, most families were controlled by the father who demanded honor and allegiance to his god. When a wife or a

son or daughter became a believer, they could no longer honor the father in this way. So they were often expelled from the house. So persecution was common to Christians just like it was common when the Gospel came into Ethiopia 75 years ago. If a church is firmly standing for Jesus, it will almost always face the resistance of the world. If a church is acceptable to society, it is usually a sign that something is wrong with the church. It has become like Laodicea. (Rev. 3:14-17)

It is important that we understand what Jesus said. We are blessed only if persecution comes because of our relationship to Jesus. There are different reasons we can face problems with others. First, we can be punished because we do something wrong. So if we are put in prison because we fight with our neighbors or do not pay our taxes, this type of punishment does not bring us anything other than the punishment that we deserve. We are insulting to the name of Jesus, not suffering because we are his followers. Second, we can be the recipients of the animosity of people by being obnoxious, not because we are followers of Jesus. So if our loud worship or worship late at the night is disruptive to our neighbors, or if we insult people of other religions, or if we refuse to show love and compassion to people in our community- any persecution we receive is the result of our own lack of consideration for others. Third, we can live holy and pure lives and be gracious to others, but still be insulted simply because we follow Jesus. When others take bribes but we refuse, if others skip work claiming to be sick but we refuse to copy them, if we witness to others but they don't like our gentle witness- this is the type of persecution which is "*because of righteousness*." It is only this type of persecution that Jesus says is honorable and brings us his blessings.

So why should we rejoice when we are being persecuted for righteousness sake? Jesus lists three reasons:

a. The kingdom of heaven is ours. For the second time Jesus said that those who love him so much that they accept persecution because they follow Jesus' path, they already have the kingdom of heaven. They are members of a special kingdom of God's people. The kingdoms of earth to which unbelievers belong will one day pass away. But those believers who are closely following Jesus and are persecuted just like Jesus was persecuted, they are already in the kingdom where Jesus reigns, and that kingdom will last long after the kingdoms of people who persecute us. Jesus is teaching his followers that what really matters in life is not what type of life they enjoy now- be it easy or difficult. Rather, we need to always remember the coming kingdom and make sure that we remain faithful to Jesus so that we are part of the future kingdom.

b. We are part of a special group of God's people from the past. Jesus said that throughout history, the majority of people persecute God's prophets. So when we face the insults, the lies, and the physical abuse for our faith, then we are like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Elijah. What a special group of people to be classified with! They are the "great heroes" of the faith- and we become one with them.

c. To graciously accept persecution brings us a great eternal reward. Jesus never tells us what the reward will be. But he tells us that if we do not run from persecution now, we will enjoy a reward from him which will last forever.

One of the amazing things about Jesus' teaching is how openly he told his disciples that to follow him was to walk the path of persecution. How different it is to how we witness to people today. "Believe on Jesus and he will heal you, give you work, and bless you with material blessings" we say. But Jesus said "Come follow me on the way of the cross and suffering." No wonder the disciples of Jesus were willing to

die for Jesus. Jesus did not hide this painful part of following Jesus from them. But as they walked the path of the cross, they were able to make a major impact on the whole Roman empire in one generation.

"Just hide your faith when persecution comes. Keep believing in your heart, but pretend to give up your faith rather than be hurt or die" is what some people are teaching today. What a lie of Satan! The New Testament tells us to remain faithful, even unto death. (Rev. 2:10) As the apostles were beaten and imprisoned, they rejoiced that they had the privilege to suffer for Jesus. (Acts 5:41) Paul warned the Christians that it is with much suffering that they can enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22) So are we willing to join the company of the great heroes of the faith- willingly and joyfully accepting persecution?

Q. 17. a) Describe how these teachings of Jesus are different from how we share with new believers today. b) Describe the difference in the type of followers which results from the two different ways of witnessing.

THIRD DAY

Q. 18. Read Lk. 6:24-26. a) List the different "woes" which Jesus gave. b) Describe why this would shock us today if it were read in church.

THE "WOES" OF THOSE WHO CHOOSE THE WRONG THINGS IN LIFE (Lk. 6:24-26)

Matthew only mentions the positive side of blessing of those who change their character. In the book of Luke we are told of the opposite side, the woes coming upon those who are cursed. Jesus uses the expression "woe" which was often used of extreme sorrow at a funeral. As we read these statements we must remember other statements from the whole Bible which provide balanced to what is said here. Jesus is not against a believer becoming wealthy. But Jesus knew the great danger wealth and all of its benefits brings to his followers. There are few believers who can be rich and still follow Jesus in the way he desires. Jesus used strong statements to "shock" the disciples to make sure they understood the dangers of the values of the world.

1. Woe to the rich (Luke 6:24)

Like Matthew, Luke is using the words "poor" and "rich" with symbolic meaning. Whereas the poor are those who cast themselves in dependence upon God's grace and mercy (a character most readily found among the economically poor), the "rich" are those who refuse to be dependent upon God. Rather they think their money will solve all of their problems. And often they become rich by taking advantage of others. The early church often experienced the truth that the "rich," those in power of the government, would be the greatest persecutors of the church. It is rare that the poor are the ones who start the persecution of the church.

Jesus said that the rich already have their reward. Their reward is the earthly comfort they enjoy from their power and riches. But one day they will die. At that time they will face the severe punishment of Jesus.

2. Woe to the well fed (Luke 6:25)

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are now, but especially in the future, fed with God's blessings. But there are those who are well-fed now, they will one day go hungry. Jesus is using symbolic speech. The "well-fed" are those who are enjoying the luxuries of life now. As a result they have no concern for being righteous and living in line with God's Word. They think they are living under the blessing of God

since they enjoy physical blessings. But there will come a day when they will be hungry. They will no longer have a life of enjoyment, but experience the punishment of eternal damnation.

3. Woe to those who laugh (Luke 6:25)

Those who mourn over their sinfulness are blessed. But those who laugh with indifference at spiritual things might seem like they can walk through life with total disregard for spiritual things and not pay a price. But death will come, and at that time as they faced the punishment of God and they will weep bitterly.

4. Woe to those who are spoken well of (Luke 6:26)

Previously Jesus had told his followers that they were blessed when persecuted because of their relationship to Jesus. But there are many whose primary desire in life is to be well liked by others. As a result they hide their faith in Jesus. Or they change what and how they preach so that people will enjoy them and praise them. When they do this, they have joined the group of the false prophets of old. The false prophets in Israel were known for saying "there is peace and blessing coming" rather than warning people of God's coming punishment. In the same way, preachers can have the spirit of the false prophets by hiding the path of the cross and obedience to Jesus by preaching prosperity and the ability to be a believer without changing how they live.

As the Psalmist expressed it, the joy and pleasure of the wicked almost caused him to give up his faith in God. But then he remembered what happens at the end. All people will die, but the wicked will then face the eternal punishment of God. (See Ps. 73; 49:16-20) The temporary problems of following Jesus that are rewarded in Jesus' blessed eternal kingdom are much better than enjoying the temporary blessings of life and facing eternity in punishment.

Q. 19. a) Describe why it is important for believers to remember these strong warnings of Jesus about a life lived for temporary pleasure. b) Describe how the spirit of false prophets is often seen in the church today.

Q. 20. Read Mt. 5:13-16. a) List the two descriptions of the role Christians are supposed to play in the world. b) What do you think Jesus meant by these two things?

CHRISTIANS ARE SALT AND LIGHT FOR THE FALLEN WORLD (Mt. 5:13-16)

Having taught his disciples what type of character they needed to have if they wanted to follow him and received the blessed life Jesus wants to give them, Jesus described to the disciples the important role they would have in society. We often think of salvation from a personal perspective. We are concerned that we personally are blessed and receive eternal life. But Jesus' vision is for the world and he was concerned that his followers impact the world. Jesus used two illustrations to describe the role his followers are to have in the world. We are supposed to be like salt and like light.

There were no more important things in the ancient world than salt and light. To call believers salt and light shows the valuable responsibility believers have in the world. Even if the world is persecuting us, we still have these important roles.

1. Salt: The ancient world so highly valued salt that it was often used as money. It had many different usages:

a. For the Romans, salt was a sign of purity and was offered to the gods. In the same way, Christians are to be the models of purity for the world. We should set the standard of being a good worker, or a good student, or a model citizen. We should also demonstrate godly husband and wife relationships, how to raise our children for the benefit of society, or how we should treat all people in society with dignity and respect.

b. Salt was a preservative to keep things like meat from spoiling. If a family butchered an ox and could not eat all of the meat, they would take salt and rub it on the meat. The meat would keep for several weeks this way without going bad. In the same way, Christians who have the characteristics Jesus described keep the world from steadily getting worse. By living morally upright lives, we influence others to live morally upright lives. By showing justice to the poor or overcoming tribalism or living at peace with each other no matter what differences we have, we encourage the world to also take care of the poor or overcome tribalism.

c. Salt was also used to flavor food. A little salt can take something that is tasteless and make it very delicious. In the same way, a few Christians are able to impact a large society when we live out the characteristics which Jesus taught his disciples to have.

Just like a little bit of salt makes a big difference in food, throughout the history of the world we see the minority group of Christians often bringing a great change to society. It was Christians who started hospitals which we all use today. It was Christians who worked to stop slavery. Christians also were the major forces behind the start of science, the industrial revolution in the West, etc. Democracy, which is popular in the world today, is the result of a Christian understanding of the value of all people.

But there are two dangers to salt.

First, there is the danger of too much salt. If you put too much salt in food, no one can eat it. Jesus is teaching that for Christians to have a good influence in the world, we must live scattered throughout society rather than all living together. One of the temptations for Christians is to seek to live together in a "Christian" community, and so the church has started monasteries. Or often Christians want to build their homes in one community so that they can escape the awkwardness of living among non-Christians. But this goes against what Jesus desired. He wanted his followers to live within non-Christian communities so that we can influence the communities for good.

Second, there is the danger of salt losing its flavor. Scientists tell us that pure salt does not lose its saltiness. But much of the salt used in Palestine was not pure. It came from marshes and so was mixed with soil. Often merchants would bring salt and store it in a mud hut. Over time, the salt that was against the dirt floor would lose its taste and could not be sold for salt. Other times, the people would put salt at the bottom of their clay ovens. The salt would radiate the heat from the fire making the clay ovens more efficient. But over time this salt would deteriorate. When the salt no longer was useful, the Jews would throw it on the top of their dirt roofs or on the courtyard or paths. This made the path hard and less muddy. So Jesus meant that it is only as we live distinct lives as his followers that we are useful to the world. But if the believers resemble the world, we are no longer useful to the world. And we will face the punishment of Jesus.

So what Jesus is warning his followers is that if they are to fulfill their role as salt for the world, they must remain in their communities. And they must have the character described in the beatitudes. They must not allow persecution or the desire to be liked by the world to take away their role as salt. Otherwise they would have nothing to offer the world and would be useless to the world and to the kingdom of God. As Christians we are not to look to the government or society to set the standards of what is right and wrong. Nor should we focus upon making rules which force people to live moral lives. Rather, we Christians are to be like salt in a sore which hurts even as it purifies. We are to openly live out our beliefs so that the world sees and is challenged to make a decision themselves to change how they live.

Q. 21. a) Describe how you have seen a few Christians have a positive influence on society. b) Describe how you have seen Christians no longer displaying the characteristics Jesus wants of his followers and therefore lose their influence in society.

2. Light was also very important to ancient people. Not only was the light of the sun important for life of all things, but light was important in their homes at night. Even the poorest of homes had a small light made out of clay. It was similar to a small *kuraz*. The Jews used olive oil as the fuel and put a small wick in the oil to burn.

The Jews noticed three things about this light.

First, they noticed that the darker the room, the more powerful the light seemed. A very small light was able to overpower a lot of darkness and reveal what was in the room.

Second, the higher they put the light, the further they could see. Rather than put it on the floor or a low table, the Jews would build a stone ledge on a wall and put the lamp on it. Being high, the light shone throughout the whole room.

Third, they knew that the role of the light was not for people to look at the light, but for the light to reveal other things. If they looked at the light, their ability to see other things in the room deteriorated. But if they look away from the light, then they were able to see the things in the room better.

Jesus is saying that this is to be true of his followers as well. Like Jesus, we are to be lights to the dark world lost in sin. (Jn. 8:12) Just a few faithful followers of Jesus can shine powerfully in the dark world. And the more obviously we Christians live out our character described in the beatitudes, the more powerful the light upon society will be. And our role as lights is not so that people look at the Christian, but so that the lives of the Christian reveals the sinfulness of the world so that people will turn to Christ.

But there are three dangers for Christians as we function as lights for the world.

First, we can all gather together in one community so that we only shine our lights to each other rather than in the dark world. Just like a candle's light is useless with a bright electric bulb burning, so also the light of Christians is useless if it is only where other Christian lights are found.

Second, we can shine our light in a way that no one can see it. So we shine our moral light in church, but not in the world as we work.

Third, we can hide it from the world by becoming so much like the world in character that no light is seen. Jesus insisted that his followers were to be like the city of Jerusalem, which is on top of a mountain and cannot be hidden. And we are not to be like a light placed under a clay container. Sometimes when Jews left the house to visit their neighbors, since it was difficult to relight their small light, they would put a clay pot over the light. This would keep the fire from accidentally burning their home. But no one keeps the light under the pot when they want to see. In the same way, no follower of Jesus should want to hide his light.

So what is our light as followers of Jesus? There are three types of lights we have. First, there is godly character which the Holy Spirit gives us. Some of these are the beatitudes which we studied. In our daily lives, if our character is radically different from the world, they notice. Second, there is the Gospel. As we proclaim the Gospel, we are shining out the light of truth to the world. Third, there are our "good deeds." These are things we do in society that helps people. When we help the sick, the widow, the poor, and those who are suffering, we are shining out our light.

But Jesus warns us that as light, people are not to be focusing upon us and praising us. Rather, they are to praise God. One of Satan's traps for us, one of the way he takes away our light, is by getting us to think that we are the light and should be praised by people for how we are living. But we are to be like the moon, reflecting the light of the sun, Jesus Christ. Our role as lights is to draw people to God.

Q. 22. a) Describe ways Christians can function as light in their communities. b) Describe ways Christians often hide their light and so make little impact in their communities. c) What are ways you are showing your light to those around you? What can you do to shine for Jesus even brighter?

Q. 23. Read Mt. 5:17-19. a) How does Jesus describe his relationship to the Law and Prophets? b) What warning does Jesus give to those who teach things that do not agree with the Bible?

JESUS CAME TO FULFILL THE LAW AND PROPHETS (Mt. 5:17-19)

As we saw in an earlier lesson, Jesus did not practice many of the rituals the religious Jews were practicing. He did not fast like they did. Nor did he obey many of the traditions on ritual cleansing. For instance, he was willing to touch a leper to heal him, even though Jesus became ritually unclean. And he healed on the Sabbath which the Jews viewed as a "work" prohibited by their understanding of the Old Testament. This would have caused the people to wonder about Jesus. Was Jesus against the Old Testament laws?

During the days of Jesus, the word "Law" had different meanings. First, it could refer to the 10 commandments in Ex. 20. Second, it could refer to the 5 books of Moses which were especially revered by the Jews. Third, it could refer to all of the books of the Old Testament. And fourth, it could also refer to the oral teachings which interpreted the laws found in the Old Testament. Unfortunately, the Jews during the time of Jesus tended to focus more upon the oral laws taught by the religious leaders than on God's Word.

Jesus strongly stated that he was not abolishing God's Word. He supported his statement in two ways. First, in Mt. 5:17-19, Jesus insists that he fulfills the Old Testament totally, for not one part of the Old Testament will ever disappear. Second, Jesus shows that his standard of righteous fulfillment of the Old Testament is actually more strict than any Pharisee ever imagined. (Mt. 5:20-48)

Jesus greatly honored the Old Testament, even more than did many of the Jews of his day. Many religious leaders like the Sadducees saw only the first five books of Moses as being from God. They believed the rest of the books in the Old Testament were valuable, but not equally inspired. But Jesus stated that all of the Old Testament (which he calls the Law and Prophets) was from God. We can learn three things from what Jesus claims about the Bible in these verses:

First, Jesus claims that the total Old Testament is from God. Not just the first five books of Moses, but all 39 books of the Old Testament are given directly by God to us. Both Peter and Paul would later teach that all Scripture is the very word of God, given by the Holy Spirit. (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21) This means that the followers of Jesus must treat all of the books of the Old Testament with equal reverence. We must not only read the passages we like, but we should study all of it.

Second, Jesus claimed that the Word of God down to the smallest character is from God. In the Hebrew Bible, there were two small markers. There was a letter that was just a small mark, similar to the mark above a comma. And there was a small part of the letter like the small mark which makes the difference between $\aleph$ and η . Jesus insists that in the Word of God there are no mistakes or parts that we can neglect. Even the smallest letter makes a difference to God and he won't let it disappear from his Word.

Third, the Old Testament is eternal. It was not just for the Jews until Jesus came. Rather it is for all people and for all eternity.

The big questions scholars wrestle with is "what does Jesus mean that he had come to 'fulfill?'" It is clear that Jesus openly disobeyed the oral laws taught by the religious leaders, so he was not seeking to fulfill them. There are different ways the word "fulfill" has been understood:

1. By "fulfill" it could mean that Jesus had come to totally obey the Laws of God as written in the five books of Moses. The problem is that Jesus and later the Church actually replaced some of these laws. For instance, both Jesus and the early church recognized that some of the food laws found in the Old Testament no longer applied. Christians were free to eat any food that they wanted. (Mk. 7:17-19) The early church also stopped offering sacrifices and would choose Sunday as their day of worship. So it is clear that Jesus did not mean that he had come to totally obey all of the Old Testament laws.

2. The word "fulfill" could refer to fulfilling the prophecies given about Jesus in the Old Testament. And he fulfills all of the symbols of the Old Testament which point towards him. (e.g. Jesus is the true sacrifice, not the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament.) Since the whole Old Testament points to him, Jesus has the right to interpret and apply it in a way that reflects God's intent. In Jesus and his eternal kingdom, all of the desires of the Old Testament laws will come to completion.

3. Jesus upheld and obeyed the "moral" laws of the Old Testament. But he was not referring to the civil and ceremonial laws. He would later teach that these were not needed for followers. And the book of Hebrews says that Jesus put an end to sacrifices. The rules of food were also done away with.

4. The word "fulfill" means Jesus is claiming to bring the Old Testament laws to their intended fulfillment of purpose. In his life, Jesus demonstrated what God wants from his children. He honored and respected God, worshipping and obeying him totally. He also lived out his life for the benefit of others. As

Jesus would later teach, loving God with all our being and loving each other as ourselves was the basic purpose of the Law. And Jesus fulfilled this part totally, even if he did not fulfill some of the specific commands. This is the most likely interpretation of what Jesus meant by "fulfilling" the Old Testament.

Jesus ends with a strong warning. As his followers must be very careful in how we teach and apply God's Word. If we teach something that is false, or if we teach an unbalanced truth by only teaching one fact without its opposite truth (e.g. we teach God's love without his holiness, God's physical blessing without persecution), God's judgment would be upon us. We will be the "least" in his kingdom. James later warns believers that we should not be quick to teach because those who teach are open to greater judgment from God. (James 3:1) What we say and the tendency of hypocrisy, saying something but not doing it, harms many people who listen to us and so we will be punished greatly.

Q. 24. a) What do these verses warn us about how we are to treat God's Word? b) How do these verses warn us about being very careful in how we interpret God's Word and teach it to others?

FOURTH DAY

Q. 25. Read Mt. 5:20-47. a) What did Jesus say about his disciples' righteousness in comparison to the righteousness of the Pharisees? What do you think he meant by this statement? b) List the different areas of life when Jesus showed his righteous standards are greater than the Law's.

How does one measure the righteousness of a person? All of us have our standards. Usually we have a list of "do's" and "don'ts" which we think define spirituality. These standards differ from person to person, church to church, and culture to culture. For instance, for many Christians, righteousness is defined by the following "don'ts": not drinking, not going to a cinema to see a movie; not having long braided hair as a man, and not wearing tight clothes as a girl. And then there are the "do's" which we are to perform: praying loudly and fervently, speaking in tongues, going to church, and giving the tithe. The Pharisees also had their standards by which they defined being righteous in God's eyes. There was circumcision for boys when they were eight days old, keeping laws that defined ritual purity, not eating certain types of food, and praying and fasting openly.

Like many of us, the Pharisees fell into Satan's trap of thinking that certain external actions were what made a person "righteous" in God's eyes. But Jesus taught his followers that "spirituality" or "righteousness" is a matter of the heart. In today's lesson, Jesus lists six examples of how his definition of "spirituality" was different and greater than anything ever imagined before in any religion.

THE PRINCIPLE: OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST EXCEED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE PHARISEES (Mt. 5:20)

Imagine someone saying to you "God won't let you into heaven until you are more spiritual than the most respected preacher in Ethiopia." Would you be shocked? In the same way, the Jews listening to Jesus would have been very shocked when told that their "righteousness" must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. To the Jews, the Pharisees were thought to be the most truly spiritual people. To the 613 laws found in the Old Testament, they had added over 1000 other laws they taught the Jews to keep. They kept so many laws that the ordinary person did not even try to resemble them. And the Pharisees despised

these ordinary people because they were not as righteous as the Pharisees since they did not keep all of the laws taught by the religious leaders.

By this statement, Jesus was seeking to accomplish two major things:

1. Jesus wanted to show that he was not against the Law, but that he actually demanded a type of righteousness that went far beyond what the Law taught. So rather than taking away from the holiness of the Law as the Pharisees were accusing him, Jesus' standard of righteousness was much greater than even what the Law of Moses or the Pharisees demanded. No other religious leader in history has even demanded such a high standard that would classify lust or hate as being a sin equal to adultery or murder.

2. Jesus wanted to shock the people so that they would be aware of how Jesus was teaching a totally new understanding of following God. One of the best ways to force us to look at God's desires in a new way is to make a shocking statement. Jesus liked to use this teaching tool. So he "shocked" his disciples with difficult truths so that they would carefully think through and understand that following him as a disciple required them to understand righteousness in a new way from how they were not used to.

Jesus warned his followers that although at times it might seem that he was indifferent to the law because he did not follow the traditions of the Pharisees, that did not mean that he was indifferent to the need to obey God. Rather, Jesus demanded that his followers be even more serious about living in a way which would please God than the Pharisees. He taught that his followers must look deep into their hearts to make sure they are addressing the motives and attitudes that were incompatible to following him. If they were not willing to do this, then they were demonstrating that they had not committed themselves to live under his kingly rule. As a result, they would not be part of God's eternal community in heaven when God's eternal kingdom was established.

Unfortunately many of us become careless in our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus and how to deal with sin. Yes, the Bible teaches that Jesus is full of grace and mercy. Any sinner, no matter how evil in the eyes of society, can come to God and be freely and totally forgiven and accepted. But they must come determined to submit their lives to God and obey King Jesus. They are to refuse to treat sin lightly as a simple mistake or something they can do and then quickly tell God "I am sorry." Jesus demands that his followers treat all sin, even the hidden sins of the heart unseen by anyone else, seriously. While on earth we will never totally get rid of committing sins because we all have our sin nature. And we are told that when we come to Jesus in true confession of our sins, he will forgive us. (1 Jn. 1:9) But if we are indifferent to sin and make little effort to submit our hearts, motives, and actions to Jesus, we reveal that we have not come to Jesus with true confession and desire to join his community over which he rules as king.

Q. 26. a) Describe ways Christians are often lax about sin, thinking that it is not very bad if they sin since they can easily ask God for forgiveness. b) Take time now to examine the motives and attitudes in your heart. What sins are there which need to be repented of and worked upon?

SIX EXAMPLES OF HOW JESUS' STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS EXCEEDED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS PREVIOUSLY TAUGHT BY THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE PHARISEES (Mt. 5:21-48)

Jesus wanted to illustrate what he meant by a righteousness which was greater than that practiced by the Pharisees. So he took several Old Testament laws and illustrated what a greater righteousness consisted of. Each of the six examples either quotes an Old Testament command or a general teaching coming out of the understanding of the Old Testament. Before we study the details of what Jesus taught, it is best to summarize the major points that Jesus was teaching:

a. Jesus was indicating that he is the one who has the authority to interpret the true intent of God's commands given in the Old Testament. Jesus is saying "God gave the following command in the Old Testament. But let me tell you what God was really intending." This was an indirect way of claiming to be equal to God. Other Jewish teachers would quote another scholar as the basis for their authority to claim something was true. But Jesus had truth in himself, and so could say with authority "this is what God meant."

b. Jesus made "righteousness" both more simple and more difficult. It was more simple since rather than focus upon 100s of laws, Jesus would later focus upon two, loving God and love other. In contrast, the Pharisees made up many added rules hoping that in doing so they covered all of the situations which God desired. However, Jesus' righteousness was much more difficult than the Pharisees. It is much harder to change our hearts and motives than actions. For instance, it is harder to stop drinking alcohol than to love our enemies.

c. Jesus insisted that the answer to becoming righteous is not in adding laws covering external actions which define righteousness, but addressing the problems in our hearts. If we can change our attitudes and the root of sin in our hearts, then we will not perform the actions which are wrong. The Pharisees sought to change external actions and not the heart. This is similar to a farmer who seeks to get rid of the weeds in his garden by cutting off the top of the weeds rather than dig out the weeds from the roots. That farmer might think that he has gotten rid of the weed because he can no longer see it. But because the roots are still there, the weed will just grow again. Only by digging out the weeds of the source of sin can any person really become righteous as God desires. So Jesus taught his disciples to focus upon the "roots" of sin and not the tops of the weeds (external actions).

d. Jesus taught that as his followers, we must not simply focus on externals, but on our internal motives and attitudes. Every other religion focuses upon external standards of obedience to God. This can be things like "do not murder," or they can be like "give to the poor, fast, or pray five times a day." But Jesus said that God is also concerned with the source from which actions come. Evil actions like murder or adultery come from wrong attitudes in the heart. So we must focus upon the wrong attitudes, not just the wrong actions. Only then is a person truly righteous. Even good actions like praying must come from the proper motive. If our prayer is done out of thoughtless tradition or repetition or seeks to force God to do something we want, even if we say the right words, we are not in line with God's desires.

In our days, we often see following God in the same way as the Jews. We focus upon the externals. So we tell people to dress in certain ways, to not commit adultery, or to not drink alcohol. Or we honor those who shout loudly in prayer and speak in tongues. But we can do all of these things and still not have

a heart which honors Jesus. We can be proud of our "spirituality" and look down on others whom we do not think are as good as us. Or we can perform our "religious" actions to show off our righteousness like the Pharisees did. This truth also warns us that only God knows whether a person is spiritual. None of us knows what is going on in the heart of another person. We cannot see the hidden motives and attitudes, but God can. So we must be careful not to judge and define a person as righteous.

Q. 27. a) Make a list of external actions which we often focus upon in our churches which we teach defines a spiritual person. b) What type of wrong attitudes can we have while still doing these things? c) Describe specific ways the root of all of our problems and sins lie in hidden motives, not in external actions.

e. When teaching about "righteousness," Jesus is talking about living our lives according to the standards God has established. This involves two things. First, it means that we do not do anything that God tells us not to do or does not like. Second, it also means that we do everything that God wants us to do with an attitude and in a way that pleases God. When these two things are fulfilled in our lives, the Bible calls us a "righteous person."

f. Jesus did not mean that the results of sins upon people and society is the same and it is as wrong to insult a person as it is to kill the person. Of course killing the person or committing adultery is more destructive than insults or lust. Rather, Jesus is saying that we are still "sinful" even if we do not kill a person or commit the act of adultery. As James taught, even if we do not kill someone, we are still a sinner if we break any law of God. (James 2:8-11) Jesus meant that to be truly righteous, we have to go beyond the external acts of certain sins we commit and address the hidden sins of the heart. Christianity focuses more upon the evil condition of our hearts than it does on getting people to follow a certain list of rules.

1. Murder compared to angry and prideful attitudes in our heart (Mt. 5:21-26)

The Old Testament and the Pharisees both taught that murder was wrong. The word kill here refers to "murder" and means any taking of life in a wrong way. It refers to when someone kills another person in hatred, revenge, or kills a person when robbing them. The Bible does not teach that killing in a war of defense or a government giving capital punishment as being murder.

However, Jesus said that God's desires are much deeper than not murdering. God desires harmonious relationships between people. Jesus taught that God desires that we love our neighbor as ourselves. (Mk. 12:31) So anything that hinders loving relationships is wrong. (Note: Jesus was not saying that we should never be angry. Even Jesus was angry at injustices. (Jn. 2:12-17) But Jesus was never angry at others for how they treated him. Most of the time our anger is because of selfish reasons.) Jesus gives three illustrations of actions which reveal wrong attitudes in our hearts which cause wrong relationships.

a. Anger: All murder starts with the sin of "anger." The Greeks had two words of anger. The first is anger which quickly rises, but then is soon forgotten. The second is anger against another person which simmers in our hearts that we do not address and get rid of. It is this word which Jesus used. So the real problem is not just murdering someone, but the simmering anger in our hearts against someone which destroys relationships with others.

b. Angry words: One of the major ways that anger reveals itself is through angry, insulting words. So Jesus said that anyone who calls his brother (another human) "Raca" or "fool" is guilty of sin. Jesus insisted that such an angry attitude made one worthy of punishment before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the

highest court in the land and primarily dealt with serious crimes like blasphemy against God or being a false prophet. So Jesus is saying that in the eyes of God, to angrily insult a person is as serious as blasphemy.

c. **Prideful words:** Jesus said that a person who calls another person "fool" would face eternal punishment of hell. To the Jews, calling a person "fool" did not just refer to someone who did not have good mental facilities. Rather, it referred to someone who was morally lax. The person did not believe in God and lived in open disobedience to God's laws. So this was a serious insult to the Jews. To call someone a fool was to take the person's reputation of being a moral person away from them. It is also a form of pride, for in our words we are indicating that we are better than the one we are insulting.

The words "Gehenna" comes from a valley in the southwest corner of Jerusalem called the Valley of Hinnom. During the days of King Ahaz, he introduced a very evil type of idol worship to a god called Molech in this valley. This god was worshipped by sacrificing small children, and Ahaz even sacrificed one of his children on the altar. This was the worse type of idol worship known in ancient days. Later, when godly King Josiah came into power, he destroyed the altar and cursed the valley. The Jews turned it into the place where they would throw their rubbish. During the days of Jesus, this rubbish pile not only smelled terribly, but burned continually as people lit the rubbish on fire. The Jews saw this unending fire as a symbol of the coming eternal judgment which God would bring upon evil people. So it became a name for hell.

What Jesus meant is "Of course murder is wrong. But anyone who allows anger to smolder in his heart and does not deal with it, if he angrily curses people or pridefully works to ruin their reputation or hurt them, he too is a sinner and liable to be judged by God." Rarely do we actually physically murder a person. But in another way we do "murder." We "murder" a person's reputation by gossiping against them when we are angry at something they have done to us. Or we "murder" a person's self-image by insulting them. How many of us have insulted people in town by calling them words like idiot or jerk. We must learn that such attitudes and actions is sin in God's eyes. Until we dig these attitudes out of our heart, we are still not righteous in God's eyes.

Q. 28. a) List ways that Christians often reveal their anger against another person and their pride in thinking they are better than others. b) What does this show about our hearts not being truly changed so that we are not living righteously? c) Why do few people think that such anger or pride is sin and talk against them in church?

But Jesus was not just seeking to teach us to get rid of anger from our lives, he wanted to teach us that among his followers there should always be harmonious loving relationships. So Jesus gave two illustrations of situations where we must address broken relationships:

a. **Worshipping at the altar:** The major way Jews worshipped God was to take an animal to the altar in Jerusalem where it would be sacrificed. The animal could be sacrificed for forgiveness of sins. But it could also be sacrificed simply to express the person's love for God and desire to fellowship with him. The Old Testament taught that a sacrifice was only acceptable to God when combined with repentance. And true repentance was always evidenced by confession of sin to the one wronged. A sinner could not have his relationship with God restored until his relationship with the other person was repaired. In fact, priests taught that if a person stole from someone and brought a sacrifice for their sin but had not repaid the

person for what he stole, his sacrifice was "unclean" and had to be taken outside the city and burned as if it were a unclean pig.

Jesus used this practice to illustrate how important harmonious relationships are to him. When sacrificing, suddenly a person remembers that his relationship with another person was strained. The man was not to continue his worship of God. Rather, he was to leave the animal with someone in the Temple and go be reconciled with the other person. Only after that should he offer a sacrifice since only then would it be acceptable to God. Jesus is teaching that unless a person has done all he can to reconcile himself with others and live in harmony with them, he cannot truly worship God. He might pray, but his prayer is unacceptable. He might sing, but the words have no meaning to God. Worship is built upon the foundation of harmonious relationships, not just something we can do alone in church. I wonder how many believers in church pray, sing, and listen to God's Word thinking that everything is fine between them and God but whose worship is unacceptable because they have broken relationships with others? As followers of Jesus we must take this teaching seriously. Paul would later write "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Rom. 12:18) Paul knew that we cannot force someone to live in harmony with us and be reconciled to us. So he taught that we must make sure that we have done all we can on our part to restore and maintain good relationships with all people.

b. In his second illustration Jesus talks about two believers whose relationship has deteriorated and they have taken each other to court. It was probably a court case about one person who had borrowed money from the other and had not repaid it on time as agreed. They are on the way to the court hearing where the judge or the elders will give their ruling. The person who had borrowed the money does not know what the judge will rule and could fine him or throw him into prison for not repaying his debt. Once he is standing before the judge, it is too late to look for a peaceful solution. So rather than continuing the argument, the person should make a deal with the one from whom he borrowed money. Through this illustration, Jesus was teaching two truths:

First, Jesus' followers are to learn to settle our relational problems quickly. The longer we wait, the deeper the problems will grow and we and others will be hurt. The longer we delay forgiving another person, the harder it is for us to humble ourselves and ask his forgiveness. And often we become angry and bitter inside. Not only do we lose peace and joy and are unable to relate to God, but others, like our family and friends, are hurt by the anger that grows in our hearts. If we want to spare ourselves and others from bitterness and the evil results of broken relationships, we must resolve them quickly.

Second, Jesus was warning that we had better work to restore our relationships quickly. We don't know what could happen to our lives. Suppose we died with that relationship still unhealed. We would then find ourselves standing before God, the Judge. And then it is too late for us to resolve the situation in a way to help us escape God's punishment. So we should learn to quickly resolve relational problems so as to not find ourselves standing before God the Judge.

Q. 29. a) Do you think most people in church realize that God does not accept their worship and prayer if their relationship with other believers is not following God's guidelines? Explain your answer. b) In what ways have you seen broken relationships not quickly healed lead to much greater problems for the person, his family, and the church? c) How would we be more ready to ask and give others forgiveness if we were to remember that God will judge us if we don't reconciling with them? d) Think through your relationships

with others. Is there someone with whom you have not been reconciled? If so, make an appointment with him and seek to restore your relationship so that God will accept your worship.

2. Adultery compared to lustfully looking at someone (Mt. 5:27-30)

The Old Testament says that adultery, or sexual infidelity between a husband and wife, is one of the most serious sins. In fact, this sin was so serious that the Old Testament laws demanded that those who committed adultery be stoned to death. (Lev. 20:10) (Note: Both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach that any sexual relationship outside of marriage is a sin. So it is also a serious sin before God if two young people have sex before they are married, or for a married partner to have sex with another person like a prostitute. The only type of sexual relationship the Bible authorizes is between a husband and wife. It is clear that Jesus was not just referring to adultery of married people because in Mt. 5:28 Jesus refers to "looking at a woman" which would indicate anyone who lusts after a woman.)

Jesus insisted that in his kingdom, it was not just the sexual act which was wrong. Rather, a lustful look by a man or woman was also sin. In the Greek, it is clear that this is not just a glance where our desire is aroused. Rather, it is a prolonged look when we are thinking of having sex with the person. Although we might never actually commit adultery, God sees our hearts and knows that there we have committed adultery. So it is not enough to be pure in action, but we must be pure in mind as well. We are not only to be satisfied with being sexually pure. Rather, as followers of Jesus we must work on our inner thought life so that it is pure as well.

Jesus again wanted "shock" his followers to show them how serious any sin is in God's eyes. Using symbolic language Jesus told them that his followers must be so determined to remain pure that they will take severe action to the things that tempted them to sin. Anything that caused a person to stumble and sin must be quickly gotten rid of (cut off, plucked out). To the Jews, the right eye was the best and most important eye. The eye was also seen as the tool which causes lust. (Job 31:1) And the right hand was the strongest hand needed for work. But it was better to lose what they considered was important for life than to face God's severe judgment because of sin. (Note: Throughout history Christians have mistakenly applied these verses literally. So they have cut off their sexual organs or blinded themselves. But clearly this would not solve the issue. Just because we do not have sexual organs or eyes does not stop us from lusting in our minds. Jesus was speaking using extreme language to express how serious sin is.

All of us have weak areas where we are prone to sin. We must know these weak areas and protect ourselves from them. So if lust is a temptation to us, then we must determine never to be in situations where we can be tempted. So we shouldn't rent a house near where prostitutes live, or we don't go to where we can see women bathing, or we don't watch videos or movies which have scenes that arouse our passion, and we don't look at magazines which cause us to lust. If drink is a problem and our house is close to a bar where the smell causes us to want to drink, we should sell the house so not to be tempted and fall. To put ourselves in situations which tempt us to fall into sin can lead to our being dominated by that sin. And if our lives are dominated by a sin, we risk being judged severely by God. It is not enough to say "God will protect me." We must "run" and get rid of the things that cause us to sin. (1 Cor. 6:18, 1 Tim. 6:11, 2 Tim. 2:22)

Q. 30. a) List some temptations Christians often struggle with. b) Describe how someone can "cut off their hand" symbolically so that they do not fall as often into that sin. c) What is your weak area? What are you doing to protect yourself from sinning in that way?

3. Divorce contrasted to life-long marriage as God intended (Mt. 5:31-32)

The Jews saw marriage as one of the most important duties. So all boys and girls were encouraged to marry, and they were only allowed to remain unmarried if it was needed for them to study the Law. Although they respected marriage, this did not mean that many Jews did not get divorced. During the days of Jesus, one of the issues religious scholars debated was over God's thoughts concerning divorce. In the Old Testament, divorce was permitted when the man was "*displeased with her*." (See Deut. 24:1-4) The only requirement was that the wife was to be given a document certifying that she was legally divorced. The man was not allowed to remarry her, but the woman was allowed to marry another man. Unless a woman was deserted for a long time by her husband, she was not allowed to divorce her husband. It was only the husband who was allowed to decide whether or not to divorce his wife. Often the wife was considered the property of the husband and he could get rid of her when he was no longer pleased with her.

One group of religious scholars, called the school of Hillel, taught that the man could divorce his wife for any reason. If he saw a woman who was more beautiful or if his wife burned the food, the man could divorce his wife and marry someone else. Many women lived in great fear, never knowing when they would be cast out of their homes. The man only had to say to the woman three times "I divorce you" and give her a certificate saying that she was divorced and free to remarry anyone she wanted. He was required to return her dowry if she had not been sexually unfaithful. The other group of religious scholars, called the school of Shammai, taught that the only time divorce was allowed was if the woman had become sexually unfaithful. In fact if a woman was sexually unfaithful or unable to bear children, the man was told by the religious leaders that he had to divorce his wife or marry a second wife.

Jesus strongly disagreed with the trend among Jews to divorce their wives. Instead, he said that his followers are to live according to the will of God as seen in the original marriage between Adam and Eve. It was to be a permanent union. The only time Jesus said divorce was permitted is if one of the partners determined to live in a continual state of sexual unfaithfulness. At that time divorce was permitted, but not commanded like the Jewish religious leaders taught. Jesus would later address divorce again. (See Mt. 19:2) But here Jesus said that in the eyes of God, divorce and remarriage always results in adultery. When a man divorced his wife he "*makes her an adulteress*." And the one who divorced his wife and married another woman was committing adultery. This idea would have been totally new to those listening to Jesus because no religious scholar had ever taught that remarriage of a divorced person was a sin.

There are many things about divorce and remarriage which are not clear and therefore Christians debate what Jesus was teaching. For instance, are a divorced and remarried person to be forced to get divorced and go back to their original partner? We don't know what Jesus would have taught. But the intent of Jesus' teaching is clear. Jesus strongly taught his followers that God's desire is for their marriage to last throughout their life-time no matter what circumstances arose. Anything else was an indication that they were not living under the kingly control of Jesus. Any divorce and remarriage by divorced followers of Jesus put them in the condition of being adulterers. Although divorced according to the standards of man, in the eyes of God they were still married so all other marriages were comparable to a husband and wife having sexual relationships outside of marriage.

It is unclear why Jesus said that when a man divorced his wife, she became an adulteress. Perhaps Jesus wanted to explain to his followers of the implication of divorce. It put the woman in a position where she had to commit adultery. There were two probable reasons Jesus said this. First, a woman living alone had no way to make a living in ancient times. She was always dependent upon her husband. As a result, she was often forced to become a prostitute to earn her living. Second, a woman would try to marry another person. But in the eyes of God this was adultery, for she was still seen as married to her original partner. No man was ever expected to remain single. So it was assumed that after he divorced, the man would remarry. But Jesus said that if he did, he was committing adultery because God viewed him as married to his first wife.

The strength of society and the church is determined by the strength of marriages. Anything that destroys marriages is the enemy of the kingdom of God. Unfortunately the church no longer teaches this. Divorce among believers in most western countries (and increasing in Ethiopia) is almost as common as among unbelievers. "I made a mistake. I no longer love her" people say as they divorce each other. Surely Jesus would speak out against this sin! It is a clear sign that we are refusing to live according to what our Master teaches.

Jesus' teaching still leaves some major questions for the church. It would seem that five things are clear.

First, Jesus is teaching that the standard of marriage which the church is always to teach and practice is for marriage to last throughout a person's life time. Anything less is a step away from God's ideal.

Second, Jesus allows divorce when one of the partners refuses to remain sexually faithful. Jesus is not talking about a one-time falling into sexual sin. Rather, it is a person who refuses to remain faithful, who refuses to honor the covenant of marriage who is allowed to be divorced. (Note: Jesus did not teach all circumstances which could bring about divorce. Paul would later say that if married to an unbeliever who wants to divorce the believer, the church should permit the divorce. (1 Cor. 7:12-16) Most likely Jesus would permit divorce in cases where there is constant physical or sexual abuse of the wife and children.)

Third, Jesus seems to permit remarriage for those who have been divorced because of sexual unfaithfulness of their partner because he does not prohibit the remarriage.

Fourth, it is clear to Jesus that he makes no differentiation between who is at fault, the husband or wife. Often we assume that it is permitted for the man to have many sexual partners, but the wife must remain faithful. But Jesus teaches that both husband and wife are to remain faithful, or either can divorce the other.

Fifth, if a person is divorced and remarried before they became followers of Jesus, they should not be forced to divorce and remarry their original spouse. Paul indicates in 1 Cor. 7:17 that we are to remain in the condition in which we were when we became believers.

However it is not clear what to do with believers who disobey God and get divorced. Believers should be clearly taught that God is NEVER pleased with them when they get divorced. As followers of Jesus with the Holy Spirit living in them, no matter what the difficulties are, they should be able to live together peacefully. Except in cases of willful unfaithfulness (and probably continued physical abuse), to get

divorced is to proclaim that a person is refusing to live under the kingship of Jesus- it is rebellion. It should cause a person to question whether or not they are truly followers of Jesus.

But what about cases where in a rebellious state, two believers get divorced and then legally remarry other people? What should we do then? Jesus never gave any instructions about this. He just made the statement that they are committing adultery. Should they be forced to get divorced? Which sin is worse in God's eyes, the divorce of the second partner or being adulterers? And should the original two be forced to remarry each other? The Bible is silent in what steps to take to rectify the situation. So we must be very careful in what we force divorced believers to do. To the author of this study book, it would seem that the New Testament teaches that if the couple has divorced but not remarried, the elders should strongly counsel the two to get remarried so that they are living according to the desires of Jesus. Or they must remain unmarried. (1 Cor. 7:10-11) But if one or both partners have already gotten remarried, it is not right to force them to divorce. The grace of God does provide forgiveness for their sins. However, because they are not models of what a godly marriage should be like, they should not be allowed to hold leadership positions. In cases like this when the Bible is not clear, it seems best to follow the path where we clearly uphold God's standard of holiness, but also preach the grace of God and his forgiveness for our sins. Yes, people might try to take advantage of us, divorce, get remarried and then come back to the church. But such an attitude should cause us to question their salvation. They are willfully saying to Jesus that they will not live under his kingly rule. But it is very dangerous for a church to withhold forgiveness from people. Aren't we all sinners needing Jesus' daily forgiveness?

Q. 31. a) Describe your church's policy on divorce. b) Do you think it follows the teaching Jesus taught? Explain your answer. c) Suppose a Christian couple came to you where one or both had both been previously divorced. They know they were wrong when they did it. What would you say to them? Discuss your answer with your pastor to see what his view is.

4. Not making oaths to verify the truthfulness of our words (Mt. 5:33-37)

In Ethiopia there are many fables in which the monkey is the hero. He is not the hero because of his compassion for others or because of his courage and strength. Rather, he is the hero because he is able to trick others. These fables make interesting stories for our children. But unfortunately, we often think we can be the hero when we trick people by our words. "It is not our fault if they are foolish and are tricked by us" we think.

The Jews had a similar idea about tricking others. They knew that God had told them to never tell a lie when making an oath to someone using his name. (Ex. 20:7) In fact the Old Testament strongly warned people that they were to keep every oath they made. (Num. 30:2) One of the judges called Jephthah had to sacrifice his daughter because he made a foolish oath which he could not get out of. (Judg. 11:30-31) But this law caused the Jews a problem. They wanted to obey God and not tell a lie when using his name as the basis of convincing others of the truthfulness of what they were saying. For instance they would say "I promise, in God's name, to sell you this house next year." The Jews all knew if they used the name of God, they had to do what they promised. By using the name of God, the Jews thought that God was a partner in the matter, and they did not want God to become a liar. But they also wanted to trick others into thinking that they had made a promise when they hadn't and so be able to trick them. They would use other words indirectly referring to God. For instance they would use words like "in heaven's name," "in the name of God's throne," "by Jerusalem," or "by the Temple." The Pharisees taught that because they did not directly use the name of God, they were not breaking God's command not to swear falsely in God's name

when they did not do what they promised. And since God's name was not mentioned, God was not implicated in the lie which took place. In order to get around their need to tell the truth, the Pharisees designed many rules to tell people what oaths were binding and which ones weren't.

But this totally went against the intentions of God. God wants people to live together in trusting relationships, and you cannot have trust if you are trying to trick people with your words. "Any attempt to not speak the truth or trick people comes from Satan" said Jesus. So Jesus strongly commanded that no one should ever have to use an oath. Instead, his word "yes, I will do it." should never have to be questioned and always kept. Or his word "no, I will not do it." should not be changeable. He should mean that the answer is no. And people should not try to force him to change his answer to "yes." Jesus even said that any need to add an oath to our words to indicate their truthfulness came from Satan.

There are two major reasons why the thinking of the Jews was wrong:

First, Jesus said that God is always involved in everything we do. He is not present when we use his name but absent when we do not use his name. He is everywhere, so anything the Jews used in the oath involved God. God lived in heaven, so to say "heaven" involved God. But he was also on the earth, in Jerusalem, or in the Temple. In fact, God knows the intimate details of our lives so that he knows how many hairs we have on our heads. So there is no way to take an oath that does not involve God, and therefore all oaths are as binding as if the individual mentioned the name of God. And every promise we make is given in the presence of God who is always listening. So when we say "I will meet you tomorrow." God is listening. And he knows we are breaking our word if we do not keep our appointment.

Second, any need for oaths is an indication that we are not people of integrity. We should be so well known for our honesty by others that they know we always say what we mean and that we will always keep our word. This would mean that there is no need to add an oath to tell them that we are really telling the truth. How well we keep our promises indicates whether or not we are people of integrity. If we promise to do something for someone, we should always do it in the way they expected us to do it. To say we will do something is a "promise" in God's presence even if we do not say "I promise." To not fulfill what we have committed ourselves to doing indicates to people that we can not be trusted to keep our word. Once we promise, we do not have an option whether or not to do it. Unfortunately many church leaders make many promises which they do not keep. As a result church members rarely trust what they say. How well we fulfill the things we say we will do is an indication of our character, whether we can be trusted or not.

There was one other problem the Jews faced when giving oaths. They would carelessly give an oath almost every time they were talking. Any time we thoughtlessly make a statement or carelessly use the name of God or Jesus, we are going against the intent of God. Unfortunately many Christians fall into this trap of Satan in two ways. First, many say they will do something with no thought about what they have said and they have no intention to do it. "I will pray for you" we say to a stranger who is in trouble, but rarely do we actually pray for them. Or even worse, many of us use the name of Jesus carelessly and thoughtlessly. When startled we say "In Jesus' name." Or when we pray we list out many names of God without ever thinking about them. One of the major ways we show our reverence for God is to always treat his name with respect and reverence, using it with care and meaning. That is the intent of the third commandment. (Ex. 20:7)

Q. 32. a) Describe things Christians often say they will do but do not fulfill. b) Why do they think it is not important for them to do what they say? c) What does not doing it indicate about their character? d) Describe ways that Christians often use the name of Jesus or God thoughtlessly. e) Examine your life. What are ways you often say something you do not mean and therefore you do not do it? How do you need to change so that your "yes" means "yes" and your "no" means "no?"

5. Not retaliating when people hurt you or take advantage of you (Mt. 5:38-42)

One of the principles of justice which God established to guide the ancient judges was the principle of "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth." (Ex. 21:23-25) The purpose of this rule was to limit peoples' tendency to increase punishment out of revenge. Usually people want to hurt someone more than they have been hurt. So if someone causes us to be blind in one eye when we fight, we want to blind him in both eyes. Or if someone kills one of our relatives, we want to kill several of his relatives. So God said that those responsible for justice are to carefully limit punishment to the level of hurt originally caused. So if a person caused me to become blind in one eye, I was only allowed to put out one of his eyes. And only the person could be punished, not his family. During the days of Jesus, the judges usually assessed financial punishments rather than actual physical hurt. So the person who blinded the eye would have to pay a certain amount of money. This principle did not allow personal vengeance. Rather, this was a guide to those responsible for justice in the community.

But Jesus insisted that his followers have a very different attitude. Rather than demanding things to be fair and just, Christians are to make sure they do not bear resentment against those who hurt them in some way. Nor should they retaliate in any way when personally offended. No doubt Jesus knew that his followers would face many of these situations since they would be hated because they were the followers of Jesus and face the insults and injustices of others. Jesus gives three illustrations taken from Jewish life of how followers of Jesus are to act in situations when they do not receive justice. Jesus is using strong symbolic language to teach his followers that they are not to have an attitude of retaliating when there are injustices or constantly fighting for their rights. He is teaching them that they should always go beyond what people expect them to do.

a. Being struck on the right cheek: Most people are right handed. It would be very awkward for a right handed man to strike a person on his right cheek. The only way he could do it was with the back of his hand. This was a very severe insult in Jewish culture, much worse than striking a person with the front of the hand. Naturally this would bring a violent reaction from the person being hit leading to an ongoing dispute and deep anger and hatred. Jesus was teaching that even if people insult us deeply, we are not supposed to retaliate or hold a grudge against the person. Our refusal to retaliate is as if we willingly let the person strike us again. As Christians, we will often be insulted. So followers of Jesus need to learn to be like our Master who did not retaliate even when insulted and struck. (1 Pet. 2:20-23)

b. Taking the tunic: Jews normally wore two types of clothes. First, there was an inner long white thin cloth similar to what some Muslims wear. Most Jews would have several of these. Second, there was a thick coat to be worn on top of the inner cloth. This coat was important to keep them warm at night. This was more expensive and poor people would only have one. The Old Testament commanded that if a Jew had to put his coat down as a guarantee, that coat had to be returned by sunset so that the person would not get cold at night. (Ex. 22:26-27) Often Jews would pledge one of their tunics as a guarantee that they would purchase something or when taking a loan. Jesus is describing a situation where his follower has fallen into a financial situation where he had to pledge one of his tunics. That man is taken to court, and

the person who has accused him corrupts justice, taking not only his tunic, but demanding his coat as well. Rather than argue and fight, demanding his rights, the follower of Jesus is to submit to the injustice. He is not to fight for his rights.

Often Christians complain that things are not fair. Of course they are not fair. But rather than getting angry, we are supposed to trust God to bring justice in his time. Jesus is probably teaching the same thing Paul would later teach in 1 Cor. 6:7, that it is better for his followers to be wronged than to take each other to court demanding things to be just. It was better to be wronged than to defame the reputation of Christ or ruin the unity of God's body.

c. Walking a mile: During the time of Jesus, Israel was ruled by the Romans. The Romans were allowed to force any Jewish person to carry his goods for a set distance. They could even demand that people allow them to stay in their homes for the night, give them food, and grass for their animals. (e.g. Simon from Cyrene was made to carry the cross for Jesus.) Naturally this inconvenience caused great animosity in the heart of people. Jesus was telling people rather than carry the goods with great anger and bitterness, they should graciously help the person even beyond what was expected.

So Jesus is saying that as his followers, we are to approach injustices with a very different attitude than most people do. When insulted, we are supposed to remain gracious to the person, refusing to retaliate back with insults. And when injustice takes place, we are to accept the injustice graciously rather than angrily demanding our rights. And when we are forced to do things which we do not want to do, rather than doing it grudgingly and with anger, we are to joyfully do it, going even beyond what people expect as we seek to serve them. (Note: Jesus is talking about personal application for his followers. He is not talking about how Christians are to act as citizens in a legal situation in using the courts and the laws of their land. Christians can use the laws of their land to seek justice, but never in a retaliatory, bitter way.)

Jesus ends this section with a general principle that his followers are to be known for their generosity. (Mat 5:42) The Old Testament taught that when a Jew fell into financial problems, he would sell himself as a servant to someone. However, every seven years all debts were cancelled and those who were "servants" were freed and allowed to return home. (Deut. 15:7-11) If the year of freedom was close, many land owners would only give the person a small amount of money. But Jesus is saying that his followers are not to be looking at what we can gain from a situation. Rather, we are to be known for our generosity in helping those who were in financial need.

It is important to realize that behind this teaching of Jesus are two major ideas.

First, Jesus is assuming that the person asking is desperate and asking for a true need, not just something he selfishly wants. It is clear that anyone selling himself as a "slave" was desperate. He was not simply asking for things selfishly.

Second, Jesus also assumes that the person has done all he can to meet his needs out of his own resources first before asking from someone else. Jesus' teaching is not to be an excuse to not have to work hard to meet our own needs or ask people for things that are not essential to living. The Bible does not support an attitude or lifestyle of "begging" to get things which we do not work for. Paul said that anyone who was not willing to work but rather lived off of the hard work of others was to be treated as an unrepentant sinner, ostracized like a non-believer. (2 Thes. 3:6-15) And the poor were to work for their food

rather than getting things for free. (Ex. 23:11; Lev. 19:10; 23:22) Such an attitude would take away the tendency towards "dependency" that many have learned.

Q. 33. a) Describe a situation where Christians are often insulted. How do you think Jesus' teaching applies in that situation? b) Describe a situation where believers often face injustice. How do you think Jesus' teaching applies to that situation? c) Describe a situation where believers are often asked to do something they do not want to do or which they think is unreasonable. How do you think Jesus' teaching applies to that situation.

6. Love for our enemies rather than hating them (Mt. 5:43-47)

The Old Testament had no command to "hate your enemy." However, it was the general understanding of the Jews that they were to love fellow Jews and live in harmony with them. But they were free to hate their enemies like the Romans who were persecuting them. Jesus insisted that his followers have the opposite attitude towards those who are classified as our "enemies." Usually these will be those who are persecuting us. Our relationship with our enemies should be defined by "love." The true test of our Christianity is not how we treat our friends, but how we treat our enemies.

The Greeks had different words for love depending upon a person's relationship to that person. They used one word for the love someone had for his wife. They had another word for love (affection) for friends and family. But there was also another word for love called "agape." It was not used often in non-Christian circles. This word meant showing good will and help to others irrespective of what they do to us or for us. It is the determination of the person to seek the person's good no matter what. It is important to realize that agape love does not mean we let people do whatever they want or we do what they want. Love means that we are seeking the ultimate best for the person. And often the ultimate best for the person is something that they might not like but it helps them grow.

Jesus was saying that no matter how people treat us, we are to respond in a way that seeks the good of others. If we are persecuted, we refuse to get angry or retaliate. If another Christian or tribal group does something to hurt us, we do not gossip about them, seek to retaliate, but determine only to do what is good for them.

Jesus taught the following things about loving our enemies:

a. It will be revealed in our prayers. Often when someone does something which hurts us, feelings of anger grow in our heart and we become bitter. We react by gossiping about it to others. Or we seek to retaliate by not talking to them or even doing something bad to them. But Jesus tells us to turn to God in prayer instead. Not only should we use prayer as our way of expressing our frustration in the situation and ask God for justice. But prayer is where we are to ask God to bless the person by helping them to become Christians or grow in their character so that they will receive God's blessing in eternity rather than his punishment. One of the best ways to release the anger and animosity in our hearts towards someone is to pray for them.

b. An attitude of love towards those who hurt us rather than retaliate is one of the greatest evidences that we are "sons of God." The phrase "sons of God" here is a Jewish expression meaning "having a God-like character." This is true in two ways:

1) We will resemble God in character: God always shows love to all people, whether or not they live their lives in a way that honors God. For instance, he sends rain on their crops and not just on the crops of the believers. And he sends sunlight to all people. So if we are to resemble our heavenly Father, we must also be gracious and helpful to all people, those who are good to us and those who are mean to us.

2) We will evidence that we are changed people, different from unbelievers. People naturally do good things for their family and friends or for those who do good things to them. The most evil sinners like "tax collectors" and even idol worshipping "pagans" like the Gentiles do this. It takes no supernatural strength from the Holy Spirit to love those who are kind to us. But when we love those who are evil and mean to us, this takes supernatural strength. It comes from the Holy Spirit living in us. So it is one of the greatest evidences that following Jesus Christ has changed our lives, giving us supernatural power to live and do what others don't. Paul said that if we are believers, we are new "creations." (2 Cor. 5:17) One way we evidence we are totally changed is our attitude towards those who persecute us and do bad things to us. If we retaliate and treat them as enemies, this is an indication that we have not really changed in our hearts when we began to follow Jesus.

Q. 34. a) Describe situations Christians face when they can show love for their enemies. b) Describe situations when Christians often react to their enemies more like how the world reacts rather than how God treats his enemies. c) List some people who are your "enemies." Describe how you are evidencing your "love" for them. Take time to repent if you are not showing love in a way Jesus would want you to.

SUMMARY: IN ALL OF OUR LIVES, WE ARE TO BE PERFECT AS GOD IS PERFECT (Mt. 5:47)

The last sentence in Mt. 5:47 is a summary statement indicating Jesus' desire for all of his followers. In every area of our lives, whether it is our relationship with God or our relationship with others, we are supposed to be "perfect." We are to resemble our heavenly Father just like a small boy seeks to resemble his earthly father.

The word "perfect" can have different meanings.

First, it can refer to being totally pure and sinless. This is what God is. But it is impossible for any human on earth to ever reach sinless perfection. The Apostle John warns us that if we think we don't sin, we are lying. (1 Jn. 1:8) So absolute purity and sinlessness is something only God has, not humans. Clearly Jesus was not referring to this type of perfection.

Second, it can refer to not having moral blemishes. An animal brought to be sacrificed on the altar was called "perfect" if there were no blemishes. So Jesus could be saying that we should make it our standard to seek to live such morally upright lives that we are without defect. And when we do fall short of what Jesus desires, we confess that, receive the forgiveness he offers, and keep seeking to live our lives in a way that is under the rulership of Jesus. Jesus is saying that in his kingdom, his followers are to be upright, godly, seeking to be ethically pure.

Third, it means to be "mature." A child is changeable in character, acting with great love one minute and in selfish anger the next. But a mature person controls his life and actions so that they are lived with greater purpose. Jesus is telling his followers that we are never to be satisfied just in being followers of Jesus who do not grow up spiritually. Nor are we to demonstrate selfishness and self-centeredness, the

primary character of children. Rather, we are to be mature, choosing to submit to Jesus and live in a way that honors him.

Of course there are many more parts of our lives which Jesus did not talk about which we need to examine to make sure we are resembling God. What about tribalism? What about our relationship with despised people in our community? What about how we view work and how hard we work? Jesus does not mention these, but we should examine our lives to make sure we are honoring Jesus in these areas as well. Jesus has given us some examples of what it means to follow Jesus. It means that we go beyond certain external rules which are relatively easy to change. We begin to look at our attitudes to see if they are what Jesus would want. And when we look deep into our hearts, seeing the wrong attitudes we have towards different people, we will begin to change. And as we change, then we are "perfect," acting as mature followers of Jesus. Is this easy? No. But Jesus is challenging us to keep growing. As Paul reminded us, being the followers of Jesus means that we are daily being changed into the image of Jesus. (2 Cor. 3:18)

The Gospel is a combination of maintaining a perfect standard with offering total grace. Christianity does not say "it does not matter what you do since God will forgive you no matter what." God's ideal is perfection; he wants us to be pure like he is pure. But the Gospel also insists that knowing how far we fall short of God's ideal standard, there is grace for those who repent and turn to Jesus. So rather than becoming angry at those who do not fulfill these teachings, Jesus invites the sinners to come to him for forgiveness. But once we are followers of Jesus, Jesus asks us to seek to live in a way that reflects we are his followers. Even if we never reach the ideal, we still work to grow increasingly into the image of God.

Q. 35. a) List some other areas of life where Christians often harbor attitudes and actions which do not honor Jesus' desires. b) What are some areas of your life that the Holy Spirit is asking you to address to change to be more "perfect?" c) Make a list of things you can do to change in those areas.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) List the twelve apostles and summarize what we know about each one; his occupation before meeting Jesus and the cost which following Jesus brought him. What lessons about church leadership can we learn from this? b) Contrast what type of people Jesus chose for church leadership to the type of people usually chosen as church leaders today. How is it similar? How is it different? What lessons can we learn from the type of people Jesus chose for church leaders? c) What can we learn from Jesus' training methods about how church leaders could be better prepared to serve in our churches?

2. a) In his sermon on the mount, Jesus offers hope to the poor and warnings to the rich. Why do the poor have an easier time understanding the Gospel than the rich? b) If Jesus' ministry found most acceptance among the poor, do you think most churches today also focus upon the poor, or are they looking for the rich or the highly respected people in society? What does this reveal about our attitudes towards the poor that goes against the attitude God and Jesus had?

3. a) List the eight beatitudes and the four woes and describe what each means. Contrast it to how the world views that blessing or curse. b) List the eight different rewards each character brings to the follower of Jesus. What does the reward mean? How is the reward different from what the world

classifies as blessing? Discuss whether or not the church focuses upon Jesus' rewards or the world's type of blessings.

4. Christians are compared to salt and light. a) In what way does Jesus want us to be like salt and light? What in their characteristics are we to resemble? b) Discuss what salt-like characteristics your church could have in your community. Where is it like salt, and where is it like salt that has lost its flavor? c) Discuss what light-like characteristics your church should have in your community. How well is your church fulfilling its calling to be light? d) Discuss things your church could do to become better salt and light.

5. Jesus told his followers that their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. a) What did Jesus mean by this statement? What is different about the righteousness Jesus sought as compared to the righteousness the Pharisees sought? Discuss which type of righteousness your church is focusing upon. b) Discuss things believers do to appear righteous. List ways those actions can be done with improper motives. c) Many sermons focus upon changing actions. Discuss whether or not enough attention is given to changing motives and attitudes. d) Discuss the implications of the different things Jesus taught about lust, anger, love for ones' enemies, and not giving oaths. What are specific ways Christians could apply each of these truths?

LESSON ELEVEN

FIRST DAY

Cherinet served in his church as a program leader and the head of the youth group. One day he went to a crusade put on by a world famous speaker. He was greatly impressed with this speaker. He noticed that the speaker often prayed with a voice which trembled and with great shouts of "halleluiahs." He also noticed that when he preached, he was very dramatic, waving his hands, pacing back and forth, and with loud shouts. "That is what it means to be a spiritually powerful minister. I want to be like him. Look how people are impressed with this speaker. I want to also impress people in my church" he thought. The next time he was given the opportunity to pray in church, he changed his voice so that it trembled and would often break out in loud "halleluiahs" and "amens." And when he got the opportunity to preach, he paced, shouted, and waved his hands just like the famous speaker he had seen. "Now I can become famous too" he thought.

Q. 1. Describe situations where you have seen people in the choir, preachers, and program leaders copy what others are doing so that they can impress people.

We saw last week that after choosing his disciples, Jesus wanted to teach them what life is to be like as his followers. He taught them that they must change from the inside out by changing their character and motives. He also told them that they need to relate to others in a much different way than people normally do, even loving their enemies. Jesus, also knew that his disciples would soon find themselves as the spiritual leaders of the church. So he wanted to warn them against special temptations people face when they stand in front of others as the spiritual leaders. As they lead singing, pray, or preach, it would be easy for them to have a wrong attitude towards their ministry. So Jesus describes how various spiritual ministries can either be performed in a hypocritical way or in the proper God-honoring way.

Q. 2. Read Mt. 6:1-18. a) List the three different spiritual practices which Jesus described in this section. b) Explain how those spiritual practices were often fulfilled in the wrong way. c) How should those spiritual practices be fulfilled if they were done in a way that Jesus approved of?

WARNING AGAINST HYPOCRISY IN SPIRITUAL MINISTRIES (Mt. 6:1-18)

1. General principle: Don't seek to appear spiritual in the eyes of people by the way that you minister (Mt. 6:1)

When Jesus started his Sermon on the Mountain, he told his followers that their righteousness must be greater than the Pharisees. We saw last week that the righteousness of Jesus' followers is to be greater in that it focuses upon sins hidden in the heart rather than just fulfilling external laws. Another way that Jesus warns his followers that their righteousness is to be greater than the Pharisees is by making sure that how they fulfill their spiritual ministries is done between themselves and God and not in order to impress people.

To the Jews, there were three major activities which defined what it meant to be a spiritual person. Jesus called these three things "*acts of righteousness*:" giving alms to the poor, praying, and fasting. These spiritual acts are important for a follower of Jesus. But the problem is that Satan can often corrupt the

purpose for which we do these ministries. Often we can turn them into ways to demonstrate our spirituality to others rather than something that we do simply out of love for others or love for God.

Jesus calls this desire to impress people with our spirituality by changing how we act when ministering "hypocrisy." The Greek word for hypocrisy was used for actors in a drama where a person pretends to be someone he isn't. While this is fine in a drama, this is very dangerous in our relationship to God. A person is a hypocrite any time he pretends to be spiritual when he does something which isn't natural to him. The act itself is not wrong, but the motive is since the reason he does something is to impress people with his spirituality. And so, like Cherinet in our story above, we begin to pretend to be spiritual in how we pray in church or in a Bible study, how we preach, or how we give a donation for a church building. If a) our motive is to impress people rather than coming naturally from our hearts, or b) if what we say to others and how we live is different, we have fallen into the sin of hypocrisy. For instance if we pray with spiritually sounding words just to show off our knowledge, then we are sinning. Or if as we preach we tell others they should witness but we aren't witnessing, we are committing the sin of hypocrisy. A careful study of the Gospels shows that it was this sin of hypocrisy greatly concerned Jesus. To him it was more destructive spiritually than adultery or drunkenness since it is so common. Because this sin is most frequently seen in the life of those who minister before others (e.g. choir, preachers, program leaders), Jesus would often accuse the Pharisees of this sin.

Jesus said that the motive for performing ministry hypocritically is *"to be seen by people."* In otherwise, if we give so people can see us and be impressed by our giving to God, if we pray before people in a way that we want to impress them, or if as we sing in the choir we do things that seeks to show off our spirituality- what we are doing is done with the motive to impress people. Jesus said that when we do this we receive our reward. What is this reward? It is the praise and honor of people as they look at us and praise us for being spiritual. But Jesus insisted that God won't reward us. If we are to be rewarded by God, then we must preach, pray, or sing out of a heart seeking to honor God. How we pray or sing in private won't be any different from how we pray or sing in public.

What is the reward God promises? We don't know. Almost every reward that Jesus promised his followers was a reward that came after death when they were in heaven. He did not promise riches, big houses, or good jobs. Rather, he promised that they would be honored by God in heaven. The New Testament teaches that what we do and how we do things here on earth will change how we spend our time in eternity. The Bible does not encourage us to do things with the primary purpose to receive a reward from God. Jesus told his disciples "If you love me you will keep my commandments." (Jn. 14:15) Love for God and love for others is to be the primary motive for when we give, pray, or preach. But the Bible does say that we will be rewarded for faithful service. No little act we do with proper motives is ever overlooked. Jesus would later teach that even a glass of cold water given to a thirsty person will be rewarded. (Mt. 10:42)

(Note: We should be very careful not to base our understanding of reward upon the Old Testament. God told the Jews that he would bless them physically on earth for obedience. But the New Testament never focuses upon physical blessings. God will often bless us with material possessions if we prove faithful in how we use our money to serve him. He does this so that we can give even more generously to others. And we are often indirectly blessed with material blessings when we become Christians because we no longer waste our money on things like drink and chatt, or we work harder than others and therefore receive better

jobs. But there is no teaching in the New Testament that if we give 100 Ethiopian birr to God, he is obligated to give us 200 Ethiopian birr. This is a false teaching we must be careful of.)

Q. 3. a) Make a list of things which Christians do that are vulnerable to the sin of hypocrisy. b) Describe the difference between how we do things with hypocrisy and how we do things with proper motives. c) Describe a situation in your own life where you did something hypocritically. d) Why is this sin more often found among church leaders and those who sing, preach, or lead services?

2. The spiritual ministry of giving to the needy (Mt. 6:2-4)

The first spiritual act which Jesus addressed was giving to the poor. The Old Testament encouraged God's people to be generous to the poor and to help them. But during the Intertestamental times, the Jewish understanding of giving to the poor changed. No longer was it performed out of love for people, but it was seen as a way to earn their salvation. They began to teach that giving to the poor was how people demonstrated their righteousness. Giving to the poor became the major "good deed" that they were to do. It became viewed almost as if they could buy God's blessing by their gifts. In the Temple there were special boxes where people came to put their offering to the poor. The priests would then distribute the gifts to the poor. The New Testament strongly encourages us to give generously to the poor to help them in their difficult situations.

The problem with people like the Pharisees was not that they were not giving to the poor, but in the reason why they were giving. Their giving was done to show off their spirituality. Scholars do not know what Jesus meant by announcing their giving with trumpets. Some think that when the Pharisees were going to give a large gift to the poor, they would hire someone to blow a trumpet to announce their gift. This would be similar to someone in church announcing loudly "so-and-so has given 1000 Ethiopian birr to buy choir robes." Or the Pharisees would openly display their money when giving to a beggar wanting to show off their spirituality. "Look how spiritual I am. I have given a large gift to the poor" they were saying through their actions.

Jesus said that they had their reward. Just like when we buy something in the store and they give us a receipt stamped "paid," in the same way God looks at that act and says "Paid." You have received the honor of others. There is nothing else that you will receive.

Jesus warned his followers that their giving must be done in a totally different way. It is to be done out of the motive to honor God and help others, not to be seen. Jesus said that usually it is best to be so secretive in our giving that it is as if our right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. This is a figure of speech indicating that we are to give without show as if the right hand does not pay attention to what the left hand is doing. When we do not reveal what we are giving, we might not receive the honor of others. But God sees what we gave secretly and he honors us and will reward us in heaven.

Could Jesus be warning against any practice in the church which encourages people towards getting honor through public acknowledgement of our giving? That can be listing our gifts in a book which people see, or having our name read out, or as some church do, putting our name on a plaque on the wall with the amount of gift. Even though the giver might have given with genuine motives, it is often used as a trap by Satan to introduce hypocrisy in giving.

There are different reasons people can give to help the poor.

First, we can give because we want the person who is asking for money to go away. When a beggar comes to us, we give them 50 cents just so they stop begging.

Second, we can give out of a sense of duty or because it is a habit. Many of us simply give our tithe to the church or we help out a poor person because we are told to by God or because it is our habit.

Third, we can give money out of a sense of seeking to be honored by people. This is especially seen when we are doing a public fund raising program. "So-and-so has given a cow. How much will you give?" says the fund raiser as he gets people into a sense of competition to show off their giving. This is what the Pharisees were doing and which Jesus strongly warned against.

Fourth, we can give money because in our hearts we feel compassion to those who have less than us. We hurt over their poverty, not having jobs, or their losing their husband or parents and so we generously give. Or we give because we are so grateful for how God has blessed us and we want to thank him for his generosity to us by giving money back to him for his glory. This is the only motive that truly brings honor to God.

Q. 4. a) Describe ways you have given in each of the four ways described above. b) Would Jesus approve of how we raise money for churches where we openly list who has given donations and how much they have given? Explain your answer. c) Protestants are often accused by people in other religions of not caring for the poor but only preach salvation. Do you think this is true? Explain your answer.

3. The spiritual ministry of public prayer (Mt. 6:5-15)

Like Christians, Jews placed a high value on prayer. "He who prays within his house surrounds it with a wall stronger than iron" was one of their sayings. Jesus knew from personal experience how valuable prayer was. He had just spent all night in prayer praying for God's direction in choosing the apostles. The book of Luke frequently tells us that Jesus went away alone to a quiet place to pray. To Jesus, prayer was not just the way to ask God to give us something or do something for us. Rather, it is how humans fellowship with God. But even this most important spiritual discipline is open to abuse, especially when prayer is done in public. There are several ways prayer is vulnerable to the sin of hypocrisy:

a. Prayer can be done in a way to show off our spirituality. When the Pharisees were in a synagogue, they were often asked to pray, and so they would stand up and in a spiritually sounding voice pray long prayers. Jews also had two times during the day when they were supposed to pray- at 9 AM and 3 PM. If the Pharisees were walking through the market when the time of prayer arrived, they would stop, raise their heads and hands towards heaven and begin to pray. In both of these cases, their primary thought in prayer was not talking to God, but to reveal their spirituality to people. Jesus said the honor of the people listening was the only reward they would get. God would not listen to their prayers.

Jesus said that our attitude should be different. Prayer is a private meeting between us and God. Therefore, it is as if we go into the most hidden part of our homes and pray there. The poorer Jews only had one room in their homes which was lockable. That was the storeroom in the inner part of their home where they stored grain and other things. Jesus said since most of the other rooms of the house were filled with people, they were to go to the one place no one else was, their storeroom, and pray before God. There in the hidden place, they could talk with God. And God honored and rewarded his children when they talked to him privately.

Jesus is not against public prayer. But he warns us that when we pray in public, we are in danger of wrong motives which change why we are praying. Prayer is always to be for us to focus our attention upon God and communicate with him what is in our hearts. It is never to be done with people in mind seeking to impress them. If we pray differently (i.e., longer, with trembling voices, with tears, louder, with repeated "hallelujahs" and "amens") in church than we do in our homes, there is a good chance that we are praying seeking to impress people rather than just talking to God. Or if we use our prayers to preach at people, then we are abusing prayer. Prayer is for us to talk to God, not for us to talk to people. Or if we use our prayers to show off our Biblical knowledge, then our motive is wrong. Jesus says that prayer is between us and God, and it should be simple rather than filled with religious words.

b. We can begin to think that by repeating certain words ("*babbling*") we can force God to do something for us. Jesus is referring to something that "pagans" or Gentiles often did in prayer. Even though the Jews did not use the same words as the Gentiles, they also thought that they could force God to do what they wanted by saying certain words. (Christians can have similar ideas when we use certain expressions like "in Jesus name" thinking God is then obligated to answer us.) Or the Jews thought that if they kept repeating their request long enough, God would get tired and give them what they want. But this is the wrong attitude towards prayer and towards God. God is our Creator and Lord. We can never force him to do anything. Rather, we are to come in humility asking him to listen to our prayers. God knows our minds. He does not need to hear our words to know what we are praying. So the loudness of our prayers, or the repetition of our prayers adds nothing. God is our loving Father who is concerned about our real needs- he does not have to be worn down through repeated requests.

c. We often think a longer prayer is more effective than a short prayer. How many of us when we pray to thank God for our food, if others are listening, no longer pray a simple prayer of thanks, but a long prayer? Why do we do this? Is it because we want to appear more spiritual before our friends? Maybe also because we think that the longer the prayer, the most powerful it will be. But it is the heart that matters, not the length of our prayers. So a two minute prayer asking God to heal us is as powerful as a one hour prayer asking God to heal us. There are times God asks us to persevere in prayer to help us grow in faith and to show our earnestness, but never in a way where length of prayer is seen as having more power than shorter prayers.

There are also other ways that we can abuse prayer.

d. We can formalize prayer so that we say the words without thinking. The Jews liked to have set prayers which they would pray for every circumstance of life. So when they left their house, they had a certain prayer. Or when they ate, they had another memorized prayer. But they rarely thought about what they were praying- it was only done out of habit. Often when Christians pray for their meal, they say the same words every time. For instance, we often hear words like "Give from your storeroom to those who have nothing." We are so used to praying this common phrase that most likely we are saying something without even thinking about it. A prayer that does not come from conscious thought and from our hearts is of no value. It is not just what we pray, but whether or not we mean what we say that is important.

We can also do the same thing with certain words or phrases which we often use without thinking. One thing we often do in prayer is to mention one or more of the names of God without thinking. For instance, we can pray "I thank you, God, for your help, Jesus, for loving me, God..." We are warned by God to never use his name in a thoughtless way. (Ex. 20:7) I wonder if we are not often guilty of breaking this

commandment in our prayers when we repeatedly use God's name without thought and reverence? Or if we use the Jewish word "hallelujah" or "amen" with no thought to what they mean.

e. We fill our prayers with religious words that sound good, but are not natural to us. Every prayer of Jesus that is seen in the Gospels is very simple. It flows from the heart. It is insightful to listen to a prayer of a little child. What is on their hearts is what they say without any extra religious words. Or listen to the prayer of a new believer- it comes from the heart and is not filled with unnatural words.

f. We think that a certain place makes our prayers more effective. The Jews thought that God heard them best in the synagogue, and especially in the Temple. So rather than pray at home, they would walk to the synagogue or Temple to pray. Or they would often turn towards the Temple when praying as if that made their prayers more effective. Perhaps there are Christians who are mistaken this way as well. One name for the church building is "house of prayer." Could this reflect a thinking that that is where we should pray? But God is found everywhere. He is in our home. He is at work. And he is with us when we are in church. The New Testament never teaches that God dwells in a house. A church building is only a building where people gather for worship- it is not where God lives. Rather, Paul said that it is the individual believer and the community of believers who are God's temple. (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19) Paul tells us to "pray continually." (1 Thes. 5:17) Surely this means that we are able to commune with God in our hearts no matter where we are located!

g. We think that prayer is primarily to be so we can request things from God. Many of us think that God's primary purpose is to help us. We have something we want from God, so we go to him and tell him to give it to us. We treat God like some big donor, asking him to meet our needs so life will be easy for us. We forget that God's desire is to fellowship with us- to talk with us like two friends talk to each other. And we forget that God is the Great Creator- and we are creatures created and saved so that we can glorify him. (Eph. 1:12) One of the major ways we honor God is by praising him and thanking him in prayer.

Q. 5. Review the six ways we abuse prayer. For each point, describe a way you have seen the abuse in your life and in the church.

Q. 6. Read Mt. 6:9-10. a) What name does Jesus call God? b) What three requests does Jesus tell us to pray first?

How prayer works is one of the mysteries of the Bible. Jesus said that prayer is not necessary to let God know our needs. He knows what we think and need before we ever pray. (Mt. 6:8) But God has told us to pray to him. And he has told us that in some unknown way our prayers make a difference in our lives and in what happens in the world. Most importantly, in prayer we can fellowship with God, something he enjoys.

Jesus wanted to teach his followers what a God-honoring prayer should be like. (Note: Luke 11:1-4 says the disciples asked Jesus how to pray.) So Jesus gave the apostles a model prayer for them to pattern their prayers after. This is not a prayer that Jesus would pray for himself- so it is not the "Lord's prayer" as it is often called. Rather, it was given to the disciples for them to pray, so it should be called "the disciples' prayer." And it's purpose is not to close our church service with. Although it is fine for us to use this prayer at the end of our church service as long as we say it with meaning, Jesus gave this prayer as model for our prayers to God.

It is important to notice the order of requests and the attitude behind the requests. The prayer is divided into two major sections. Jesus starts with three requests that are addressed to God expressing our desire for God's honor and glory. The second section has four requests asking God for help. Notice the following things in this model prayer:

1. How God is addressed in prayer: "*Our Father in heaven.*" Jews were very concerned that they honor God. And to them honor meant that God was great and powerful, far removed from people. They were so concerned about never stating the name of God with irreverence as taught in the third commandment that often they would not even use the name God in prayer. In fact, the major name for God in the Old Testament, "Yahweh," is no longer clear how it is to be pronounced since Jews stopped saying the name. Although it is good to have a deep reverence for God, this leads some people to a wrong idea. We can begin to think that God is far removed and indifferent to us rather than like a loving father. There is another difference in how Jesus addressed God. Jesus only mentioned one simple name for God. The Jews often sought to list as many names or characteristics for God as they could believing this made their prayers more special. Jesus gave no indication that we are to fill up our prayers with many names for God.

In his model prayer, Jesus wants us to keep two truths about God in balance.

First, we must come to God in prayer with the realization that he is our "*Father.*" Jesus used the word "Abba" to refer to God. (Mk. 14:36; Rom. 8:15) The word "abba" was the term for "father" used by small children in the home- similar to how small children can say "Daddy." No Jew would have ever used such a familiar, loving term for God. But Jesus wanted his followers to know that when we came to God in prayer, we come not to a distant, removed, judgmental God. Rather, we come to one who is deeply concerned about our personal needs, much better than any earthly father. (Note: Jesus used the word "*our*" Father within the context of those who are his followers. Jesus is saying that because they were his followers, the disciples had a relationship with God which made him their Father. People who are not in a relationship with God where they are followers of Jesus cannot claim to have God as their Father in the same way. This is a prayer that only true followers of Jesus can pray. It was not a prayer that non-Christians should pray thinking that God would hear them just because they repeated the words. In fact, the early church often forbade non-Christians from praying this prayer because it would be a lie.)

Second, we must also remember that God is "*in heaven.*" This is to remind us that we should not treat God with lightly. He does love us, but he is still the great God. He is the one who created us and the world. The author of Hebrews warns us that God is a "consuming fire." (Heb. 12:29) Any attitude in prayer that treats God with lack of respect, honor, and godly fear is not biblical prayer. If we have the idea that God exists primarily to meet our needs, we have forgotten that God is the almighty, powerful God who deserves our worship and obedience whether or not he does the things we want.

Q. 7. Do you think most Christians combine both a loving relationship with God and reverence of him in their lives and prayer? Explain your answer.

2. Three requests we pray seeking for God to be honored: Jesus knowingly started his model prayer not with the personal requests we want to ask God to do for us, but with requests expressing our desires of wanting God to be honored. This is important, because it puts us and God in the proper relationship. If we start our prayers focusing upon our needs, slowly we begin to think God exists to serve us. We are the "lord" ordering God, whom we treat as our servant, to do something for us. But when we start focusing

upon God, it causes us to remember that he is the Lord and we are his servants. We are supposed to glorify Him. Jesus mentioned three requests we can pray on behalf of God showing our desire for his honor and reflecting our relationship to God:

a. *"May your name be made holy:"* There are two words which we must understand in this request. First is the word *"holy."* The word holy means to be separate, distinct. So we are praying "God, I want your name to be treated differently from all other names, with reverence, honor, and respect." The second word is *"name."* We often focus upon the actual name of a person- like Tesfaye or Wubinesh. Or when referring to God, we focus upon the actual name like Jesus or God. But the Jews used the expression "name of God" or "name of Jesus" in a different way. For the Jews, this phrase "name of God" referred to all that God is: his nature, character, and personality. In many ways it was just another way for them to say God. So when they say the name of God is a strong tower, they are actually saying God is a strong tower. (Prov. 18:10) Or in Ps. 9:10, the Psalmist is saying that those who know the nature and character of God (not just the sound of his name) can truly trust him. So Jesus is telling us to pray "God, enable us to give you the unique place in our lives and in our church as your nature and character deserve. Through our lives, may you be revered, honored, and glorified."

But how does this prayer request turn into reality? It is answered when we live our lives in such a way that everything we do honors Jesus. As we develop the character described in the beatitudes and as we have relationships with others that are exemplary, as we submit our total lives to Jesus and live in a way that honors him, then Jesus is respected and honored by others. So as we are praying this we are saying "God, I want you to change my life so that as people see me, they honor you. And I want our church to live in such holiness and love that people will respect and honor Jesus. And above all, I long for the day when all, even his enemies, will bow before Jesus to honor him." (Phil. 2:9-10)

b. *"May your kingdom come:"* We saw earlier that the Jews understood the word *"kingdom"* to refer to anywhere that God is reigning. When Jesus preached "the kingdom of God had arrived," he was referring to God's rule over the hearts and lives of people. But Jesus also taught that one day a kingdom would come when God alone would reign in full power. No longer will evil and Satan fight against God. When Jesus gave us this request to pray, he wanted us to think at three levels. First, personally, we are saying to God "I want you to reign over my life in total authority. I want to submit to your kingly rule- not to my selfish desires or to the world. Come rule in me." Second, for the church we are praying "God, as a community we are your kingdom. I want you to rule in all of your power and authority in the church, making us a society of people who live totally submitted to your rule." Third, for the world we are praying "God, we long for the day when Jesus returns to rule over the world. We are tired of all the evil in the world. Please start that kingdom where Jesus reigns and there is justice. Keep us from placing our hope and affections in this world. Keep us longing for that coming kingdom. And help us to change our world now so that it is more under your authority. Until you come Jesus, we will preach your Gospel to the world so more people can come under your reign."

c. *"May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven:"* Often when the Jews wanted to emphasize something, they repeated their idea in similar words. So this third request closely relates to the second request about God's kingdom. We could say God's kingdom is anytime his will is being fulfilled, for then he is reigning. There is currently one place where God's will is always done with no resistance. That is in heaven. On earth, Satan and the philosophies of the world, false religions, and nations stand in opposition to God's will. And people usually resist obeying God. Even those who claim to follow Jesus struggle with

letting God reign in absolute authority over their lives. And yet those who follow Jesus are to have as the prime desire of their lives that God's will take place in their lives. They do not come to God in prayer with the attitude "God I want you to do what I want." Rather, they say "God, I want to do what you want. I want the blessings in my life that you want for me. I want the work that you want me to have. I want the character than you want me to have." This is what is meant when we pray "not my will, but yours be done." When we pray for God's will to be done in our lives, we are asking God to work in our hearts so that what we want and ask is what he wants to happen. It is the same way when we come with prayer requests for the church and the world we are saying "God, we really do not know what to pray in these situations. But our major desire is that your will take place. Do you want to heal so and so? If so, please do it. And do you want us to build a new church building? If so, help us do it."

It is not so much the "words" that matter in this prayer. Rather these requests are to reflect how we approach God in prayer. We do not start seeking to get God to do what we want. Rather, our prayers reflect our commitment and desire to submit to God's authority. We get rid of all selfishness in our prayers by praying that only God's will be accomplished.

Q. 8. a) Consider your attitude when you pray. 1) How does your attitude combine loving familiarity with fearful reverence? 2) How does your prayer requests reflect your desire for God to be honored? 3) How does your prayer requests reflect that you come to God submitting to his kingly rule and asking only for his kingdom and will to be done? b) Think about the attitude towards prayer in your church. What would need to change in how people often view prayer for them to fulfill Jesus' desire in teaching this model prayer?

SECOND DAY

Prayer is one area of our spiritual life which is susceptible to hypocrisy. Jesus wanted to help us understand the attitudes that should be reflected in our prayers in order for them to be honoring to God. And so Jesus taught his followers that before we ever begin to pray for our own desires, we need to make sure that our hearts and lives reflect our desires that God alone be honored, and that in our lives, church, and world, God will reign as people submit to do his will. Jesus is also warning us not to hurry to give our requests. Stop and honor God. Submit to his kingly rule over your life. Submit yourself to his will. Only then are you in the right relationship with him to properly ask him things you need.

Q. 9. Read Mt. 6:11-13. List the four requests Jesus asks us to pray for ourselves:

3. Four requests we should pray for ourselves: Only after preparing our hearts and putting ourselves into the proper relationship with God can we then begin to pray about ourselves and others.

a. *"Give us for today our daily bread."* Foundational to being a follower of Jesus is to learn to depend upon God for all things. We saw earlier that the "poor in spirit" are those who live looking to God to supply their needs. In his model prayer, Jesus told his disciples to show their dependence upon God by asking God to supply their needs for each day. Jesus was teaching the disciples that they must have the same type of attitude the Israelites had to learn in the wilderness when they gathered manna. Their manna was for each day; they could not store it up. (Ex. 16)

In Jesus' days, most workers were paid at the end of each day, and the money they received was just enough for food for the family for that day. Jesus is teaching two major truths. First, he is saying that no matter if we have a job or not, money or not- we must learn to live depending upon him for all of our needs. Every day we are to come before God and humbly ask him to provide for us for that day. This puts us in the right relationship to God- looking to him as the one who supplies our needs and we are dependent upon him. Second, Jesus is teaching that we must make sure that our requests for God are not based upon selfish desires. Jesus asks us to pray for our needs, not our wants. Of course it is fine to ask God for things that we wish for and God often graciously gives us more than we need. But we are to focus upon things we need to live.

There are two hidden truths in this passage which we must also remember. How does God answer this prayer to give us daily bread? Does it come from heaven like manna did? No.

First, God expects us to diligently work and he provides for most of our needs through the jobs he gives us or our hard work in the fields. In almost every one of our requests, we turn to God asking for his help. But God also expects us to do our part. For instance, God commanded the Jews to fight to enter Canaan even though it was given to them by God. We turn to God asking for help to defeat Satan, but God also expects us to fight Satan by learning God's Word, praying, and not putting ourselves in situations that we can be tempted.

Second, God meets our needs through the family of God. That is why Jesus said "*give us*" reflecting that we are within a community of the followers of God. When we lose our jobs or something happens that we do not have the necessities of life, Jesus expects the others to help us. When we pray "God, give from your table something to eat to those who have no food." God in turn says to us "The way I give is when you give some of your food to them." We must be careful that we don't use prayer to try to avoid our responsibility to help those in need.

Q. 10. a) Examine your prayer requests. Explain how they show dependence upon God for daily necessities. How do they sometimes show selfish desires? b) Describe ways God wants to use you as the answer to your prayer to help those who have no food or face trouble.

b. "*Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors:*" The Jews used the word "debts" to refer to sins which they committed which harmed others. The word indicates that every time we sin, we are failing to give to God or others or do for them what they deserve and therefore we are in debt to them. Jesus is telling his followers that we are to cleanse our lives every day of the sins which we commit against him and against others. As followers of Jesus, we need to develop a deep sense of our sinfulness and the need for daily cleansing. (1 Jn. 1:9) And we must always remember that we stand before God dependent upon his grace and forgiveness. We can never be holy enough that we do not need this daily forgiveness.

(Note: Although all of the debts for our sins was paid on the cross of Christ and God says we are righteous (Rom. 4:24-25), when we sin our fellowship with God is hindered and confession restores an open relationship with God.)

This was one of the most important requests Jesus taught his followers to pray. He wanted his followers to understand this request, so he explained it further in Mt. 6:14-15. And yet few of us think about what this request actually says. The way the Greek reads is that we are asking God to forgive us since we

have already forgiven our brother in Christ who has offended us in some way. What we are saying in our prayer is that we want God to forgive us our sins in proportion to our willingness to forgive others when they hurt us. We don't expect God to forgive us if we haven't forgiven someone else. Jesus insisted that forgiveness from God for the many sins we commit against him is dependent upon us forgiving others of the few sins they commit against us.

(See Mt. 18:22-35 for a parable which describes why people who refuse to forgive others are not forgiven their sins. It teaches that those who refuse to forgive the sins that others commit against them usually do not understand the Gospel, and therefore are not forgiven by God. Usually when we refuse to forgive someone of their sins, we think our own sins are not very bad. So we don't come to God in a true repentant spirit.)

And yet how many Christians have never forgiven others who have hurt them in some way? With our churches filled with people who refuse to relate to each other and hold grudges against each other, this means there are many in our churches who live without God's forgiveness for their sins. They might be church elders, or choir members or evangelists, but if they refuse to repair their broken relationships and forgive each other, they are ministering without the forgiveness of God. There are some who say "I forgive them. But I never want to talk to them again." But this is not true forgiveness. God does not treat us this way. To forgive means that we have turned the matter over to God and desire what is good for the person. We treat the person as if he has never sinned against us.

Q. 11. a) Do you think most Christians understand this truth that they will not be forgiven by God until they forgive others who have hurt them? Explain your answer. b) Examine your own life. Are there people or tribes you have not forgiven? What can you do to forgive them and repair your relationship with them?

c. *"Don't lead us into temptation:"* The Greek word for "temptation" or "test" has two meanings which can only be distinguished by the context. Therefore, it is not clear which meaning of tests Jesus meant.

First, it can refer to being tempted to sin. It is used of Satan when he tempted Jesus to sin. (Mt. 4:1-11) James tells us that God never directly tempts us to sin. (Jms. 1:13-15) This means that Jesus was not saying that we should ask God not to tempt us to do evil. Temptation to sin is the combined work of Satan and our own sinful nature. It is clear from Scripture that being tempted by Satan and our sin nature is a permanent part of life on earth. So Jesus is not telling us to pray that we will never face any temptation. Perhaps Jesus meant that we should ask God to keep us from situations where the temptations of Satan will overcome us. Or we are praying "let us not be overcome when we face temptation." Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 10:13 that God will never allow us to face a temptation that is beyond our ability to withstand. He will provide a way out but we can still chose to sin.

Second, the Greek word can mean "test" like when we take a test in school. The purpose of a spiritual test is to evaluate our moral strength and character and to help us to grow. God often does this. (See 1 Pet. 1:6-7) He allows us to face situations like persecution. On one hand those situations test how strong our trust in God is and our willingness to obey God. On the other hand, those tests are often the tool God uses to help us to grow in character. God is more concerned with the quality of our character and faith than with giving us an easy life filled with material blessings. So he knowingly brings tests into our lives. He does not want us to fail, but to encourage us to grow even more in our faith. God's Word promises us that facing tests is part of living, for those whom God loves he disciplines. (Heb. 12:5-11) In this prayer,

if Jesus meant "tests," he is encouraging us to ask God to oversee all events that come into our lives for that day so that it is not beyond our ability to obey God.

d. "*Deliver us from the evil one*:" It is not clear in the Greek whether Jesus is saying we are to pray that God deliver us from an evil temptation or from the evil one, Satan. Most likely Jesus was telling us to ask God to help us not to fall into a situation where Satan can test us beyond our endurance and to protect us from Satan's purposes. This request is related to the one above. The followers of Jesus need to understand that we are facing the firm resistance of God's enemy, Satan. Like a lion, he wants to attack us just like Satan had attacked Jesus in the wilderness. From this prayer and the rest of the Bible we can learn the following things about the believer resisting Satan:

First, we can never resist Satan in our own strength. Here Jesus is telling us to pray to God for the strength to overcome anything that Satan brings against us. It might be external situations like sickness or persecution. Or it might be internal situations like temptation to sin. We can never defeat Satan ourselves, but we must call out to God for strength. It is interesting that Jesus did not say pray against Satan. Rather, Jesus teaches that one major way we overcome Satan is by praying to God for his help.

Second, God can deliver us from Satan in two ways. He can **take us out** of the situation or stop Satan from tempting us. So there are times when because of our prayers, Jesus stops Satan from attacking us or tempting us. Or God can **keep us strong in** temptation. Like Daniel's three friends, God may not keep us from the fire of temptation, but he keeps us strong in the midst of the attack. (Dan. 3)

Third, although God promises to control the situation and give us the strength so that it is never beyond our ability to defeat Satan, he gives us a part in defeating Satan. He asks us to pray for his help so that we depend upon him for strength to overcome. He expects us to learn Scripture so that we can know what God wants and quote Scripture to Satan to refute his attack like Jesus did. (Mt. 4:1-11) He expects us to use wisdom so that we do not allow ourselves to get into a situation where we will fall. For example, Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife and did not stay there arguing with her.

Q. 12. a) Which of these truths do many Christians not understand about how to overcome Satan and therefore are often defeated? b) Think about a time when Satan defeated you. Which of these three things did you forget and therefore you fell into sin.

Most scholars think that in the original book of Matthew, the words "*for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen*" were not included. Rather, when the church turned this prayer into a liturgical prayer for church, they added these statements from the book of Revelation to be a fitting closure to the prayer.

Q. Read Mt. 6:16-18. Summarize Jesus' teaching about fasting.

4. The spiritual ministry of fasting (Mt. 6:16-18)

The final spiritual "act" which Jesus talked about was fasting. In the Old Testament, there was only one prescribed fast for the nation of Israel. On the Day of Atonement, they were to fast as they prepared themselves for the forgiveness God would give to them that day. (Lev. 16:29-31) However, when the Jews faced a crisis situation, they would often fast and pray to God for deliverance. Towards the end of the Old

Testament, after the time in captivity, the Jews established days of fasting when in sorrow they remembered different events in their history like the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. (Zech. 7:4-6, 8:19) During the Intertestamental period, religious Jews like the Pharisees established Tuesday and Thursday as their days of fasting. For the Jews, the purpose of fasting became a time to sorrow over the past. Although Jesus never told his followers not to fast, he did not place much of an emphasis upon it. In the book of Acts, we primarily read about Christians fasting when they had a very important decision that they had to make, like choosing church leaders. (Acts 13:2; 14:23) It was always combined with prayer as God's people sought God's will in a difficult situation.

In Jewish life, fasting was always joined with prayer. It was not the act of fasting by itself that made the difference. The Jews saw fasting as having three major purposes. First, it drew God's attention to their situation as they pled with God to deliver them or answer their prayer. Second, it expressed the deep sorrow they felt over their sin, asking God to forgive them. Third, it was a way for God's people to ask God to help them and others, especially their nation.

When the Jews fasted, they did not eat any food during that period, usually from sun up to sunset. They also did not wash their faces, allowed their hair to become untidy, and put on old and dirty clothes. The Pharisees would also put white chalk on their face to enhance the expression of sorrow.

Like any spiritual act, what is good can easily be corrupted by wrong attitudes. Four wrong things developed in the Jewish fasts, just like they can for us today.

First, fasting became a ritual done without a clear purpose. So the Pharisees fasted twice a week, but did not use that time to pray and ask God to forgive their sinfulness. Without a clear purpose, it became an empty ritual.

Second, they began to see fasting as a religious act which made them righteous. The more they fasted, the more they thought God was pleased with their lives and declared them to be in a correct relationship with him.

Third, they began to think that by fasting they could "force" God to do something for them. "God, we fasted, so you must do it." Fasting took away their sense of humility before God. It was similar to those who give a gift to a person so that in turn that person will be obligated to do something for them. Such an attitude towards God is not Biblical.

Fourth, they turned fasting into a way to show off their spirituality. So people, like the Pharisees, wanting to show people how religious they were and how serious they were in fasting, would do things to reveal that they were fasting. Rather than spend time at home in prayer, they would go out with their long sad faces so that people could see them.

Jesus taught that the respect from the people that this brought the Pharisees was all the reward they would get. But the followers of Jesus were to "hide" the fact that they were fasting. Like any normal day, they were to wash their faces and put oil on their face. Putting oil on one's face was often a sign of joy so fasting was not to be done in a sorrowful way. They were not to wear the special fasting clothes. Instead, although others might not know that they were fasting, God saw them and would reward them.

The Bible never commands us to fast. However, it is a good spiritual discipline to learn. The primary purpose of fasting is so that we give concentrated time to pray. God honors the serious attitude we have and often works in unusual ways. Christians have often found that fasting brings other benefits. It is a good tool to learn self-discipline so that we control our appetites rather than being controlled by them. Our self-discipline teaches us that we can do without some things for a greater purpose. It also is useful to spend concentrated time with God and as a result helps us grow spiritually.

Q. 13. a) Ask three believers why they fast. Which of the above reasons for fasting do they follow? b) What purpose does fasting have in your church? How can fasting sometimes become abused?

Q. 14. Read Mt. 6:19-34. a) What warning does Jesus give about money? b) Why does Jesus say it is useless for believers to worry?

BE CAREFUL NOT TO FOCUS ON ACCUMULATING MATERIAL POSSESSIONS (Mt. 6:19-24)

What we focus our attention on is usually what becomes the most important thing in our life. It can be education, an easy life in a western country, a good job, or a nice house. Or it can be growing in spiritual depth and insight or eternal blessings. Jesus called these things our "treasure." (The word refers to anything that people consider valuable. It can be money, clothes, property, cattle, marriage, or education.) Jesus warns his followers that we must be careful not to focus our attention and affections upon things the world considers important.

In ancient times, people considered wealth as property, clothes, money, or grain. Most of those following Jesus were of the poor class of people. They probably owned their homes, but usually worked for someone else. They had little in the way of worldly wealth. This was especially true for the disciples who left all they had and followed Jesus. Although the rich tend to focus their attention upon their wealth and the things their wealth can purchase for them, the poor can also look longingly at earthly wealth and make it the center of their attention.

But Jesus taught that this was foolish. Nothing of value found on the earth is permanent for several reasons:

First, wealth is not permanent because there are too many things that can destroy any wealth we have. Jesus used examples from the life of the rich to show how their earthly riches were so temporary. If they bought clothes as symbols of their wealth, then a certain type of moth could eat the clothes and destroy them. If it was money, then "rust" could ruin the money. (Note: The Greek word "rust" means "to rot, decay, or corrode" and can refer to rust destroying metal, but it can also refer to mice eating grain or mold ruining crops.) In ancient times money was always coins made out of metal. If their wealth was crops, mold or weevils could destroy it. All of the things they held as valuable was susceptible to thieves. People often had stone or wood walls in their homes, so it was easy for the thieves to dig through the walls and steal things which were inside.

Second, it had no permanent value because when a person dies, no one could take their wealth with them.

Jesus told his followers to focus their attention upon spiritual things. The Jews taught that "*treasures in heaven*" consisted of kind deeds which they did for others, godly character, or obedience to God's Word.

Basically we store up treasure in heaven by focusing upon spiritual things, becoming followers of Jesus with changed character, and serving him and others. Jesus said that this type of treasure is so much better because it is like having a bank account in heaven. There is no one who can go there and destroy what we have put there. And when we get to heaven, our treasure is there waiting for us.

Q. 15. a) Describe ways Christians often focus our attention upon treasures on earth. Illustrate how those things can be destroyed. b) Describe ways Christians can focus our attention upon treasures in heaven. c) Examine your life. List ways you are storing up treasure in heaven.

Using parables common to the Jews, Jesus made two statements to illustrate how they must protect their lives from a wrong attitude towards earthly wealth:

1. A good eye versus a bad eye: (Mt. 6:22-23) To the Jews, the eye was like a window which lets light into a house. It is what let light into the inner heart of a person. So the eye became a symbol of how a person related to spiritual light. For there to be light, one's life had to be free from moral and spiritual impurities. Jesus' teaching means that if his followers have an eye that focuses upon God, God's Word, and eternity, then our whole lives will be filled with light and we will live in a God-honoring way. But if our focus is upon the things of the world and on living on earth in a way that seeks selfish benefits, our eyes will be dark and our lives will be lived outside of the will of God in darkness. Jesus teaches us that being generous with our money is one of the major ways that we keep the evil of the world and what it holds as valuable from causing our spiritual eyes to darken. Generosity brings a good spiritual eye.

2. A slave who tries to serve two masters: (Mt. 6:24) The New Testament calls Christians slaves of Jesus. Unlike a servant who has the freedom to leave his job and look for another, a slave has no rights. The slave must obey his master even if he does not want to do it. He is "owned" by his master who has the right to do with him whatever he wants. He can be sold or even killed if his master so desires. Many of us approach our relationship to Jesus like we are servants with the ability to choose to obey or not obey, follow or not follow. But Jesus wants us to remember that we claim that he is the Master. We are to come to him knowing that we have no rights over our lives. Jesus has the right to do what he wants in us and through us. He even has the right to allow us to face persecution and die!

The Jews knew that it was difficult for two people to share a slave or servant. There would always be a conflict of loyalty. Whom would the person obey when commanded to do two different things? So sharing a slave always led to conflict. The slave would always have to choose to obey one ("love him") and refuse to obey the other ("hate him"). (Note: Jesus is not using the words "love" and "hate" to refer to emotions, but to refer to priority of relationships. So to hate the master, or to "hate" our family or our own lives (Lk. 14:26) means that we give something besides our master or family our prior attention and allegiance. To hate something is to love something less than the other thing. But if we "love," we have total loyalty and allegiance to that thing.)

Jesus taught that this conflict of interest is true in our relationship with God as well. It is impossible as the followers of God to both claim that Jesus is Lord and seek to submit to him while at the same time make wealth our master. If we try, the demands of each master is the opposite. Jesus says "give of your time and money to serve others. Think about eternity, not the present." But our desire for money says "use the money on yourself. Take care of your future and your family by getting a good job and putting money into the bank." Unless we make a clear choice which we will serve, Jesus will end up being the one we

"hate" when we give prior allegiance to our other master, money. To follow Jesus means that we totally submit everything to him as our Master. We submit to him more than our families. And we treat all of our money as if it belongs to God and not to us, using it how he wants us to use it. How about you- who is the master of your life?

Wealth or possessions can become like a "god," something we honor and seek. In fact, the Greek word here was the name of the money-god in Syria. All of our material blessings actually belong to God. Our wealth is not ours to do with as we want. We are stewards of God's resources, and they are to be used in a way that honors God. If we don't treat the blessings God gives us as "gifts" for us to use for God's work, they become gods who control our time and energy. How many husbands no longer spend time at home since they are serving their "god" and trying to make more money? Or how many wives seek jobs to get more money, even if it means they must live separately from their husbands and spend no time taking care of their children?

Many of the sermons we hear today get people to focus upon the treasures of this earth. Rarely do we hear sermons telling people to prepare for eternity. We encourage people to serve the Master, "Money," rather than the Master, Jesus. Could this be why many in the West and many in Ethiopia claim to be Christians but no longer live their lives in total obedience to Jesus? We need to realize that wealth is often one of the major hindrances to total commitment to Jesus. Jesus wants us to focus fully upon him and his desires in the world- and if we are not very careful our attention becomes divided with thoughts of material blessings. Jesus did not want part-time, half-hearted disciples whose minds are on things other than God's will for their lives.

Q. 16. a) Think about sermons which you have heard that encourage Christians to focus upon the treasures of earth. What promises were given to believers? b) Why do you think there are so few sermons that focus upon the treasures of heaven? c) If Jesus were to teach in your church, what warnings concerning education and wealth do you think he would give to those who claim to follow him?

DO NOT WORRY ABOUT THE THINGS THAT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU (Mt. 6:25-34)

Q. 17. Read Mt. 6:25-34. What things should we not worry about? b) Why is worry foolish?

Following Jesus is often defined in the Bible as having faith in God. The word "faith" means to trust God. For example, we trust God for our salvation and not our own ability to be good. Or we trust God to take care of us rather than thinking we can take care of our own lives without God. One way that followers of Jesus are to show their trust in God is by overcoming worry and focusing instead on our great and mighty God.

Worry is the opposite of trust. It is a sign that we do not trust God to take care of us or meet our needs. (The word "worry" here does not refer to planning about the future. Rather it refers to anxiety about what might come our way in the future.) One scholar says that worry is practical atheism because we are acting as if God does not exist and won't take care of our future. So Jesus told his disciples that worry was not compatible with following him in faith.

As poor people, it was easy for the disciples to wonder where their food would come from. They would often not have steady jobs as they served Jesus. And they did not have any salary as Apostles, so where

would they get their clothes? This is the same concern many evangelists face. They are underpaid by their churches and often their money does not meet their expenses. How will they feed their family? How will they educate their children? If we are not careful, these natural concerns can become worries which show our lack of faith in Jesus. "I will never leave you or forsake you" he promised. Do we believe him?

Jesus gave five reasons why anxiety about the future is not right for his followers:

1. God has given us life. So we can trust him to continue to give us life by meeting our needs.

2. God takes care of birds. Birds don't worry about where they will get food. And they don't try to store up food for the future because they are concerned God won't meet their needs. Rather, they gather food for each day, trusting God to meet their needs for tomorrow. Birds are of much less value than humans who are made in the image of God. So if God gives birds food to live, won't he give food to the more valuable humans? Birds teach us that we are to work hard, but to not worry about what could happen in the future.

3. Worry does not change anything in our lives, so it is a waste of energy. It is not clear in the Greek if Jesus was saying "worrying (about being short) can not add anything to how tall you are" or "worrying (about how you will live in the future) will not add another day to the length of life you enjoy." Doctors tell us that worry is one of the major things that causes of disease such as stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, and heart failure. So it can actually shorten our life.

4. Flowers in the field don't ever worry about what they will "wear." And yet even wild flowers like the Meskel flower have a beauty that is beyond the beauty of the clothes of kings like Solomon. (Solomon was the standard for the Jews as the most wise and the most wealthy king.) If God will clothe flowers with such beauty even though they will soon wither and die, won't he clothe people who are more valuable as well? (Note: In Palestine it was often difficult for people to find fire wood to burn in their fires. So they would gather dried leaves and grass (flowers) and burn them in their small ovens, especially when they wanted a quick hot fire. This is similar to how we burn eucalyptus leaves when making injera.)

5. Worry is the character of unbelievers. The "pagans" who do not know God and his gracious character naturally worry since they have no confidence that God will take care of them. When we worry we are indicating either that we do not know about God's character of graciously taking care of people's needs or that we do not believe what the Bible teaches about God's character. Either God does not have to power to take care of us, or God does not love us so will not take care of us. These thoughts indicate that we are not following God as his trusting children.

Q. 17. a) List things Christians often worry about. b) How do these five things Jesus taught help us overcome worry in our lives?

So how do we overcome our natural tendency to worry? Jesus said that as his followers we must do two things:

1. We must learn to focus upon God's kingdom and his way of righteousness. Jesus tells his disciples to "seek" God's kingdom. This word does not mean to look for something that is lost. Rather, it means to focus our full attention upon something. Jesus is saying that we are to focus our attention upon God's reign in our lives and his way of living. Remember, God's kingdom is both present as we bring our lives and

our church under the reign of Jesus. But it is also future as we look forward in expectation to the time when Jesus reigns over all and evil is gone. The more we think about that kingdom which Jesus will one day bring, the easier it is to make sure we are living now in a way which stores up treasure in heaven. We must also focus on "righteousness," aligning our lives with God's perfect standard. We don't put on an external show of righteousness. Rather, even when no one else is looking, we worship God and live in a way that glorifies him.

God guarantees that all of the things necessary to live (food, clothes) will be given to us. He will control everything that comes into your life. Nothing, not even death, will come upon you without his permission. As Paul said, there is nothing, not even persecution and death, that can separate us from God's love. (Rom. 8:35-39) We must believe this and therefore don't worry about the future which is under God's control.

2. We must learn to live one day at a time rather than thinking about the future. Often when we worry about the future, we are imagining things which could happen to us, but which may never take place. Our worrying won't change what comes and the problems we will face then. Since we don't know what will happen in the future, we must think about today. If we think about today, the problems don't seem as big. As we humbly depend upon God for his strength to meet whatever problem we face today, we get through the day. Tomorrow will come and with it other problems. But we can overcome all of them one by one as we face the daily situations with God's power.

Let us think about where we are able to influence situations we currently face. Let us commit the day to God, asking him for the power that we need for today and live for his glory. And we must commit all of our tomorrows into God's powerful, loving control. If we daily determine to use whatever opportunities God gives to serve him, we pass the day and then our lives with purpose. We must also learn not to worry about the past, because we can't change what has happened. All we can do is ask God for forgiveness for the mistakes we have made and God promises to forgive them. Isaiah 26:3 teaches, God will keep us in perfect peace if we keep our minds and thoughts focused upon him.

Q. 18. a) List some things that you tend to worry about. b) Prayerfully commit those things over to God. c) Memorize Isaiah 26:3. Every time that you begin to worry about something, quote this verse and focus your attention upon serving God faithfully for that day.

THIRD DAY

"She wants to be in the choir so that she can become popular." "He wants to go to theological college so that he can get a job with the church." "Those elders made that decision because they do not like people from my tribe." These kinds of statements are common in church. These statements do not indicate facts, but project motives of the hearts of others. Often such statements reveal our pride in ourselves, for we think we are better and more pure than others. Or they show our jealousy when others get something we want. Jesus knew that these types of statements and the gossip they produce are very destructive for the unity of his spiritual family. So Jesus continued to teach his disciples what life is like in the kingdom which he came to start. We have studied these teachings in some detail because they are Jesus' clearest statements of what he expects of his followers. Unfortunately few believers study them today or teach new Christians what Jesus expects of them.

Q. 19. a) List some other statements often heard in our churches when we question the motives of others. b) Explain why it is impossible for us to really know the motives of others unless they tell us. c) Describe the harm have you seen such statements bring to the unity of the church.

Q. 20. Read Mt. 7:1-12. a) Why does Jesus say that we should not judge others? b) Summarize what Jesus taught about prayer. c) Describe how our relationships would change if we applied Mt. 7:12 to everything that we do.

DO NOT HAVE A JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT OF OTHERS (Mt. 7:1-6)

There are two temptations which especially plague Christians when we seek to follow Jesus. First, there is the temptation of hypocrisy, pretending to be spiritual when we aren't, or trying to show off our spirituality to others. Jesus spoke about this problem in Mt. 6. Second, there is the problem of becoming critical against those who do not measure up to our standard of spirituality. So we compare ourselves to others using the standard of righteousness we have in our minds, and when others do not meet that standard, we become critical of them. Jesus addresses this sinful attitude in Mt. 7:1-6.

One of the most destructive things to the unity of the church is when members have judgmental, critical attitudes. Most of us look at other Christians and question their motives. We proudly think we are better than others, or because we are jealous or have not forgiven someone, we talk against others, usually questioning their motives. It was this type of judging that Jesus warned his disciples against. There are two types of judging.

First, there is the evaluation of a person's external life. The Bible commands us to evaluate what is said in church by those claiming to be prophets. (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Jn. 4:1) Jesus warned people to be careful of false prophets, an act that demands that we evaluate. (Mt. 7:15-20) So clearly Jesus is not telling his followers that we are to let people do and act as they want without ever evaluating and making a judgment upon it. When people in the church are openly living in rebellious sin like adultery, anger, or gossip, or teach what is clearly against God's Word, we are told to evaluate the actions and respond with discipline.

Second, there is the evaluation when we believe that we can understand a person's motive when they do something that is not prohibited in the Bible. It is the spirit of criticism which we have when we think someone's motives are not pure, or we do not like the way they do things. It is this spirit of criticism that destroys the harmony of a church as the youth question the motives of the elders, saying they are not spiritual because they do not clap fervently or shout "amen." Or it is the critical attitude of the elders against the youth when they say the youth have no love for God since they do not dress correctly. Or it is the belief that when the leaders make a decision in favor of another church or church district, that they have done so because someone there is their friend or of their tribe. It is this attitude that Jesus speaks out against.

Often when we have a critical attitude towards others, we have double standards, one for ourselves and a different one for others. We demand that others be especially pure and holy, but we don't hold ourselves to that same standard. Actions that we excuse in ourselves, we reprimand in others. God does not allow us to do this. He tells us that the standard we use on others must be the same standard we use on ourselves. The same standard we demand of church elders must be the standard we are meeting in our lives. If it isn't, we have no right to complain.

Why shouldn't Jesus' followers have a critical attitude towards each other when they think they can evaluate the motive of the other person?

1. Jesus said that we will be judged with the same standard we use to criticize others. Jesus illustrates from the market place. When buying teff, sellers use a certain size can to measure out their grain. Some merchants knowingly use smaller cans in order to cheat others. Others who are more generous, use larger cans. Jesus said that in our relationship with others, we are like buyers and sellers. So if we use "small" cans of criticism, believing people have wrong motives or are not really spiritual, we will receive the "small" cans of criticism back. This is true at two levels.

a. How people respond to us is often determined by how we treat others. People know whether we are generous in our opinion of others, assuming they have good motives, or if we are critical of others. And so they respond to us in the same way. If we assume that others are doing things from the correct motives and speak well of them, they will usually assume that we are doing things from the best motive. But if we are critical of others, always gossiping about them and questioning their motives, they in turn will often question our motives and talk against us.

b. God himself will judge us similarly to how we treat others. If we are gracious and assume that others do what they do from the best motives, then God will treat us graciously. But if we are critical and complain about every little mistake others make, God's judgment of our lives will be equally harsh.

2. Most of the time when we are critical of others, we have sins in our life which are even worse than what we are complaining about in others. When we complain about the lack of spirituality in others, often that shows that we have pride in our hearts. Or if we complain that the elders are doing things for their tribe, it is because we ourselves want things for our own tribe, which shows that we also have the spirit of tribalism. In order to demonstrate his point, Jesus gives a funny illustration. There are two people working in a wood shop. One person has a small bit of sawdust in his eye, but the other has a large pole in his eye. The one with the large pole turns to the one with the sawdust and says "let me help you get rid of that small sawdust." With the large pole in his eye, how can he even see the sawdust in his friend's eye? How foolish to think that we can help someone when we first don't address the sins and wrong attitudes in our lives?

Through this illustration, Jesus is teaching several things:

a. We must guard against criticizing others. It is especially important not to make a judgment against another person based upon what we think are their hidden motives. Rather, we should assume that they are acting out of a genuine desire to serve God. Since we cannot see a person's heart, we should let God judge that. So we shouldn't assume that they are doing something to us because they are prejudiced against us and our tribe or because they want a benefit for their family.

b. Usually when we are critical of others, we have sin in our own lives which we are overlooking. In fact, the very irritating sins which we see in others are usually the sins that we are guilty of. Seeing things that we do not like in the lives of others should cause us to examine our lives to see if we have sins which we have not addressed. In addition, in our critical spirit, often we commit sins which are very destructive. We usually gossip and complain to others, destroying the reputation of that person and the unity of the church. Rather than think about upon the sins of others, we should focus upon our own sins and weaknesses.

c. Jesus tells us that before we confront another person about their sins, we must humble ourselves. We must get rid of sin in our own lives. And we must evaluate our motive for talking to the person. Is it because they have hurt us and we want revenge? Is it because we are selfish? Or is it because we honestly want to help the other person see the sin in his life so that he can repent and restore his relationship with God? If we are only talking to the person because we are hurt by something they did, then we have the sin of selfishness in our hearts and we should not talk to the person. We still have a "log" in our eyes.

d. Jesus tells his people to help others get the speck out of their eyes once they have evaluated their own lives and addressed their own sin. Jesus is not saying that we should not help others address the sin in their lives. We are told to restore a believer who has fallen into sin with gentleness. (Gal. 6:1) Godly love always seeks to help a person grow in spiritual maturity. But it must be done very carefully. Once we have gotten rid of pride and selfishness, then we are in the position to humbly address the problems others have. Many people do not understand how they are hurting others by their actions. It is only when someone lovingly shares with them when they are doing something wrong that they can realize their offensive actions, repent, and change.

Friends, we must address this sinful critical spirit that has grown like a weed within our churches. We must tell others how evil it is in the eyes of God. And we must warn them that it will bring a more severe judgment from Jesus. Why should we be very careful of judging the motives of others?

1. We never know all of the facts about the person. We might not understand their background and why they act as they do. Or we might not know the pressure being put on the person from family or friends. Because we do not have all of the information, we cannot make a proper evaluation. No one has the right to criticize another person until they have personally faced that situation. Until the youth have been elders and understand the difficulty of some decisions, they have no right to criticize what the elders do. Or we should not criticize the church evangelists until we have worked long hours like them and received low pay.

2. We are almost never impartial in our evaluation of others. If we like them, we tend to assume the best about them. But if we do not like them for some reason, or if they are from another tribe, then we tend to assume the worst. It is very hard for humans to be impartial in how we view others. So our evaluation is never fair. Only God can be totally impartial in his evaluation.

3. None of us is ever good enough to be a judge. We all have sins in our lives which cause us to live and act in ways that are not in line with God's will. Only God is qualified to judge accurately. He not only knows the actions, but he knows the motives and the situation which caused the action. So when we criticize others and seek to change the situation, we are often interfering in God's right to judge as he desires.

Q. 21. a) List some situations when church members tend to critically "judge" others. b) What are the results to the church from this type of judging? c) Examine your own life. What are ways you have had a critical spirit towards others? If you have gossiped and ruined their reputation, what do you think Jesus would want you to do about that sin?

Matthew 7:6 is a difficult verse to understand because it does not seem to fit the context. Jesus was probably concerned that his followers would go too far in accepting everything people were doing and no

longer be wise in their relationship with others. The word "dog" and "pig" were common Jewish words referring to either the Gentiles or to morally impure persons. The "dog" here was not a friendly pet but a wild dog which wandered around scavenging for food. And the pig was an unclean animal. Although Gentiles ate pig meat and therefore raised pigs for food like we have sheep, the Jews greatly despised this. Jesus says that if we throw pearls which might look like food to the pig, he does not value these jewels and so tramples them into the mud. And if we throw meat to wild dogs, they can attack us.

So what is Jesus teaching? It seems that Jesus is saying the pearls refer to the precious Gospel which his followers are supposed to share with all people in the world. And the dogs and pigs are those who take an active and hated stand against the Gospel. So Jesus is warning his disciples that as we share the Gospel, we will meet people who hate Jesus and the Gospel. We are to always share graciously and with sensitivity towards the person listening. But what are we to do when they hate what we share? When people have already decided to take a strong stance against the Gospel, it does not good witnessing to them. It is like throwing pearls to pigs who cannot understand the value of the Gospel. It does not good arguing with them trying to convince them. Or it does not good to shout at them telling them they are going to hell since they don't believe on Jesus as some believers do when meeting people of other religions. This can be as harmful as throwing meat to wild dogs.

When meeting people with a strong stance against the Gospel, we are to do two things.

First, we prayerfully share to those who are more interested. No one is argued into the kingdom of heaven. But in every community the Holy Spirit will prepare people who are willing to listen to us as we graciously share about Jesus. We should ask God to show us those receptive people so we can share. Jesus warns us that if we try to force people to believe, they will often react violently towards us just like the dogs who bite a stranger offering them meat. Not only does this bring upon us unnecessary persecution, but it usually causes them to be even more hardened to the Gospel.

Second, we are to maintain a loving relationship with them. The major tool the Holy Spirit uses to break down the resistance of people hardened to the Gospel is our love. If we maintain a loving relationship even when they make fun of us and persecute us, the Holy Spirit uses this to soften their heart and one day they may become interested in the Gospel. At that time they are no longer like "pigs," but like people who are open to the pearls of the Gospel.

Q. 22. a) Describe how you have seen believers try to force the Gospel on resistant people. b) List some of the "dog" like people in your community who take a strong stand against the Gospel. What can you do with the help of the Holy Spirit to break down their resistance? c) List some of the people who are more receptive to the Gospel. Describe how you and your church can take a more active role in sharing with them about the pearls of the Gospel.

PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE TO A GOD WHO GIVES GOOD GIFTS (Mt. 7:7-11)

Prayer is one of the mysteries of the Bible. If God knows all of my needs already, why should I pray? Even though we might not know how prayer works, we do know God tells us to pray and uses our prayers to change things. For the second time Jesus taught about this major spiritual discipline. Before we can properly interpret this section, however, we must remember what Jesus has already told us about prayer in Mt. 6:5-14. We cannot use these verses as a promise from God that he will answer every one of our

requests. Earlier Jesus taught us two major truths which form the basis for how to apply these verses. First, Jesus has told us that when praying to God, our major motive must be for God's will to be done. We should desire that the reign of Jesus be expanded in our lives and in our world. So Jesus assumes that the things we will be asking for come from a heart where we are primarily concerned with God's will. Jesus demonstrated this at Gethsemane when he prayed asking God to remove the cross, but also prayed "not my will but yours." Second, Jesus told the disciples that they were to be praying for their needs ("daily bread") not selfish wants. So we should not understand this verse as a promise that if we selfishly ask for something that God will do it for us.

In this section, Jesus wanted to teach his followers two things about prayer:

1. We must be persistent in our prayers even when the answer does not come as quickly as we might expect. In the Greek, the words "ask," "seek," and "knock" are all written in a verb tense which means "keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking." (All three words refer to the same thing, the continued asking God for our request until we get an answer.) Although there are times God answers our prayers as soon as we ask, there are other times God delays his answer. Until we have a clear answer "no" from God, we are to keep praying. Our continued praying reveals three things.

First, it reveals the sincerity of our request. Just like a child who keeps asking his father for new shoes because he needs them, the repeated request reveals to God how fervently we desire our request.

Second, persistent prayer teaches us that God is Lord and that all good gifts come from him. If God always answered our prayers as soon as we asked for something, we would soon treat him as our servant to do what we want, rather than realizing that he is the Lord and we are his servants and everything he gives us is a gracious, undeserved gift.

Third, delayed prayers reveal and strengthen our faith in God. We are forced to depend each day for the strength we need to live as we wait for the answer. And it teaches us to keep trusting God even if we don't see the answer. Faith grows not when we get what we want, but when we don't get what we want when we want it and yet we still patiently trust God to take care of us.

2. We must understand what type of a God we are praying to. There are two wrong attitudes we can develop about God concerning prayer. First, we can begin to treat God as if his purpose is to grant all of our requests. We think we know what we need, so we tell God and demand that he answer. We are like children who get upset when their parents do not give them the expensive toy they see in store or market. Second, we can begin to think that God is so far removed from us that he is not listening to our prayers, or does not have time for our prayers, or is not concerned enough about us to answer.

It is to correct this second view about God being reluctant to give us what we need that Jesus addresses here. He uses three illustrations to teach that when we pray, we come to a Father who deeply loves us and is happy to give us *"good gifts."*

a. The son who asks for bread is not given a stone: One of the basic foods for Jews was bread which looked like a bread roll which we buy in a bread shop. In many places of Palestine along the rivers were rocks that from a distance looked like a roll of bread. If a small hungry child asked his father for a roll, no

father would tease his son by giving him one of those rocks. In the same way, God is not callous with his spiritual children and tease them by not meeting their needs and giving important things.

b. A son asks his father for a fish is not given a fish-like eel (which looked like a snake) which he is not allowed to eat: (Scholars think Jesus was referring to this eel which looked like a snake, not to a snake.) Fish were also basic food for the Jews. In their lakes and rivers, however, there was another fish-like creature called an eel. Since it did not have scales, the Jews were not allowed to eat it. What father would tease his son by giving him something that he could not eat? In the same way, the disciples should know that their heavenly Father would never tease them by giving them something that might appear useful but was useless to them.

c. A son asks his father for an egg is not given a scorpion: Little children love eggs and often Jewish mothers would boil eggs and give them to the children to eat. But in the land of Palestine, there was a type of scorpion that from a distance looked like an egg as it rolled its poisonous tail up close to its body. No father would give his child a dangerous scorpion instead of an egg. In the same way, God will not give us dangerous things that look good.

Jesus summarizes his teaching by saying that human fathers, though they have an evil nature, enjoy giving good things to their children. Surely God, who does not have an evil heart, will give only good things to his spiritual children!

What does this teach us about prayer?

1. Confidence in prayer is dependent upon our relationship with God through Jesus. Jesus gave this teaching to his followers. And it is only to them that have the privilege of calling God "*your Father*." Although God, in grace, can listen to and answer the prayers of an unbeliever, his promises are only given to his spiritual children. It is also given to those who are following Jesus as he has explained in the Sermon on the Mountain. If we are not totally committed to following Jesus, we cannot claim this verse as a promise that God will answer our prayers. We must also be focusing our requests upon God's kingdom, not our selfish desires.

2. When we pray, we are like little children asking their father for a gift. Our Father in heaven lovingly looks upon us as his children and wants to give us things that are good for us. We should never view God as being reluctant to answer our prayers and give us what we need.

3. When we pray, we should ask for necessities of life, not selfish wants. It is interesting that in none of the illustrations Jesus used was the son asking for something unnecessary like candy. Rather, the examples of bread, fish, and eggs are all basic foods for living. So our payers should focus upon our needs, not "candy-like" things which are selfish.

4. God is the one who determines what is the "good gift" and what isn't. Suppose the son came to his father and seeing an egg-like scorpion asked his father to give it to him. Would a loving father listen to his son's request? No. Every parent knows that often a child asks for things that are not good, and to listen to the child would actually be hurtful, not loving. In the same way, God knows that there are some requests we ask for that are not the best for us or even dangerous to our faith, so he doesn't give them. God lovingly determines what is a "good gift" for us and what isn't. (Note: In Lk. 11:13 Luke shared that the major good

gift we should ask for is the Holy Spirit. If we get the Holy Spirit and live under his authority, then all of the good things which we need to be followers of Jesus are fulfilled.) When we pray, we come believing that he always has our best interest in mind when he chooses to say "yes," or "wait," or "no." Often our requests are limited by focusing upon earthly blessings or values held by the world. But God is committed to our spiritual growth and the things that are best from the perspective of the kingdom of God. So he knows what is really the best gift for us. And what is good for us might be totally different from what God determines is good for someone else. God answers each person individually, not generally to all people in the same way. So he can heal one and not another. Or he can give work or financial blessing to one and not the other. Both can still be a "good gift" from God's eternal perspective.

5. Confidence in prayer is determined by three characteristics of God. If we are to have the right attitude in prayer, we must remember these three characteristics.

First, God is all-powerful. Therefore there is nothing beyond his ability to do for us. "Is there anything too hard with God?" the angel asked Abraham. (Gen. 18:14) No matter how difficult and impossible things might seem, we should always come to Jesus knowing that he has the power to answer our prayers. When we doubt his power, it shows our lack of faith.

Second, God has all wisdom. There are many things God could do for us. There are many ways he could answer our prayers. But in wisdom, he knows which of the many different things we ask are best for us and which are not good for us. Our wisdom is like a child's, and something we think is good could actually be hurtful. God knows that, so he determines in his wisdom to give us what is "good" in his eyes, even though it might not be in our eyes. For instance, for us, sickness and death are a curse. But God might choose sickness as his good tool to help us grow, and death is his best tool to take us home to live with him forever!

Third, we must remember that God loves us. As Paul wrote, if God did not spare Jesus but sent him to die for us because of his great love, how could God withhold other good gifts from us when we need them. (Rom. 8:32) So no matter what happens to us, or how God chooses to answer our prayers, we know that the response is the best for us, a good gift, coming from his loving heart.

Q. 23. a) Describe a way that God used your persistence in prayer and gave an answer. How did the "waiting" and persistent praying help you grow? b) Explain why it is important for Christians to remember God's power, wisdom, and love when they pray.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG JESUS' FOLLOWERS SHOULD BE BASED UPON LOVE (Mt. 7:12)

Is there one rule which can summarize how we are to live? Or do we need to remember hundreds of rules which we should try to obey? The Pharisees liked to focus upon hundreds of rules. They spent hours trying to teach people all of those rules and reprimanded them when the people did not obey all of the Old Testament commandments plus their traditional regulations. Rather than adding hundreds of rules, Jesus focused upon one rule which fulfills all of the relational obligations which God has for us. Jesus expressed that rule in different ways during his time on earth. Once an expert in the law asked Jesus what was the most important commandment. Jesus' answer was that they must relate to God with love with all their being, and they must relate to others by loving them as themselves. (Mt. 22:37-40) All of the Old Testament commandments would be fulfilled if we did this.

Jesus says a similar thing here. If we want to fulfill all of the Old Testament requirements God has upon us, we must emphasize *"doing to others what you would have them do to you."* Scholars call this the "Golden Rule" for it is the most important commandment listed in the Bible dealing with human relationships. The attitude found in this command comes from Lev. 19:18.

During Jesus' days, both the Jewish religious leaders and Gentile philosophers taught a truth similar to what Jesus taught, but from a negative perspective. They taught "don't do to someone anything you would not want them to do to you." So if you don't want others to insult you, don't insult them. Or if you do not want them to trick you in the market place, don't trick them." This was a basic rule of social life, that we not do to others what we don't want them to do to us.

But only Jesus took this teaching one step further. He applied the rule from a positive perspective and said that we are to do everything we would want someone else to do to us. For instance, do we want others to treat us with respect? Then we are to respect them. Do we wish that others would help us when we are in trouble? Then we are to help them. It is not enough for us to refrain from doing things which will hurt others. Jesus taught that we are to always look for ways to help people. Every time we meet someone we should ask ourselves, "If I were that person, what would I want someone to do for me?" Are they poor, how would I want people to treat me in that situation? If there not enough room in the car for all of us to travel, how would I want to be treated by others- by pushing ahead of them to get the best seat, or graciously giving up my seat? If I had done something wrong and sinned, how would I want to be treated by others? If I fell into sin and became pregnant, how would I want others to treat me?" As you can see, this changes how we relate to people. We all want to be treated with respect by others. We all want others to help us when we are in trouble or deal with us gently when we sin. Therefore we should treat others the same way.

Love is the major characteristic of a Christian. It is the major proof that we are followers of Jesus who lovingly came to pay for our sins, even if it caused him to suffer. Love is to be the characteristic of a Christian, helping others while expecting no reward in return. Jesus is not saying "treat others well so that they will treat you well." We are not to show love out of selfish motives. Sometimes we invite a person for a meal so that they will be more receptive when we ask them for a favor. This is not a Christian mentality nor is it what Jesus was teaching. Rather, Jesus was saying we lovingly help people expecting nothing from them in return. And we use the question "If I were them, what would I want to happen?" as the basis for determining what we should do to help them.

Q. 24. a) List five things that we should not do because we don't want others to do these thing for us. If we obeyed this, how would our relationships with others, even non-Christians, change? b) List five things that we could do for others because we know that if we were in their situation, we would want others to do them for us. How would our relationships in the church and community change if we applied this golden rule to everything we did? c) Examine your relationships with others in your community. Give examples how you are applying this Golden Rule. If you can't think of many things, perhaps you need to ask God to help you overcome the selfishness of wanting others to meet your needs without you meeting theirs first.

Q. 25. Read Mt. 7:13-29. a) Contrast the two gates and roads for people to choose. b) What is the difference between a good and bad prophet? c) What warning did Jesus give to those who did miracles without first relating to Jesus as a disciple? d) What is the difference between a wise and foolish builder? e) What was the peoples' reaction to Jesus' sermon?

CONTRAST BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS (Mt. 7:13-27)

Most of Matthew 5-7 deals with specific principles Jesus gave his followers to apply if they are to be his true disciples. He asks us to a) change our character so that we are salt and light; b) change to focusing upon what is happening in our hearts and not only in our actions; c) change our attitudes about why we do spiritual ministries; and d) change our relationships with others. Having finished his teachings with the most important relational commandment- do to others everything you want them to do to you- Jesus finishes his teaching with strong warnings about what it means to follow Jesus and the results it brings. Jesus gives four illustrations to help guide the disciples' understanding about the walk of faith. In each of his stories, Jesus compares two opposite possible responses that people can make.

1. The two gates and two roads (Mt. 7:13-14)

All of life consists of making choices. It is as if before us every day and every minute of the day are two roads. And standing at the entrance of each road is a gate. One gate is broad- easy for people to pass through. After getting through the broad gate, there is a broad easy road. Many people can walk on it, and it is flat, easy for those who travel it. But the other gate is narrow and it is difficult for anyone to get through. And after the gate, the road is narrow, rocky, mountainous- not easy for those who want to walk along it. So why would anyone not choose the broad path? Why would they choose the narrow gate and path? It is because of what awaits them at the end of the path. The broad path leads to "destruction," or eternal damnation. But the narrow road leads to heaven and eternal life. (Note: Although God allows us to choose which road we will take, where the road leads is determined by him. Democracy, or the will of the majority, will not change where the road goes. So even though the "majority" have chosen to take the easy road, it is not the right road, because it ends with their eternal death.)

Jesus is teaching his followers about what life is like if we choose to follow him. Like Moses (Deut. 30:15-20), Joshua (Josh. 24:14-15), and Jeremiah (Jer. 21:8), Jesus is calling his followers to carefully make a choice. He is teaching that most people will not follow Jesus, but choose the broad gate and the easy road. In other words, they watch where most of the people are going and follow them. What do their parents and friends believe? they ask and do what others do. And they look for the easier road of life. "What will bring me riches? What will be easy for me to do?" they ask. "Can't I just claim to follow Jesus, and worship on Sunday? Why should I obey Jesus' difficult teachings? Others aren't doing it" they reason. In fact, if they do nothing at all, everyone will enter into the temporary easy road. For a long time, this road seems to be the best. It is only at death that suddenly we find out that the road took us to hell.

The narrow gate and the narrow road are not attractive. It is narrow and few are willing to walk on it. Going through this gate and walking this path takes a conscious choice because few are entering it. It is the road of persecution. And it is the road that goes against what our human nature wants, the road of surrender to Jesus and absolute obedience. Those on this road don't think about good jobs and fine houses. The only reason why anyone will follow this road is because of where it ends up. It leads us to heaven and eternal life.

This is a strong warning to us today. Many evangelists want to somehow make the gate and road leading to heaven easier for people. "Follow Jesus and he will heal you. Follow Jesus and he will make your life filled with ease and material blessings." "Look how large our church is- join us. We don't require anything of you but for you to come to church" they say. And so thousands enter a large gate and wide road. It is doubtful that they have ever chosen to follow Jesus, they are only following the crowds through the wide and easy door.

Jesus told his followers "I don't promise you an easy life. In fact, if you follow me, you will have to carry your cross. It will be difficult, filled with persecution. All I can promise you is that eventually it will lead you to heaven." With this type of invitation, very few people follow Jesus. But those who do are willing to die for him or willing to give up their earthly comfort to take the Gospel to distant unreached places. They join the few, like the apostles, who would make a difference in the world while sacrificing their all for their Master. (Note: Jesus is also warning his apostles that the majority of people will never be true followers of Jesus. There will only be a few who are willing to walk the narrow, difficult road of following Jesus. This is a warning to us today to not expect huge masses to follow Jesus. And we should not get excited just because many come to our churches. How many of them are still walking on the broad path?)

Q. 26. a) Evaluate the way the Gospel is usually presented in your church. Is it presented to be a wide road or a narrow road? Explain your answer. b) How would our Gospel presentation change if we were to warn people of the difficulties of the narrow road?

2. Wolves who pretend to be sheep can be recognized by their fruit (Mt. 7:15-20)

Jesus warned the disciples of three areas of problems they would face.

First, there are external pressures upon the church, usually in some form of persecution. This persecution can vary in intensity from the disdain of unbelievers, to being prejudiced against by government policies, to outright imprisonment and death. Jesus told his followers that this was normal and was actually a cause for great rejoicing not sorrow as we often react to persecution.

Second, there is the internal problem of lack of purity and unity among God's children. Jesus warned his followers that we must be careful to maintain our "salt" and "light" characteristics by being and living differently from what the world was used to. Third, there is the internal problem of spiritually seeming people teaching false truths and leading believers away from truth. They were especially teaching people against following the narrow road of total submission to Jesus. It is this third problem that Jesus addresses next.

Throughout history, God's people have been troubled by those who appear to be believers, but aren't. Jesus calls them wolves in sheep's clothes, or dangerous animals who look harmless. Jesus taught about this sad fact by addressing two situations his followers would face.

First, there are pretend believers who have the spirit of a false prophet. Jesus knew that there would always be more people who claim to follow Jesus than actually do follow him. Some scholars think Jesus is not specifically addressing false prophets in this section. Rather, he is talking about so-called Christians who have the similar attitude which false prophets of the Old Testament had. They pretended to be spiritual, but didn't live in obedience to God. Some people seem to be good Christians in word and deed. They might even do miracles. But their obedience to Jesus is limited, and they abandon their faith when things get difficult. (1 Jn. 2:19)

Second, Jesus knew that there are spiritual looking church workers who destroy God's people through their false teaching and pretend spirituality. They are like the false prophets during the days of Jeremiah who resisted the truth, leading people astray. It is important that Christians know how to distinguish between true and false prophets. Jesus is primarily talking about this problem in the church.

Throughout the history of God's people there are always those who claimed to be prophets but teach false things and not the truth. It wasn't the false prophets or false teachers of others religions who caused God's people trouble. Rather, it was false prophets who claimed to speak in the name of the true God, but what they said was not God's will. As we read the book of Jeremiah and Ezekiel we read about these false prophets who resisted the truth that God's true prophets were teaching. (Jer. 14:14-16, Ezek. 22:28) The problem of false prophets continued in the New Testament. In Acts 20:29-30 Paul warned the Ephesian elders that from among their midst there would rise false prophets who would try to deceive God's people. When Matthew was writing his Gospel, the church was troubled by many false prophets.

A "prophet" is someone who claims to have a message from God for God's people. There are occasions when God wants to give his people a special message. Although that message always agrees with what God has written in his Word, it is a direct message from God, not from Scripture. The message can reveal something that is going to happen in the future. But usually it is a message from God about a situation his people were facing at the time. In the New Testament, the difference between those who had the gift of prophecy and those who were itinerant teachers was not very clear and both were often called prophets. During the time of the early church, these prophets held a special role since the New Testament was not yet written to guide them. (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11) But when the New Testament was completed, the special role these prophets played began to decrease. It was common for prophets to travel throughout the country, proclaiming their messages in the churches. Unfortunately there were also false prophets traveling with wrong messages and false teachings. So the New Testament warns believers to be aware of these false prophets.

Jesus knew that these false prophets would trouble his followers whom he calls sheep. (Note: The major Biblical symbol for God's people was sheep since that was the primary domestic animal for the Jews, similar to how the cow is the major animal for Ethiopians.) These false prophets would be like wolves. In Palestine one of the wild animals which troubled those who raised sheep was called a "wolf." The wolf was similar to, but larger than our dogs, but smaller than most hyenas. They were known for their cunning and often attacked and killed the sheep. So they were the constant enemy of those who raised sheep. In the Bible, wolves became a symbol of all leaders and false prophets who work to harm God's people.

These false prophets were not just "wolves" who would seek to destroy the followers of Jesus. But they dressed in sheep clothes. This image has two possible meanings. First, some scholars think it refers to the fact that shepherds wore sheep skins, and so Jesus is saying that these false prophets pretend to be good shepherds of God's people. But at heart they are wolves who will destroy. Second, other scholars think Jesus is saying that the wolves are wearing sheep skins so that they look like sheep and it is hard to tell them apart from the real sheep, the true followers of Jesus. And once they have gained the trust of the followers of Jesus, that is when they start their destructive work. False prophets are dangerous because they seem to be real prophets and spiritual because they use all of the right words.

So how can God's children know the difference between the true prophets and ministers and those who have the "spirit of wolves"? The Bible offers us various clues, which Jesus calls "fruit."

a. What false prophets teach does not agree with all that the Bible teaches. False prophets often take one truth from God's Word and make it their major teaching. They refuse to look at other teachings which provides balance to that truth. For instance, some teach that there is only one God, overlooking the many

other verses which teach the Trinity. This is why it is important for church leaders and all believers to have a clear understanding of the truths of the Bible so that they can recognize the imbalance. Paul tells believers that we are supposed to evaluate every prophecy. (1 Cor. 14:29) The major way we evaluate a prophecy is by whether or not it agrees with God's Word. If church leaders and church members accept a prophecy without evaluating the truthfulness of that prophecy, they are disobeying God's Word.

b. False teachers often focus upon their "prophecy" more than they do God's Word. They want people to be amazed by their special knowledge and messages. But they don't get people to study and apply God's inspired written word.

c. After they give a prophecy, it does not take place. In the Old Testament we are warned very strongly that anyone who claims to have a message from God which does not take place is to be punished. (Deut. 13:1-5, 18:20-22) In fact, in the Old Testament, God told them to stone that person to death. If believers today were told that if what they prophesied did not come true, they would be put under severe church discipline, it might stop many false prophecies being spoken. Unfortunately, church leaders are letting people make prophecies today but not holding those who make the prophecies accountable for the accuracy of what they say. Leaders are being used by Satan to let the wolves loose among the flock to harm God's people.

d. False prophets receive some type of personal benefit from their ministry as prophets. Interestingly, today those who claim to be prophets often receive more money than pastors or evangelists. Church members come to them and give them a lot of money even though the churches do not pay them. There are two major ways false prophets reveal their desire to benefit from their ministry. First, they often have a desire to benefit financially. Both the Jews and the early Christians recognized this danger. So they forbade any prophet from earning money as a prophet. In fact, in the early church, they made a rule that no prophet was allowed to stay in a church to live off believers more than two or three days. If he did, they said that he was a false prophet. His role was to state God's message and move on, not to be a permanent prophet in a church. And they were not to be paid money. They were only to be given bread (basic food) not special food. Second, false prophets usually want to be known as prophets. They seek recognition and honor and status. This too is an indication that they are not true prophets. A true prophet is only concerned with honoring Jesus. He serves in humility and does all he can to avoid honor for himself.

e. False prophets will eventually reveal their character as false prophets. For a short time they might appear to be spiritual, but eventually their character of being "wolves" will come out. What they say and how they live will be different. Although there might be some thing, like miraculous power, that might seem to indicate that they are spiritual. But if we look at their whole life, and as we compare it to God's Word and to the teachings on the Sermon on the Mountain, we will see differences. They will tell people to give generously to God's work, but if you look at their lives closely, they don't give. Or they tell people to live holy lives, but they often live in secret sin. They tell people to obey God's Word, but they don't study God's Word. They are not loving, patient, kind. Rather, they become proud, thinking they are better than others.

Jesus taught that a true prophet will demonstrate godly character. The fruit of a tree always reveals what type of hidden root it has. In Israel there was a type of thorn brush which had small berries that looked like grapes from a distance. But when a person looked at them carefully, the difference was clear. And there were thistles which had a flower that looked like a fig (one of the favorite fruits of the Jews), but everyone was able to see the difference in the fruit. In the same way, false prophets and false teachers

might appear for a time to appear spiritual. But eventually their lives will reveal their evil roots. Jesus meant that even though we should not have a judgmental, critical spirit towards others, we are not to be naive. We must evaluate those who are leading and teaching to make sure they have a life filled with good fruit of living according to the teachings of Jesus, demonstrating the reality of their faith in Jesus.

There are other indicators that we should watch out for. Someone has said that a true prophet always prepares people to walk the narrow road of following Jesus, teaching them how to walk in obedience to God. False prophets usually try to make it easier to follow Jesus. They focus upon the blessings and not the cross. During the days of Jeremiah, which he was warning people of the coming captivity, the false prophets were saying "God will bring us peace." Many false prophets emphasize keeping certain laws (e.g. do not wear hair in a certain way, do not wear certain types of clothes), rather than offering grace and forgiveness to sinners and getting people to love God with all their hearts. Or they stress so much the grace of God that they do not encourage people to live in holiness and obedience to God. Some tell people to focus upon one spiritual act (e.g. speak in tongues) but don't teach about other important spiritual truths. Others become proud and form a small group of "holy" people who think that they are better than other believers.

Jesus warns those who are false prophets. They might succeed in their deception for a time. People might honor them just like they honored the false prophets of old. But if their lives are not characterized by "good fruit" as defined by Jesus, there will come a time when they will be "*cut down*" and burned with fire. One day not only will people recognize that they are false prophets and turn against them, but eventually they will stand before Jesus. At that time they won't be able to hide because they can't trick him. They will be burned in the lake of fire.

Jesus' warning is very relevant today. People give prophecies in our churches which we receive with loud illitas but which never come to pass. And yet no one is putting these people under church discipline or letting other churches know that they are false prophets. And in many areas, people wander from church to church claiming to be prophets asking for the right to give their prophecies in our churches. When church leaders allow them, it is not long until the false teachers have divided the church, often taking the youth away to form their own special group. The early church learned that the only way for a church to be confident in visiting prophets was for them to have a letter of introduction from a reputable church leader. When are we going to become aware of the wolves in sheep clothing in our midst?

Q. 27. a) Describe how you have seen wolves in sheep's clothing in churches in Ethiopia. b) What damage did they bring to the church? c) What do you think our churches should do to protect ourselves from the false prophets while still allowing God to speak to us through true prophets?

3. Two types of people with miraculous gifts, one who is obedient and one who isn't (Mt. 7:21-23)

Although closely related to false prophets, there was another problem that Jesus warned the early church of. That was the problem of people performing miracles in his name, but who weren't true disciples. Jesus said that there would be people claiming to be Christians, who prophecy in his name, do miracles in his name, or drive out demons through his name. These are three of the major miraculous gifts of the early church. And Jesus indicates that the prophecies will come to pass and the miracles happen. No one will know from what they do that they are not true followers of Jesus. Most likely they will have amazed many people with their miracles. But when these people stand before Jesus for judgment, they

will be told "I never knew you." In other words, they might claim to be working on behalf of Jesus or speaking on behalf of God, but they never had a personal relationship with Jesus or God.

Jesus is warning us that the test of authentic followers of Jesus is not the presence of miraculous gifts. Rather, it is a life lived in obedience to God. This is a surprising teaching for many of us. We assume that when there are miracles, prophecies, or casting out demons, that God is at work among us. But Jesus says that is not always the case. There are two powers that can work miracles. Satan, seeking to confuse God's children, can also do miracles in the name of Jesus. So how can we know whether or not it is Satan or God who is at work? Jesus says the major proof is obedience. We often hear that we are facing revival in Ethiopia, primarily because it seems that miracles are on the increase. But the questions we must ask ourselves are "Are we as followers of Jesus living more in obedience to Jesus or less? Are we more holy as a community of Jesus or less? Are we one or divided? Is our character in the world like that which honors Jesus or causes his name to be mocked? Are we known for selfless service of each other and our communities or are we selfish?" If we are not those who are doing the will of God, then Jesus is warning that there could come a time when we stand before him that he tells us "I do not know you. Go to hell." Shouldn't we focus more on whether our lives follow the teachings of God's Word more than upon miracles? Yes, God does miracles today. But his major test of being his followers is never miracles, but the obedience of his people to his desires.

Q. 28. a) Describe what people mean when they say we are experiencing revival in our churches today. What place do miracles have in most people's understanding of revival? b) Evaluate the Christian community in Ethiopia. Do you think we are characterized as those who are doing the will of God or not? Explain your answer.

4. Two builders: a wise obedient builder and the foolish and disobedient builder (Mt. 7:24-27)

Jesus' final warning to his followers is in the form of a comparison between two builders. In Palestine, it was difficult to find good places to build a house. Often there were places that looked good to build a house since the ground was more level. It was a temptation for people to build there. But these convenient places were often on a place where, during heavy rains, a flash flood could destroy the house. Foolish builders would not think about the future floods. Rather, they would choose the easy place and later face destruction of their home. A wise builder would carefully choose his ground. Usually that ground was not flat, but rocky and needed a lot of work to prepare for his home. And a wise builder would carefully dig down until he found rock and built his house on a rocky strong foundation. Although the storm might come against his home, because he had chosen well and had a strong foundation, his home would withstand the storm.

Jesus teaches that all of us are building our spiritual homes. We have a choice to follow the lazy, foolish builder's example. That is choosing the easy way of claiming to be followers of Jesus, but never giving our lives fully over to total obedience of Jesus. We want the "eternal life" that Jesus offers, but we don't want to pay the cost of following Jesus. We enjoy the worship in church, but don't want to change how we live in the world. We don't want the cross of persecution, so we don't change the way we live. And we don't want the cross of sacrificial living as we seek to serve others more than ourselves. We don't want to obey completely what Jesus demands, for that seems hard. But what does such a life bring? It brings a temporary easy life, but the eventual destruction of what is important in life, our relationship with God.

Or we can make a much more difficult choice. We can be like the wise builder. (To the Jew, a wise person was one who knew what was the best and lived according to it. It was not just having the right

knowledge.) We work hard to rid our lives of the things that do not bring honor to Jesus. We totally submit our lives in obedience to him, even when it brings us much suffering or disadvantage. We continue to build our lives through obedience to Jesus. And what does this life bring? It does not keep the person from the storms of life, but he is able to withstand the storm and his spiritual life and eternal home is secure.

What are the storms Jesus was referring to? There were no doubt three.

First, there are the storms of problems of life which all people face; the death of loved ones, sickness, famine, or unexpected disasters. Jesus is saying that if we have not prepared our lives first through the knowledge and obedience of his Word, our faith won't stand firm during these times of disaster.

Second, there are storms of unique problems followers of Jesus face in the world. Jesus warned his followers that we would be hated just like he is hated. We will face persecution. Following Jesus does not bring us an easier life, but a more difficult life as most people will oppose us. Will our faith stand firm when the persecution grows strong? Unfortunately many Christians' faith doesn't. They hide their faith or they give up following Jesus and return to the world. This shows that they had built their spiritual house upon sand. If we prepare our house in advance to follow Jesus no matter what, the storm of persecution won't easily overcome us.

Third, there is the major storm of Jesus' judgment. Paul warns us that all of us will one day stand before Jesus to receive judgment, as if our lives are passed through a fire. (1 Cor. 3:12-15) Will our lives pass the test on that day? Will all of our expectations of being blessed by Jesus be destroyed since we have not lived our lives in obedience to Jesus? Or will we pass through the storm as Jesus welcomes us into eternity with great joy? If so, we must commit ourselves to complete obedience to Jesus now.

Q. 29. a) Do you think most believers have prepared their lives for the storms they will face? Explain your answer. b) What are you doing to prepare yourself for the three storms listed above that you will face? What can you do to prepare so your spiritual house is not destroyed?

THE REACTION OF THE PEOPLE TO JESUS' SERMON (Mt. 7:28-29)

Matthew tells us that the people listening to Jesus teaching his disciples were amazed by what Jesus taught. They were not so much amazed at the subjects which he taught. Rather, they were impressed with the authority Jesus demonstrated as he taught. Unlike the other religious leaders who passed on their opinions, or simply quoted from the Old Testament, or who quoted what other religious leaders taught, Jesus spoke as if he had the truth in himself. He spoke as if he was God, giving out his word just like God spoke with authority to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Unfortunately it is possible to be amazed at Jesus and still not choose to follow him. Most of those who heard Jesus were not willing to commit their whole lives to becoming the disciples of Jesus. They were never willing to enter through the narrow gate (faith in Jesus alone) onto the difficult narrow road. Jesus was not making the choice easy for them so he would gain many followers. Rather, he clearly described to those listening the implications of their choices. They had the right to be astonished by him, but still not follow him. Or they had the right to choose to follow him along the way of the cross and suffering. God always gives us the right to make this choice. But where the road will end up is determined by God. One will lead to heaven, but the other will lead to hell. How about you? Joshua told the nation of Israel "Choose

whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Josh. 24:15) Have you made that choice?

FOURTH DAY

JESUS HEALS THE CENTURION'S SLAVE (Mt. 8:5-13, Lk. 7:1-10)

We often think we know how God will work. We assume his work will be among the respectable people in our community. We think he will honor people who are educated, or rich, or those respected by the community. And we often think God will find his best response among our tribe, not among people from other tribes. But today we will see two stories of how Jesus often worked beyond the expectations of people. These stories teach us that God's Spirit often moves among those the world classifies as the less important people.

Q. 30. Read Lk. 7:1-10. a) Who wanted to have his slave healed? How is this person described? b) What did this man say that evidenced unusual faith? c) Whom did Jesus say his faith was greater than?

It is hard for us to understand today the strong division between the Jews and Gentiles. For over 500 years the Jews had faced the oppression of the Gentiles. Hatred developed towards the Gentiles and some Jewish teachers taught that God had no interest in the Gentiles, saying they were only created by God to serve as fuel for the fires of hell. The religious leaders had developed many rules limiting how a Jew could relate to the Gentiles. They taught "Gentiles eat unclean meat. So they are always ceremonially unclean. Any time we talk to them, and especially when we go into their homes, we become ceremonially unclean. If we want to stay pure, we can't relate to these Gentiles." So there were many things which kept Jews and Gentiles separate. (Note: This strong revulsion of Jews against the Gentiles and going into their homes would be as strong as what some people feel about going into the home of a fuga or menja in Kaffa and eating with them. In traditional Ethiopian culture, trades that work with their hands like potters and blacksmiths (called fugas) are despised. These trades are usually done by a despised subgroup within a tribe, like the menjas.)

When Luke wrote his Gospel, however, an increased number of Gentiles were putting their faith in Jesus and joining the church. The Jewish Christians felt threatened as centuries of prejudiced relationships broke down. In spite of major church meetings like seen in Acts 15, the issue would not die among Jewish Christians who felt that they must maintain the division between themselves and the Gentiles. "What was Jesus' attitude towards the Gentiles?" they asked. So Luke told the story of Jesus' meeting with a Gentile whom Jesus honored because he demonstrated even more faith than the Jews.

Jesus left the rural area outside of Capernaum where he had given his great sermon and returned to Capernaum where he often stayed. No sooner did Jesus arrive in town than he was confronted with a delegation of elders. In the town was a centurion whose slave was paralyzed and in great pain.

We don't know if this centurion was a centurion of the Roman army. Most Roman soldiers at this time were stationed either in Syria to the north or Caesarea. But probably there were a few soldiers stationed in key towns like Capernaum to keep the peace. Or this soldier could have been part of Herod Antipas's army. Like Herod the Great, Herod Antipas used Gentile soldiers in his army to control his territory of Galilee and Perea.

A centurion was one of the most important positions in the ancient armies. He was responsible for 60 to 100 soldiers. In order for him to be promoted to this position, the soldier had to be a man of proven courage and fighting skill. Because he was the soldier generals depended upon to keep peace throughout the empire, he had to be wise in how he handled people, dependable in his work, and able to evaluate situations and lead with skill. (Note: It is interesting that every mention of a centurion in the New Testament is with respect. This seems to indicate that this type of soldier was a man of good character, not usually someone who was cruel.) In the Roman army, centurions were not allowed to be married since it was felt this distracted them plus they were frequently moved throughout the vast Roman empire, which was inconvenient to the family. They usually waited until after they left the military to get married and have a family. Often these centurions would have a special slave whom they would take with them wherever they were posted. Since they were together over many years, frequently a deep friendship grew between the two. Obviously, this is what happened to this centurion since he was deeply concerned about his slave.

Although often Gentile soldiers showed little interest in local religions, this centurion was deeply religious. Luke tells us that he had helped build the synagogue in Capernaum. This indicates two things. First, this centurion had a lot of money. Although Jews must have helped in building the synagogue, it seems this centurion had given the major part of the money to build the synagogue. Second, the centurion was probably a "god-fearer." There were two different ways Gentiles could relate to the Jewish religion. A few became proselytes, becoming full Jews by being circumcised. Many Gentiles, however, were attracted to the high moral teachings of Judaism but did not become Jews. They worshipped the God of Abraham and kept many of the Jewish teachings but were not circumcised. This centurion was one of these god-fearers as was Cornelius, the first Gentile Christian (Acts 10), who was also a centurion

The centurion in Capernaum had developed good relationships with the Jewish community and the leaders. So when he heard that Jesus was coming to town, he asked the leaders to ask Jesus to come and heal his slave. The Jewish community leaders (called elders) came to Jesus and asked him to go and heal the slave. They were actually asking Jesus to break the Jewish tradition of not entering a Gentile home and becoming unclean. "Jesus, we know you will become ceremonially unclean by entering his home and healing him. But he is a good man and worth it. Please do it" they asked. Jesus was willing and went to the home of the centurion.

However, before he got to the house, the centurion heard that Jesus was coming and sent out some "friends" to tell Jesus not to come into his home. This centurion, a powerful man who commanded soldiers and could order people around, was a deeply humble person. He knew the implications of Jesus entering his home and how this would have broken Jewish religious principles. He also knew that he was a Gentile and therefore unworthy to expect God's favor in this way. Wasn't God the God of the Jews? Isn't this what he had heard from the Jews all of his life? But above all, the centurion knew the implications of a man of God having the power to perform miracles. He realized Jesus was a man of great authority and humbled himself before him.

In his message to Jesus, the centurion expressed amazing insight into who Jesus is. It seems what the centurion meant was this. "Jesus, I am a soldier. I know how the chain of authority works. The Roman emperor's and the Roman government's authority is seen in how it passes orders down through its leadership structure. So as a centurion, my words are seen as the authority of Rome for I am '*under authority*' and I obey orders of those who are not present. I also demonstrate authority by ordering others

to do something, and I do not need to be present to make something happen. Jesus, I understand that you are in the same relationship with God. Your ministry on earth is an extension of his authority over all things. So when you heal, you bear his authority to heal. But like me, you don't need to be present to heal. Just your word of command will accomplish the healing. That is how authority is demonstrated. So don't come to my house and become ceremonially unclean. Just give your command."

Jesus was amazed at the insight and faith of this Gentile. The faith was not focused upon Jesus' ability to heal, but in who Jesus is as God's representative. First, the man was not limited by the normal view of healing. The Jews assumed that for healing to take place, the healer had to be physically present. He had to touch the person or say words over the person. And most healers had special ceremonies or ointments they would use. But the centurion believed that Jesus did not need any of these. He was powerful enough to heal without being present. (Note: This is a warning to us to not focus upon certain actions which healers use. To focus upon the "oil" or the touch of the healer is actually a step away from Biblical faith. Our faith is never to be in the person or in something that he uses. Rather, our faith is to be in Jesus. He may choose to use the oil or the touch of the person. Once Jesus even used his spit! But it is Jesus, and not the action, which brings healing.) Second, the Gentile knew how great Jesus was whereas most Jews kept questioning Jesus, testing him to see if he was the Messiah.

Although there were examples of faith among the Jews, Jesus thought that the faith of this Gentile was much greater for several reasons. First, Jews were expected to have faith in God since they knew a lot about God whereas the Gentiles knew very little. He did not have the long history of the Jews on which to base his faith, but was probably a recent follower of Judaism. Second, there were not a lot of traditions indicating God would do a miracle for a Gentile. The Jews thought God would primarily help the Jews. Third, he had not been following Jesus watching the miracles. He had only heard about it. And yet he placed his trust in Jesus to work the miracle. But the Jews who had all of their advantages of the Old Testament stories and prophecies struggled to trust Jesus. (Luke is hinting that Jewish Christians need to realize this truth. They might think that the Jews have a prior claim to God's love. But Gentiles were entering the church (like Luke himself) who had as much, if not more, faith than most of the Jews believers. Therefore the Gentile believers should be welcomed into the church, not ostracized as inferior Christians.

Q. 31. a) Describe how similar prejudice is seen in churches today. b) Describe how you have seen God do something amazing in a group of people that we normally expect God to do little. c) List ways that in your church you can better welcome people from traditionally ostracized groups so that they feel truly one with us.

JESUS RAISES THE WIDOW'S DEAD SON TO LIFE (Lk. 7:11-17)

Q. 32. Read Lk. 7:11-17. a) Where did Jesus do his next miracle? b) Describe the situation. c) Why did Jesus do his miracle? d) What was the response of those who witnessed the miracle?

In ancient societies, like rural Ethiopia, those living in desperate situations are often widows. Culturally, it was expected that the husband work and grow food for the family, or work at a job and bring money into the home. But when the husband died, there was little income. Things became especially desperate when the widow did not have a son to replace the husband and work to bring money into the home when she became old. The Old Testament is filled with instructions to the Jews in how to help the widows, and the prophets often reprimanded God's people for not taking care of the widows. Often people

with power and money find this type of person beneath their responsibility. So they don't help them. But that is not how Jesus felt.

Sometime after he healed the centurion's slave, Jesus walked to the town of Nain. Nain was about 40 kilometers away from Capernaum, so Jesus was probably traveling throughout Galilee preaching when he came to this town. With Jesus were the 12 apostles and other disciples. Plus there was always a large crowd who followed Jesus to listen to him teach but above all to watch his miracles.

Just as Jesus got to the outskirts of Nain, he met a funeral procession on the way to the cemetery. A young man, the only son of a widow, had died and because it was a hot climate, he had to be buried quickly. Following cultural practices, the body was carried on a stretcher on the shoulders of people from the town. The body was probably wrapped in a blanket although it could be that the body was in a simple coffin made out of reeds like bamboo. In front of the stretcher the widow walked crying bitterly. In front and behind, people from the town were escorting the body to where it would be buried, also weeping bitterly as they thought about the hardship this woman would face.

Although no one told Jesus that the woman had no other children, knowing all things, Jesus knew that she was now a widow with no male children to help her. Jesus' heart was filled with compassion. The word compassion in Greek means to have a deep inner pain and sorrow for someone else. It is interesting that Jesus did not feel the compassion for the dead boy. Death to Jesus was not a place of sorrow, especially if someone was a follower of God. It was a place of rest and blessing. So there was no reason to feel sorrow for the boy. But Jesus' compassion was for the woman who was now left with no children to help her. She would face the rest of her life in hopeless poverty.

When Jesus arrived at the stretcher, he raised his hand and touched the stretcher. In Jewish culture it was very improper to halt the procession on the way to burial, but Jesus' raising his hand was a sign to those carrying the body to stop. According to Jewish customs, after touching the stretcher Jesus was now "unclean" for a whole week. (Num. 19:11-16) Only those closest to the dead person would ever touch their body. So the people would have been astonished when Jesus touched the stretcher and willingly accepted the uncleanness out of love for the widow. How it must have amazed the people when Jesus began to speak to the dead body! "Get up" Jesus said. (Note: Jesus actually said "*I say to you*" to express that he has the authority to command. He is not making a suggestion, but giving a command which must be obeyed.) Jesus did not put on any show in the miracle. He did not scream and yell or do things which many healers today do to seek to impress the crowds. Rather, his word of command was calmly given. And Jesus' miracle was instantaneous. The son openly demonstrated that he had risen from the dead by sitting up on the stretcher and talking to those carrying him and to his mother. Jesus gave back the son to the mother so that once again she had someone to care for her.

What does this story teach us?

1. Jesus shows us that God does not view our difficulties with indifference. Rather, every time we struggle, he is filled with compassion. (See Mt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34 for other situations where Jesus was filled with compassion and helped people.) The Greeks during the days of Jesus taught that the ideal person was one who maintained an remote relationship with others in their troubles. That way he would be impartial and know how to help. But Jesus is the opposite. When he sees people struggling in life, his heart is filled with compassion. And his compassion means that he gets involved and helps. What an

amazing God we have! He is not far away in heaven and indifferent to our circumstances. Rather, he is close and works to help us in our difficulties.

2. Jesus feels special compassion to those who struggle the most in life. Rarely do we read of Jesus helping the rich in their problems. But we are told that Jesus was filled with compassion for the widow lady. Every believer should know that Jesus has a special concern for them. And those of us in church must know that we too are to have a special concern for those who are in hopeless situations like this woman. The early church was known for being like Jesus, helping those who were struggling like the poor and the widows. One Roman historian writes that even during the times when the Christians were being persecuted, the Christians would help the poor, even the non-Christian poor. "Why can't we take care of our own people? Why do these despised Christians do it for us?" he complained. But often our churches today don't evidence this same type of compassion. Isn't this an area where we need to be more like Jesus?

3. Jesus does not need the faith of a person as a precondition for working. Although Jesus did not perform miracles when there was open doubt and resistance to him, Jesus did some miracles without any request for help or faith evidenced by the people. This teaches us that it is not "faith" that heals us. It is not a precondition for God to work. Lack of faith does not limit Jesus' power to heal. Rather, it limits his willingness to perform a miracle. We sometimes think that the reason people are not healed is because they do not have enough faith. Imagine that faith could be measured in a glass. If a person's glass of faith is half full, we tell them to fill it up with faith and then Jesus will heal them. But the New Testament does not indicate this. Filling up our cup of faith is not something we can do, and Jesus does not wait until it is full before he works. We must get rid of doubt in Jesus' ability to heal us. And then we are to trust him. But if he then chooses to not heal us, it is not the fault of our not having faith, but because it is not the plan of God.

4. Jesus is the great prophet. Raising someone from death to life was seen as the greatest miracle a person could do. Seeing the miracle, the people honored God for his great work in their midst and they recognized Jesus as a great prophet like the Old Testament prophets. The way that Luke told this story indicates that he is patterning it after other stories in the Old Testament. It is interesting that not far this location Elisha, one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, raised another child to life. (2 Ki. 4:18-37) Elijah, the model prophet in the Old Testament, also raised a widow's child from death. (1 Ki. 17:10-24) In fact the words "gave him back to his mother" is an exact quotation from the Old Testament story.

Q. 33. a) Evaluate your church. Do you think your church is known for its compassion towards those in the church and in society who are poor? Explain your answer. b) How would ministries in your church change for it to have the same type of compassion which Jesus showed to this widow? c) Describe ways you are showing compassion in your own life to those who are very poor. If you are not following Jesus in this part of your life, what do you need to do differently to be a person with greater compassion?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) What is the sin of hypocrisy and why did Jesus speak out so strongly against it? b) Describe areas of life that Christians, especially those who minister in front of others, fall into the sin of hypocrisy.

c) Discuss each of the areas of spiritual ministry (e.g. giving, praying, fasting) which Jesus mentioned as being susceptible to hypocrisy. List ways that each ministry can be performed from wrong motives. What can a Christian, especially a minister, do to protect himself from the sin of hypocrisy?

2. Prayer is one of the most important spiritual ministries. a) What lessons about prayer and the things we should be praying for can we learn about prayer from Jesus' model prayer that he taught the disciples? b) Discuss whether or not those types of requests are frequently seen in prayer or absent from the prayer of most Christians. c) Discuss what Jesus taught about forgiveness and prayer. What are the implications of this to those families, tribes, and denominations that do not forgive each other? d) When Jesus taught that we can pray with anticipation that God will answer, discuss what Jesus meant by this. What confidence do we have in prayer? When seen in the light of all of Scripture, what limitations are there to Jesus' promise to answer our prayers?

3. a) List things which many Christians worry over. b) Discuss why worry is an act of lack of faith in God and his character. c) Discuss how Christians can evidence in their lives that they are seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness more than all other things.

4. a) List ways that Christians often "judge" the motives of others. b) Why is having a critical spirit disruptive to the church? c) Discuss the difference between judging the hidden motives of others (which Jesus tells us not to do) and evaluating the fruit of peoples', especially prophets', lives. When is it wrong to judge and when is it important to judge?

5. a) The Greeks taught "Don't do anything that you do not want others to do to you." List some examples of how this guides our relationships with others. b) Jesus taught "Do unto others what you would want them to do to you." How is this different from what the Greeks taught? List examples of how this principle is to guide how we relate to others.

6. Jesus taught that there are two gates and two roads that all people walk on. a) What are the two gates and the two roads and how are they different? b) Compare Jesus' teaching about entering the narrow gate and difficult road to what is often taught in our churches when seeking to bring a person to Christ. How is our teaching similar or different to Jesus? c) We often judge the success of our church or denomination by the numbers of members. How does this relate to Jesus' teaching about the two gates?

7. a) What warnings did Jesus give about false prophets? b) Discuss ways that one can tell the difference between a true prophet from God and a false prophet. c) We are warned to examine the fruit and evaluate prophets to determine if they are true or false. How is this being done in your church? What should your church be doing more of in order to keep false teachings or false prophecies from spreading?

8. a) What does the story of the centurion and the healing of his slave teach us about faith? b) What does the story of Jesus' raising the widow's child teach us about healing and compassion?

LESSON TWELVE

FIRST DAY

Q. 1. Read Jn. 21:25. What did John say about the ability to write about all of the things which Jesus did and said?

The stories in the four Gospels about the life of Jesus are just a small indication of what Jesus did during his three and ½ years of public ministry. Each of the Gospel writers chose stories which suited his purpose for writing. Many of the stories were given to describe to non-Christians who Jesus is. And many other stories were given to teach believers what it means to be followers Jesus. Sadly few Christians study these Gospels to understand what Jesus taught about what it means to be a "Christian" or a "disciple of Jesus." So we tend to have churches filled with people who think that following Jesus is like walking through a wide gate on an easy road rather than the narrow road which Jesus described in our lesson last week.

Unfortunately we will not be able to examine each story of the life of Jesus in depth. So in our remaining lessons, we will summarize the stories and describe more briefly what those stories seek to teach us as followers of Jesus.

Q. 2. Read Lk. 7:18-35. a) What did John the Baptist ask Jesus and how did Jesus answer him? b) How does Jesus describe who John is? c) What do you think Jesus meant by his parable of the two groups of children?

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST (Lk. 7:18-35, Mt. 11:2-9)

One of the questions the early church asked was "Who was John the Baptist?" What relationship did he have to Jesus? Could he still be followed like people belong to a denomination after the leader is dead? For many years, there remained groups of followers of John the Baptist scattered throughout the Roman empire like those in Ephesus. (Acts 19:1-7) Using stories from the life of Jesus, Luke explains more fully about John the Baptist and his role in the coming of God's kingdom through the Messiah.

1. John the Baptist questions whether Jesus is the expected Messiah (Lk. 7:18-23)

John the Baptist had been in prison in the region of Perea for over a year. Although many of his disciples had started to follow Jesus, some remained with John the Baptist. Even though John was in prison, he followed the ministry of Jesus with interest. But John became disillusioned and confused about Jesus for several reasons.

First, Jesus did not fulfill John's expectations of what the messiah was to be like. Most Jews, including John and the disciples, thought the messiah was going to be a strong military leader who would use his great power to punish the wicked and overthrow the enemy of the Jews. And yet Jesus was showing none of these characteristics. If Jesus was really the powerful messiah promised in the Old Testament, why had he allowed John to stay in prison? Jesus even taught people to love their enemies, like the Gentiles.

Second, God had used John to proclaim a judgment upon the wicked. And yet it was the wicked who were following Jesus. Those who were with Jesus were "tax collectors and sinners" and those most

"righteous" were not following Jesus. John had a hard time understanding the "grace" of Jesus when he thought Jesus had come to bring judgment. And evil rulers like Herod were not being punished.

Third, the Jews were confused about how many messiahs would be coming. John knew that one of them would be the one who brought in the mighty kingdom of the messiah. But there were others who taught that there would be a prophet-like messiah or even a priest-like messiah. So perhaps John wondered whether Jesus was a different type of messiah other than the political messiah John expected.

John heard about the great miracles Jesus was doing. So he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him whether he was the messiah God had foretold in the Old Testament. Jesus did not immediately answer the disciples. Rather he continued to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and cast out evil spirits. Then he turned to John's disciples and told them to report to John what they had seen. Jesus was reminding John of the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the messiah. In Isaiah 29:18-21; 35:5-6; and 61:1-2, God said that his servant would open the eyes of the blind and heal people. Jesus encouraged John not to doubt and become like many others who were stumbling over the fact that Jesus was not like they expected of a messiah.

John was right in the predictions he had previously given about Jesus. But he was wrong in the timing of when Jesus would come to rule in justice and destroy the wicked. Although Jesus came initially as the loving Savior to die for our sins, there will come a day when Jesus will come again in power and judgment. At that time, John's understanding of Jesus will be fulfilled. The mighty political Messiah will reign forever over the world with righteousness and justice. John and the Jews did not understand that the Messiah would come twice, once to die for the sins of people and the second time to start the eternal kingdom.

2. Jesus explains the role of John the Baptist (Lk. 7:24-30)

Who is John the Baptist in the scheme of God's plans? Jesus asked the crowd "Is John like the common reeds that are found in the desert where John used to work? Is he an ordinary person just like any Israelite? Or is John like some great king's son dressed in fine clothes who grew up in a palace?" Just like we honor sport heroes like Haile Gabreselassie or musicians, ancient people greatly honored those who wore special clothes and enjoyed the power and glory of the palace. But John was not like either of these. He was not an ordinary person nor anyone the world would naturally consider special. Jesus gives the crowd two truths about John the Baptist to describe his unique role in God's plan.

a. John the Baptist is the fulfillment of the prophecy of sending an Elijah-like prophet to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. (Mal. 4:5) John had prepared the way for Jesus, so he was a great prophet in God's eyes.

b. John the Baptist was greater than any other human born to women. This is a Jewish expression to show how unique John is in history. From the time when God created Adam and Eve until the times of John the Baptist, people lived in the "old era." John was the final great prophet of that era, and he had the unique role of standing in the Old Testament period and pointing out to people that Jesus the Messiah had come and started the "new era." This unique role made him great in God's eyes.

But then Jesus said an amazing thing. When the New Testament times starts, in the church, the most ordinary believer is in a more unique position than John the Baptist. Although great, John the Baptist never become a believer in the New Testament way, for he would never see the death and resurrection of Jesus.

He would never have the Holy Spirit in the same way that the believers after Pentecost would enjoy. Jesus is using this expression to teach his followers that something radically different was about to begin. The Old Testament times, which John the Baptist was part of, would soon pass away. The promised new covenant times were about to begin. And those new covenant times were much greater than anything the Old Testament saints enjoyed. So Jesus' followers were in a unique position as soon to be members of his new people, the church.

As Luke reflected upon this great change, he shared how many of those listening to Jesus understood the amazing thing that God was doing in their midst through Jesus. But those willing to listen to and honor Jesus were the ordinary people whom the religious leaders made fun of and despised for not being as zealous as them in keeping the many rules established by the Rabbis. They were tax collectors, sinners, and the poor- all despised by the rich and religious.

Once again we see a common theme in the Gospels. When Jesus came a great reversal took place. The world honors the rich and powerful and those seen as religious. And the world despises the poor, the ordinary people, and especially those who are not as religious in a way approved by the majority of people. But when it comes to the kingdom of God, it is the poor and even the "sinners" who are most accepting of the teachings of Jesus and therefore are honored in his kingdom. But the rich and self-satisfied religious people usually reject Jesus. Again we are warned that God tends to work against what the world expects, and the kingdom of Jesus would spread most among the ordinary, and even the despised people. But those who are in positions of honor; the rich, the educated, the religious leaders, those in political power- they would have the hardest time understanding who Jesus is and submitting themselves to becoming his followers.

Q. 3. Describe how you have seen this truth that those who follow Jesus in humility tend to be those whom the world does not honor.

3. Jesus accuses the Jews of being like confused children who can't make up their minds (Lk. 7:31-35)

Jesus had come to save the Jews. But although there were some who would honor Jesus and follow him, the majority would never commit themselves to be his disciples. Rather, they were like confused children who can't make up their minds. Jesus compares the Jews to children playing in the marketplace. Although the proverb Jesus told is confusing, it seems that he is saying that there were two groups of children. One group wanted to pretend that it is a funeral, so they asked the children to start singing funeral songs and act out a funeral, but the rest of the children wouldn't join in. The other group wanted to sing wedding songs and pretend to be filled with joy and dancing. But again the children wouldn't join them. The children were not satisfied by either game. In the same way, Israel could not make up its mind about the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. John the Baptist lived in the desert wearing rough clothes and eating poor food, and preaching a severe message of judgment. He was like the funeral- filled with sorrow. But most Israelites and the religious leaders made fun of him saying such a life-style and message came from a demon. To say someone had a demon was a Jewish expression meaning that the person was "insane." Jesus came with the opposite type of approach. His life and ministry was like the wedding party, filled with joy, celebrating even with people whom society considered unacceptable. But the Israelites complained that Jesus was *"a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."* They complained that Jesus did not have the right type of friends and was not serious enough. To call someone a glutton and a drunkard was a strong insult among the Jews. So the Jews complained about John because

he was too severe and about Jesus because he was too joyful. They refused to respond to either of their messages, just like the children in the parable that Jesus told.

But Jesus said that their response to John or Jesus was not the final word. One day "*wisdom is proved right by her children.*" Jesus said that both John's ministry demanding holiness and Jesus' ministries of grace would overcome the lack of acceptance of the Jews. As the church grew and expanded through the Roman empire and the world, people would honor both John and Jesus. And especially on the day of judgment, the "children" or followers of Jesus would be vindicated. But those who laughed at John, Jesus, and believers would receive God's punishment.

In the same way, often Christians are the minority in a community. They are made fun of and often persecuted. We are tempted to give up and become one of the majority of people who refuse to follow Jesus. But Jesus warns us to not become like the majority of the Jews. There will come a time when our wisdom in choosing to follow Jesus will be rewarded. Even now, those laughed at and insulted as "Pentecostals" will often be those chosen for the best jobs since they are honest and dependable. But above all, followers of Jesus will have an eternal reward.

Q. 4. a) List some of the lessons about following Jesus that you can see in this section. b) Describe how the wisdom of following Jesus eventually wins over the mockery of those who choose not to follow Jesus.
Q. 5. Read Mt. 11:20-30. a) List the cities Jesus pronounced judgment against. b) Why did Jesus condemn them so strongly? c) For what did Jesus praise God? d) What invitation did Jesus give to people?

4. Jesus pronounces judgment upon those who witnessed miracles but refused to believe (Mt. 11:20-24)

Jesus' words of warning to the crowd listening to him grew increasingly more severe. Many of the people in the crowds were there to have Jesus entertain them with miracles. But they refused to respond to him in faith; to repent and submit themselves to the rule of King Jesus over their lives. But the Jews were forgetting a key spiritual truth. Those who receive the greatest benefits also have the greatest responsibility to respond in the right way or they will face God's more severe judgment. The Jews of Galilee had the amazing privilege of seeing with their eyes the Son of God, listen to his teachings, and watch his miracles which clearly demonstrated that he was the Messiah. But they still refused to repent. Amazingly, if someone is not sensitive to God and does not desire to follow him, even the greatest miracles cannot convince him. Miracles only help increase the faith of those who are sensitive to God and desire to submit to his rule over their lives.

Jesus must have done a lot of miracles which we do not know about since we have no record of Jesus doing miracles in some of these cities. We are told by John that if all of the miracles were described, the world could not hold all of the books. (Jn. 21:25) Jesus listed different cities in Galilee which had witnessed his miracles. These cities were probably representative of other cities of Galilee and Judea who had the privilege of watching Jesus' miracles, but as a whole, they and their leaders refused to accept Jesus as the rightful king over their lives and follow him. Korazin was a city three kilometers to the north of Capernaum. We never read of Jesus being there and doing miracles, but obviously he had done some miracles there. Bethsaida was to the north of Capernaum close to where the Jordan River entered the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was the major center where Jesus did many of his miracles.

The word "woe" in Greek means both an expression of anger, but also of sorrow over the problems people had brought upon themselves. Jesus' words must have shocked the Jews. Tyre and Sidon were historical enemies of the Jews. In the Old Testament, they were strongly prophesied against. (See Is. 23; Jer. 25:15-26; Ezek. 26:3-7; 28:11,18-22) Sodom and Gomorrah were the two cities during the days of Abraham which were destroyed because they were so wicked. (Gen. 19) Jesus told the crowd of Jews listening to him that if he had showed this type of miracles among the heathen, sinful nations, they would have repented. The words "*sackcloth and ashes*" refers to the Jewish practice of wearing a rough garment next to their skins and putting ashes on their heads or sitting in ashes to express deep sorrow and repentance for sins. But the Jews, with all of their supposed religiousness and obeying the Law, in rejecting Jesus, were going to face a much greater punishment. Jesus compared Capernaum to Babylon, the most evil enemy of the Jews. Like Babylon, Capernaum had become proud, perhaps even proud that the famous Jesus lived in their town most of the time! But Jesus said that Capernaum would be like Babylon, humbled and its people go to hell. (Is. 14:13-15)

This provides a strong warning to those of us who have grown up in a Christian home. We have the unique privilege of being born and growing up in a Christian home. We have had the opportunity to listen to the Gospel every week, whereas there are others who, from the day they are born until they die, never hear the Gospel. We enjoy religious freedoms whereas in other countries someone choosing to follow Jesus faces death. And yet it is easy for us to become indifferent to the Gospel. We might follow Jesus when it is convenient. But we never give our lives totally over to Jesus, submitting to his will in our lives. Jesus is saying that we need to remember that we have been given unique privileges. But with it comes greater punishment if we do not use those privileges to serve Jesus even more fully.

Q. 6. a) Describe how you have seen the children of believers, especially church leaders, treat the Gospel casually and do not give their lives totally to Jesus. b) Describe how Christian parents and the church could do a better job warning children that this "privilege" brings with it greater responsibility.

5. Jesus explains the mystery of God's choice of who believes in him (Mt. 11:25-27)

The lack of response to Jesus from the majority of the Jews raises a theological dilemma. Does the fact that the majority of the Jews refused to follow their King Jesus mean that God's plans were defeated? In his response Jesus introduces one of the most mysterious theological truths of the Bible. The Bible teaches two seemingly opposite truths.

First, there is the truth that God always invites all people to choose to repent and believe on Jesus and be saved. Scholars call this "human responsibility." The Bible teaches that people are either given eternal life or eternal punishment depending upon their choice of whether or not to follow Jesus. The Bible never teaches that a person is in hell because God refused to let him believe. Jesus honors this truth and he pronounces punishment of the cities because they chose not to believe. In Mt. 11:28-30 Jesus will offer everyone the choice to follow him and receive the rest he will give.

Second, there is the truth that God determines who will be saved. No one believes simply because he chose God. God also chooses a person. As Jesus later says no one can come to God the Father for salvation without Jesus first drawing them. (Jn. 6:44) Scholars call this truth "the sovereignty of God."

The Bible teaches both truths and never seeks to reconcile them. There are some Christians who totally focus upon human responsibility. They can become proud thinking "I am a Christian because

I chose to believe on Jesus. Aren't I great!" In doing so they raise themselves up and lower God from his powerful position as the sovereign Controller of the universe. But there are other Christians who so focus upon the sovereign choice of God that they blame God for someone not doing something or not believing. We must be careful from either extreme. Only in heaven will we fully understand how our ability to choose to do or not do something and God's role in our choices fit together. Until then we must seek to balance these two truths.

In Mt. 11:25-27, Jesus explains salvation from the side of God's sovereign choice. Notice the following:

a. In prayer Jesus praises God for his sovereign working in human history. Jesus calls God "Father," a word expressing his unique role to God the Father. But he also calls him "Lord of heaven and earth" to remind us that God is in absolute control of all things in heaven and earth. Nothing happens that is outside of his will. Even salvation is under God's control.

b. Jesus also praised God because he chooses to reverse the normal situation on earth. He hides the truths of salvation from those who are rich and considered wise. This does not mean that God is against us becoming educated. But it reveals a truth that often those who are rich, powerful, and educated (called the "wise") have the most difficulty understanding the Gospel and humbling themselves in repentance, which is necessary to follow Jesus. They depend upon their riches and education, not in humility upon God. The people reveal that they have not been predestined (chosen) by God by refusing to trust in him. God also opens the eyes of the "*children*," those who are not as well educated or as powerful, the poor and "sinners," so that they can believe. It is this group of people who are most receptive to listening to the Gospel and understand it easiest. Those who openly recognize their sinfulness and turn to Jesus confident in his salvation are called "little children" for they are like little children who don't demand to understand everything their parents do but trust the parents to take care them. Those who follow Jesus reveal that they have been chosen by God by placing their trust in Jesus.

c. Jesus has assumed God's place of sovereignly revealing truth (this is what Jesus meant by "all things") and choosing who will follow him. This must have greatly shocked the Jews. They understood the sovereign choice of God. But when Jesus said that God had given him the roles of revealing divine truth and choosing people for salvation, they fully understood that Jesus was claiming to be God the Father's divine chosen representative.

d. Jesus alone has the perfect knowledge of God. Their knowledge is reciprocal. God the Father, not the people during Jesus' time, fully knows Jesus and who he is. But even more amazingly, Jesus, as God's unique Son, fully knows the character and will of God the Father. (Note: The word "know" means "to know exactly, completely, with nothing hidden or unknown.") And from now on, no one can ever know God the Father unless Jesus reveals the truth to him. Jesus is telling the Jews that from now on they can't claim to know God the Father just by following the Old Testament Law. Things had changed. Now to know truth and to receive eternal life, they must turn to God the Son. Peter would later express it in Acts 4:12 by saying "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." To refuse to accept Jesus is to refuse to accept God the Father. The Jews could not worship one without accepting the other.

The world is filled with religious people. There are many different religions and millions of people zealously following their teachings. But Jesus is saying that it does not matter how zealous they are or how moral they are, they are false. One of the popular teachings in the world today is that "There are many ways

to God- and each religion has its own right to teach a way to God. It is wrong for one religion to tell another religion 'you are wrong.'" Satan wants us to believe this lie. But Jesus and the early apostles refused to accept such teachings. A person can enter the narrow gate of salvation only by coming to Jesus and becoming his follower. This is why it is so important for us to share with everyone the unique role of Jesus and invite them to enter God's kingdom through the narrow gate.

Q. 7. a) Describe how you have heard people say there are many ways to God and all religions are good. b) Why is this a dangerous teaching for Christians to accept? c) If Jesus is the only way of salvation, what does this teach us about our urgent need to clearly share with all people how to follow Jesus?

6. Jesus invites the weary to come to him for rest (Mt. 11:28-30)

Having shared his unique role in calling people to know God the Father, Jesus now shows the other side of salvation, which is the side of human responsibility. Jesus invites anyone who is weary and burdened to come to him for rest. This invitation was primarily not given to his disciples, because they had already come to Jesus and started to follow him. This is especially an invitation for those who were in the crowd listening to Jesus, to give up their lack of faith and follow him.

This invitation is given against the background of Jewish understandings.

a. The invitation is to the weary and burdened. The Greek word "*weary*" expresses exhaustion, similar to a person who works so hard that he is completely tired and cannot do anything else. The word "*burdened*" refers to a very heavy load which causes one to feel like collapsing, much like a load put on a donkey to the point that it is about ready to fall down. But what is the burden Jesus is referring to? The immediate context is to those who are weighed down by religious rules like the Pharisees taught. They had tried repeatedly to keep these rules but found them impossible. Even the Jewish leaders at times admitted that keeping the Old Testament Laws was a burden. (See Acts 15:10 for Peter's description of keeping the Old Testament laws.) And the Pharisees had added thousands of other rules people were supposed to keep. People had tried, but all these laws accomplished was an inner weariness. Of course those who are burdened down by the problems of life can come to Jesus and he will help them. (Mt. 23:4) But the major understanding of this verse is an invitation to those who have tried so hard to be good enough for God to accept them; they have given to the poor, or fasted, or they have gone to church regularly but still don't have the sense that God has forgiven them. They are the ones who need to come to Jesus for another way to be reconciled to God, one where God graciously gives rest and salvation as a free gift.

b. Jesus promises to give those who come to him "*rest*." The Jews understood this word "*rest*" in a special way. In the Old Testament, when the Jews were wandering in the wilderness, God told them that they would get to the Promised Land and be able to rest. Many years later, when they overcame their enemies, they were said to have gained the rest that God had promised them. (Ex. 33:14; Josh. 21:44) The Jews who were under the domination of Gentile nations during the days of Jesus believed that only the Messiah would give them political rest. So the word rest became a special word symbolizing the blessings God had promised his people, including rest from the oppression of their enemies and material blessings from God. (Note: The Jewish religious leaders taught that a person must go to the Law if they wanted the blessings God had for him. But Jesus boldly taught that those seeking rest were to come to him. He, not the Law or even God the Father would be the one to give them the rest they needed. Jesus is again hinting that he is equal to God the Father, who is the source of all blessing.)

By promising rest, Jesus is not saying there will no longer be any problems. Rather, he is saying that if we come to him, we will receive immediate rest of our souls from the oppression of being separated from God and weary striving to be saved. As we come under his kingly rule, we will receive the rest of salvation, of peace of heart, and of a satisfied life. We will get rid of the burdens of worry, anxiety, and meaninglessness. And one day, when we die or Jesus comes to rule in absolute authority, we will enjoy the rest of eternity in heaven.

c. To get rest, people must take on Jesus' yoke and learn from him. Jesus made use of a common expression to explain the truth that it is only in obedience to Jesus' teachings that we can receive rest. The Jews had an expression "the yoke of the Law." They believed that a person who would submit his life to obedience to the Law would enjoy a blessed life. But Jesus is saying that is no longer true. It wasn't by living their lives in obedience to the Old Testament laws or to the commandments of the religious leaders that they would be honored by God. Rather, it was by submitting their lives to the teachings of Jesus and becoming his disciples. (Note: Jesus is again demonstrating his authority, for he is the one who has replaced the yoke of the Old Testament with the yoke to him and his teaching.) To get the rest that they desired, people had to learn what Jesus taught, which was his revelation of God's truth to them. (We studied a good summary of this in the Sermon on the Mountain.) And after learning the truths that Jesus taught, each person must submit his life to obey Jesus. It is only in a life of obedience that the rest will come.

This is very different from what we often teach new believers. We focus upon "belief" that Jesus died for our sins. That is important, but Jesus said that to receive rest in our hearts, believers must submit to him. We can never get inner peace and satisfaction by doing what we want. We can only get it by submitting to Jesus. Satan tells us that the commands of Jesus restrict us, that rest and freedom come through disobedience. For instance, many seek God's command prohibiting all sexual relationships outside of marriage as restricting and bad. But God insists that faithfulness to our marriage partner brings true rest. Often people want to disobey those commands trusting that some day they can repent and be forgiven. So people take a second wife because they think once they are in the church it will limit their freedoms. Or they commit sexual sin thinking Jesus is limiting their sexual satisfaction. But in rebelling against Jesus' commands, we chose a way that always hurts us. True blessing is always found in the way of obedience to Jesus. Even the world is finding out that the greatest sexual satisfaction is found by those who are faithfully married to each other. Every time we choose to disobey God's truth, we leave the path of greatest blessing and rest, both now and in eternity.

d. Jesus is gentle and humble. This is one of the few times when Jesus describes his character. He is probably contrasting himself to the political and religious leaders whom the people knew. The religious leaders were harsh and judgmental, always reprimanding people for not obeying the law. And the leaders were proud, considering themselves as better than the ordinary people. But Jesus is the friend of sinners and when sinners come in repentance, he graciously and gently accepts them without reprimanding them. And he is humble, not seeking his own honor or interests but gives up his rights to serve others, especially those who come to him in repentance.

e. The yoke Jesus offers is "*easy and my burden light*." Remember that Jesus is focusing upon the yoke of obedience to his teaching, not to the situations in life. Jesus did not mean that if we believe on him we will not face problems in life. Nor is Jesus saying that he will not make any difficult demands upon us. We just saw in the Sermon on the Mountain that in many ways following Jesus is an even more difficult way

than the road of the Pharisees with their many rules. God's way demands that we address the deep evilness of our hearts, not only our actions. Rather, Jesus is saying that if we submit our lives to him and join ourselves to him as his followers, something amazing will happen. Obedience to Jesus' commands will be easy. The word "easy" yoke in the Greek means to have a yoke that is well fit and does not chafe. The Jews would often custom make their yokes to their team of oxen. They would measure the necks of the oxen and then carve out the wood to make them fit exactly. When they did this, the yoke would not cause sores on the neck of the oxen. Such a yoke was called an easy yoke. Jesus meant that when we follow him, although there is still work to do and we will continue to face difficult circumstances, our hearts will have a deep sense of peace and purpose we have never felt before.

Following Jesus as his disciples will also lighten our burden. How can this happen? Again, Jesus would not take away the burden. Rather, because we are related to him, he is the one who would give us the power to obey him. (In coming to Jesus, it is like a younger ox being joined with a large powerful ox. Both work, but it is the power of the larger ox which accomplishes most of the work. In the same way, when yoked with Jesus, we still work, but his power works in and through us to accomplish God's will. [2 Cor. 12:9-10]) Paul would express this truth that situations in life might knock him down, but never totally destroy him. (2 Cor. 4:8-9) Later Jesus would say that he would give all of his followers the Holy Spirit. The major purpose of the Holy Spirit is not to do miracles or give us powerful spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues. Rather, it is to give us the power to obey Jesus and be the type of people he wants us to be and do what he wants us to do.

Q. 8. a) Describe how many Christians' understanding of Mt. 11:28-30 is different from what Jesus meant in this verse. b) Illustrate from your life how you have seen obedience to Jesus make life less difficult and filled with peace and purpose. c) Describe ways church leaders need to do a better job of explaining the Christian life so that people understand that obeying Jesus is actually the best for them, rather than a burden they must reluctantly bear.

SECOND DAY

Q. 9. Read Lk. 7:36-50. a) What type of a person was Simon? b) What did the sinful woman do to Jesus? c) What was Simon's reaction to this? d) What did Jesus teach about his relationship with the sinful?

JESUS IS ANOINTED WITH PERFUME BY A PROSTITUTE (Lk. 7:36-50)

(Note: There are some scholars who think that this story and the one in Mark 14 and John 12 are the same event. But most likely Jesus was anointed twice, once in the middle of his ministry by a prostitute and once just before he was crucified by Mary. Luke is giving this story as an illustration of who are the "little children" who accept Jesus and who are the "wise" who refuse to accept Jesus.)

One of the things rich Jews liked to do was to invite a famous person into their homes for a meal. They saw this as a way to increase their honor much like we want to get our picture taken next to a famous preacher or sports star. One day a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to a banquet at his house. Although Simon could have done this because he wanted to spend personal time with Jesus and ask him more about his kingdom, most likely Simon invited Jesus because Jesus was famous and he wanted to enjoy the honor of having Jesus in his home.

In ancient times, rich Jews would build large homes with a large room where many guests could eat. At a banquet, it was Jewish custom for the guests to lie on large cushions on the floor. They would have their feet pointed away from the low table where the food was. Resting on their left elbow, they would eat with their right hands. It was also Jewish custom for poor people to enter into the large room hoping to be given some food. Standing just inside the door, they would be given some food by the servants. Or people could come in to listen to the famous person speak. But non-invited guests were not supposed to approach the table and interrupt the party.

As Jesus was eating, a woman entered the room. She was not there to listen to Jesus or get food. Rather she wanted to express her appreciation to Jesus. Everyone in town knew this woman was immoral and most likely a prostitute. She no doubt had been listening to Jesus teach and had repented of her sin and knew in her heart that God had forgiven her. Filled with appreciation for what Jesus had done for her, she quietly came into the room. She went to Jesus whose feet were pointing towards her. In her hands she had a small stone jar filled with expensive perfume, no doubt earned by her work as a prostitute. She wanted to anoint Jesus' feet with the perfume. Although it was custom for the perfume to be poured on Jesus' head, perhaps unable to reach his head, she poured it on his feet. Or since daughters and wives often demonstrated their deep affection for their husbands by pouring perfume on his feet, she was this custom to express her appreciation of Jesus' acceptance of her. People were amazed that Jesus would let her pour it on his feet since she was a prostitute.

Even though she was a prostitute ostracized by all others in the town, seeing the one who had forgiven her of all of her sins, she became overcome with emotion and began to cry. Her tears fell on Jesus' feet. Embarrassed she probably looked around for a towel but there wasn't any. So she undid her hair. Jews, like westerners, have straight hair. In Jewish custom once a young girl became married, for the rest of her life she was not allowed to have her hair undone before any man other than her husband. To undo her hair in public was viewed as an immoral act, and a man could divorce his wife if she did it. But this woman did not care what others thought. She continued to cry deeply and wipe Jesus' dusty feet with her hair. Then her emotions got even stronger. She began to kiss Jesus' feet. To kiss the feet of a person was seen in Jewish culture as a sign of deep reverence and gratitude. Then she poured the expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. This woman did not care what others thought about her. All she was concerned about is that somehow she could express her appreciation to Jesus for forgiving her sins.

Jesus seems to have ignored what the woman was doing, but Simon, the host, couldn't. He did not say anything, but in his mind he began to think "People claim that Jesus is a prophet from God. But how can he be a prophet? First, if he was a prophet he would have known that this woman was a prostitute. Second, as a prophet he would have stopped the evil woman from approaching him this way." So Simon concluded that Jesus was not a true prophet of God.

Like many Christians today, Simon had a mistaken understanding of what it means to be a righteous person. He thought that a righteous person stays as far away from evil people as possible. But Jesus demonstrates that the way of God is to come close to the evil person and seek to get them to repent while at the same time maintaining their moral purity.

Jesus was more than a prophet, he was God. So he knew what Simon was thinking and he wanted to explain to Simon and others one of the major truths of the Gospel. He told a parable about a rich moneylender who loaned money to two different people to explain a spiritual truth to Simon. To the first,

he loaned 500 denarii. One denarii was the amount of money a day laborer earned for a day's work, so this sum equaled almost two years of normal wages. To the second person he loaned 50 dinarii, about two months of work. The Old Testament taught that every seven years the moneylenders were to forgive the debt of the other person. However, the rich moneylenders, working with the religious teachers, made rules to get around this practice. If a person did not repay his debt, the moneylender would often take the person to court, have him thrown in prison, take his children and wife into temporary slavery, and even confiscate all of his goods. But this moneylender was not like that. Instead, he forgave both of their debts.

Jesus asked Simon which of the two men would have "loved" the moneychanger more. In Hebrew there is no clear word for expressing thankfulness and gratitude. One of their ways to express thanks was to say "I praise you." But their favorite word to express thankfulness is "love." So Jesus was asking Simon which of the two men would have the greatest appreciation for what the moneylender had done? Simon probably knew what Jesus was going to teach in his story so he reluctantly said "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

The moneylender in the story represents God. And the "debt" was a common Jewish word for "sin." Jesus said that those who are aware of their great sinfulness have a deeper appreciation to God for forgiving their sin than those who think their sins are only a few. Jesus pointed to the immoral woman whom he had previously forgiven of her sins of prostitution. "Notice how she has expressed her loving appreciation to me." Jesus said. Although Jewish custom did not demand that Simon wash Jesus' feet, anoint his head with oil, or put perfume on his head, a host who wanted to honor a person normally did these things. Although Simon did not insult Jesus by not doing these customary actions, he did not honor him with the symbols of love and honor familiar to the Jews. He did not wash Jesus' feet to clean his feet from the dusty roads. Jews wore sandals so their feet became very dirty so it was customary for a host to wash his guests feet before the meal. Simon probably had servants to do this, but did not give Jesus this common courtesy. And he did not give Jesus the traditional respectful kiss of greetings on his cheeks. And he did not pour oil on Jesus head, as was customary when seeking to honor a person. Oil was often used to soften skin that had been dried by the sun and wind. So Simon had done nothing to show love to Jesus, revealing how little gratitude he had in his heart to Jesus or God. But the immoral woman had done even more than a loving host would do. Her actions demonstrated her great appreciation to Jesus.

But it was what Jesus did next which shocked the guests. For the first time Jesus acknowledged the woman and said "your sins are forgiven." Because of her act of gratitude, Jesus again confirms that he and God had forgiven her. In the Greek tense of the verb it is clear that her sins had already been forgiven and Jesus was simply announcing again the truth that she was in a state of forgiveness with God. The Jews knew that a priest might be able to tell a person that they were forgiven of their sins after they sacrificed an animal. But only God had the right to say categorically to a person that they were forgiven. Here Jesus forgave the woman without any sacrifice for her sins. And he took the role of God and proclaimed that she was forgiven. Clearly Jesus was indicating that he was more than a prophet. He was God with the authority to forgive sins.

Why had Jesus forgiven the woman? Jesus said it was because of her faith. Jesus did not forgive her sins because she had anointed his feet with perfume. We don't ever earn forgiveness by an act we do. Rather, she demonstrated the reality of her faith in Jesus by her action of anointing Jesus' feet. In the Gospels, "faith" is never something that a person simply believes in his heart or mind. It is always something that is demonstrated through an action. To have faith is to change how we act based upon our

conviction about Jesus. Jesus told her to go in peace. The Jews often used the word "peace" as a blessing which comes with salvation. So Jesus was telling her to go enjoy the blessings of salvation which he has provided for her.

This story of Jesus illustrates how those who are open sinners, like the immoral woman, are often better able to understand Jesus' kingdom and get God's salvation than those, like Simon the Pharisee, who think that they are better than others. One scholar says that the greatest sin we can commit is the sin of self-sufficiency, thinking we are good enough that we don't need Jesus and his cleansing. To compare ourselves to others and think that they are evil and we are not leads to an attitude which undermines a need for the salvation which God offers. In truth, everyone of us, even those of us who think that we are better than others, are great sinners needing God's salvation. All of us are equally guilty of sin and need forgiveness. And all of us should respond to Jesus' forgiveness with the same level of heartfelt appreciation which the woman expressed to Jesus.

Q. 10. a) Describe how our churches can often have the same attitude as Simon towards others who are classified as evil sinners. b) List sins you have committed over the past week. How is your relationship to God best described as the one who has forgiven the large debt rather than the small debt? c) Describe how you are showing your deep gratitude to Jesus for how he has forgiven your large debt like the prostitute.

Q. 11. Read Lk. 8:1-3. List the various women mentioned who accompanied Jesus and the disciples and supported Jesus' ministry.

WOMEN DISCIPLES WHO FOLLOWED JESUS (Lk. 8:1-3)

As Jesus' popularity grew, the resistance of the religious leaders increased, and the time for Jesus' death drew closer, Jesus traveled increasingly throughout Galilee preaching about his kingdom. Disciples who were committed to Jesus' kingdom and who wanted to learn from him continued to gather around him. Not only the Twelve apostles, but we are told that there were at least 72 other disciples with Jesus who would later be sent out as messengers. (Lk. 10:1) What is unusual about Jesus, however, was that he allowed women to be part of his traveling group.

As we have seen in the story of Jesus, Jesus often went against the cultural understandings of people in order to reveal God's justice towards all people. One type of people who are frequently the recipients of injustice throughout the world are women. Like many cultures, the Jews had a low view of women, considering them inferior to the men. Starting from a young age, girls were discriminated against. They were usually not allowed to learn God's Word in the synagogue like the boys did. Their views were not accepted, and some Jewish leaders would not allow the testimony of women in court. And when they were married at age 13 or 14, they were expected to stay at home taking care of the children and their husband.

Jesus treated women differently, however. He portrayed women positively in many of his parables. Women were pictured as those who were more faithful to Jesus than men, watching over Jesus at the crucifixion whereas most of the men fled. Jesus honored Mary for her desire to learn from him just like any of the male disciples. And he even allowed women to join his traveling group. Allowing women to be part of his traveling group of disciples would have been scandalous to the Jews; seen as something that would invite immorality similar to how it is inappropriate in many rural settings for girls to travel with boys on the way to school or the market. In spite of the rumors this would have created, Jesus allowed the women to

travel with him. He no doubt wanted to demonstrate to the other disciples that in his kingdom, women were to be honored, not demeaned; and were to be allowed to have important ministries.

Not only did these women follow Jesus as members of his discipleship group, but they were some of the major contributors to Jesus' ministry. Women are often more sensitive and generous to the things of God than men, and they demonstrated it frequently in the story of Jesus through different extravagant actions such as giving money or pouring out perfume on Jesus. For instance, in Nigeria, women's associations in the churches are known for their generosity in providing for evangelists and missionaries.

Luke mentions several of the women who were with Jesus. One was called Mary Magdalene, which means Mary from the town of Magdala, which was located along the Sea of Galilee south of Capernaum. She had been possessed by seven demons (Mk. 16:9), and no doubt Jesus cast them out of her. After the crucifixion of Jesus, Mary was one of the women who went to anoint Jesus' body in the tomb and saw the resurrected Jesus. (Jn. 20:1, 20:11) Another woman Luke mentions is Joanna who was the wife of an important official, Chuza, in Herod's government. Some scholars wonder whether she is the mother of the boy whom Jesus healed. (Jn. 4:46-54) She was also part of the group of women who sought to anoint Jesus' body in the tomb and who saw the resurrected Lord. (Lk. 24:1-10) Luke also mentions a woman called Susanna as well as other women.

Q. 12. a) Describe how women have had an important role in the spread of the Gospel in Ethiopia. b) Do you think your church gives women adequate ministry opportunities and reflect Jesus' determination to go against his culture to allow them to minister for him? Explain your answer.

Q. 13. Read Mt. 12:22-37. a) Where did the Pharisees say Jesus got his power to do miracles? b) List three reasons why Jesus said that this could not be true. c) What sin did Jesus say was not forgivable? d) What warning did Jesus give about our words?

THE PHARISEES ACCUSE JESUS OF WORKING MIRACLES THROUGH SATAN'S POWER (Mt. 12:22-37, Lk. 3:20-30)

1. Reactions to Jesus healing a demon possessed man who was blind and could not speak (Mt. 12:22-24)

Jesus continued to openly perform many miracles. One day he healed a person who had a demon which had made him blind and mute. The Jews believed that the sinfulness of people allowed demons to make people sick. Jewish leaders would often say "There is no death without sin and no suffering without iniquity." Jesus clearly refuted both of these false beliefs. Jesus said that innocent people can suffer an accident without sin being the cause. (Jn. 9:1-4; Lk. 13:1-5) And the Gospel stories make a clear distinction between those who simply had an illness, or only a demon, or had a demon who caused an illness. We must be very careful not to assume these wrong ideas about the relationship between sin and suffering.

There is much that we want to know about the realm of evil spirits which is hidden from us. It is important that we get our understanding about the spirit world from the Bible, not from traditional religions or popular views taught by someone on a cassette or video. There are two dangerous attitudes which we must be careful of. First, there are some who deny the reality of evil spirits. Mainly in the West where "scientific evidence" is highly regarded, people think that demon possession and miracles are primarily a psychological phenomenon. They say that miracles are either a chance event or because when people are told they are well, they change how they think and get better. Although what we think and believe does

play a major role in our health, the Bible clearly teaches that there is a world of spirits, both good angels and evil demons, who impact our lives. God also does many miracles. Second, there are others who see evil spirits behind all disease and evil situations that people face. And so there are those who speak of "the spirit of adultery" or "the spirit of fear" or "the spirit of cancer." Or when their vehicle is almost in an accident, they claim a demon did it. The Bible never indicates that adultery and fear are the direct result of demons. The blame is always placed upon the person who has fallen into Satan's temptation, never that a demon has caused the adultery and fear. And unless clearly the result of demon possession, most diseases come because we are living in a world cursed because of Adam and Eve's sin. (Gen. 3) Biblical truth is found between these two views. Satan and his helpers, demons, are very active and bring harm to God's creation in different ways. But not everything is caused by them.

The opposition to Jesus was increasing. No doubt the religious leaders in Jerusalem began to hear many stories about Jesus and it is likely that they sent their representatives to Galilee to evaluate Jesus. The Pharisees clearly saw Jesus perform miracles so they could no deny his power. And not one of those whom Jesus healed returned to his original condition a few days later like many so-called healings today. So the religious leaders had to make a decision as to what those miracles proved about Jesus.

A miracle is an unusual event where God changes the normal working of life and does something that is impossible. Whenever Jesus did miracles, people were left with three choices:

a. They could believe that the miracle has a natural explanation. There are many people who look for a natural explanation when God does something impossible. They say the doctors misdiagnosed the disease or something happened in the cells to reverse the cancer. Or in the case of demon possession, the person is said to have a form of mental illness and his mind got straightened out. This of course is the normal reaction of many in the West, even Christians.

b. The miracle is because Jesus, using the power of God, healed the person. This is the clear teaching of the New Testament.

c. The miracle is because Jesus, like a witchdoctor, was working in the power of Satan. This is what the Pharisees chose to believe. By saying that Jesus did his miracles by Satan's power, the Pharisees were calling Jesus a sorcerer, a crime punishable by death in the Old Testament. In fact, for the next two hundred years, the Jews would claim that Jesus was a sorcerer and his powers came through his magical powers.

It is amazing that if a person does not have faith in Jesus, if his mind is already made up that Jesus is not who he says he is, then no miracle will ever convince them. Even the resurrection of Jesus would not change the minds of the Pharisees. So a miracle does not produce faith when there is a closed mind. But when someone is open to Jesus, then God often uses a miracle to encourage their faith in him. That is why when the Gospel first moves into unreached areas, often God does a lot of miracles to verify that Jesus is a powerful Savior.

The crowd watching Jesus was amazed at his power to cast out a demon and restore the person so that he could talk and see. However, Jesus did not have many of the other signs which the Jews expected the messiah to have. He was not a powerful political deliverer. He had no armies and had not fought a battle against Rome. He had not taken an active stand against wickedness and destroyed evil people. So

the crowd was filled with confusion and uncertainty as they wondered "He isn't the Messiah is he?" But the Pharisees began to take an increasingly strong stance against Jesus. Among themselves, and perhaps before the people when Jesus was not listening, they began to say "his power comes from Satan."

(Note: One of the Jewish names for Satan is Beelzebub. Scholars don't know the exact meaning of this name. Most likely this name came from one of the Philistine gods called Baalzebul which means "Exalted Baal" or "lord of the lofty abode." (See 2 Ki. 1:2) It seems that the Jews, angered over this corrupt god who was not like the true God of Abraham, made a nickname for this false god and called him Baalzebub, which means "lord of the flies" or "lord of dung." During the Intertestamental times, this became one of the names for Satan since the Jews believed that Satan was behind all idol worship.)

2. Jesus responds to the accusation that his miracles came from Satan's power (Mt. 12:25-37)

Jesus knew their thoughts, so he provided three reasons why it was foolish for the Pharisees to claim that he was performing his miracles through the power of Satan.

a. If Jesus was casting out demons with Satan's power, that would mean Satan was causing his own kingdom to be destroyed. (Mt. 12:25-26) No family or church or nation can ever be strong when the people fight against each other. It is only when they are unified and work together that they have power. In the same way, Jesus said Satan's kingdom would only be strong if it was unified. It was Satan who had caused the person to be demon possessed. And demons work to promote Satan's kingdom. So obviously Satan would not cause a person to be delivered from demon possession. That would be like fighting against himself. Obviously Satan would not do this.

b. If Jesus was casting out demons because Satan empowered him, what would this reveal about those Jews, with the support of the Pharisees, who went around casting out demons? (Mt. 12:27) "If you think others are casting out demons by God's power, why do you say my power is from Satan?" was what Jesus meant. During the days of Jesus there were specialists who went from home to home to cast out demons when people were sick. The Jews believed that King Solomon had discovered through his wisdom a way to control Satan. This secret knowledge was passed on to certain people. People who were exorcists would often take a very strong smelling root from a special plant and tie it in the possessed person's nose. This root was believed to have magical power and was very difficult to find. The exorcist would say some magical words over the person and then claim that the demon had left the person or house. Jesus neither supported nor refuted this practice. All he said was that the Pharisees should not have a double standard. They could not claim that their own exorcists were working with the power of God and Jesus was working with the power of Satan when a demon possessed person was delivered. To condemn Jesus meant that they had to condemn their own people who were practicing exorcism.

c. The fact that Jesus cast out demons without any magical words or special roots proved he was more powerful than Satan. (Mt. 12:29) Jesus illustrated this truth with a proverb. Suppose there was a man who was known to be very strong living in his home. If a thief came while he was awake to steal his goods, he would first have to tie up the strong man. Then he could steal what he wanted. To openly tie up a strong man means that thief is even more powerful than the strong man. If Satan was the strong man who was protecting his kingdom and yet Jesus openly entered and took away one of his possessions, this indicates that Jesus is more powerful than Satan.

(Note: There are some Christians who use this verse to teach that as evangelists go into a city with the Gospel, they can "bind Satan" or the evil spirit working in that town by praying in Jesus name. There is nothing in the Bible which supports this practice. The New Testament shows that we can only "resist" Satan so that we can limit his temptation or work on a case by case basis. For instance, Jesus "resisted" Satan by expelling the demon from the man. He did not cast out all of the demons from Galilee or a town at one time. Jesus only addressed demons when he met them. He never started his work by praying against them. We are not able to "bind" Satan so that he can no longer tempt us. Nor are we able to cast him into the pit. This will only happen when Jesus' eternal kingdom starts. (Rev. 20:10) It is useless for us to pray for things which the Bible already tells us won't happen. Rather, we are to take an active stance against Satan when we meet his work. Be it a temptation or a direct attack from Satan, using God's Word (like Jesus in Mt. 4) and prayer, we resist his work. Only Jesus is the one who can bind Satan. And he binds Satan every time someone places their faith in Jesus. Jesus is entering Satan's kingdom and taking away one of Satan's possessions. Through the preaching of the Gospel, we enter into this ministry of taking possessions from the "strong one.")

Q. 14. a) Describe how you have seen Christians become imbalanced in their understanding of Satan and his power over a Christian. b) Have you ever heard someone pray to cast Satan out of a church service or a city? Based upon the teachings of the New Testament, do you think this prayer works? Explain your answer. c) What is meant when we "bind" demons? Does this totally stop Satan's work? Explain your answer.

In strong words of warning, Jesus taught the people, especially the Pharisees, the implications of their accusations that he was working in the power of Satan:

a. If Jesus was casting out demons through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, then the Jews must recognize that God's kingdom was now in their midst. (Mt. 12:28) Jesus, the king had arrived. And Jesus was entering Satan's kingdom and taking away Satan's possessions and Satan could not do anything about it. Jesus has tied up Satan. (Note: In his teaching about God's kingdom, at times Jesus claimed that it had already arrived and was among the Jews. This is because Jesus had come as king and had chosen people (disciples) over whom he would rule. But at other times Jesus said that kingdom was not yet. This is because the consummation of Jesus' kingdom and his complete rule over all people is still in the future. That eternal kingdom is described in Rev. 20-21.)

Jesus is saying that there are two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of Satan where all non-believers are ruled over by Satan. That is where everyone is born and lives until they are delivered by Jesus. But with the coming of Jesus, another kingdom has arrived. In some way Jesus has tied up Satan. How did this happen? Jesus does not say. Some scholars point back to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and say that he was the first human to ever defeat Satan. At that point Jesus' authority over Satan was established and Satan became like a defeated enemy. More likely is the truth that, being the Son of God, Jesus has always had authority over Satan. But until Jesus came to earth, Jesus did not directly enter into Satan's kingdom to attack him and take people from Satan's kingdom. But now by preaching the Gospel, healing, and casting out demons, Jesus was using his great power to "steal" the souls of people away from Satan. Paul would later claim that it was on the cross that Satan's power was ultimately broken. (See Col. 2:15) By dying for the sins of mankind on the cross Jesus took away the hold that Satan had on people. Satan's right to accuse people of sin and demand their death was taken away.

The New Testament pictures Satan as a defeated enemy. He might continue to fight and struggle, but the end of his kingdom has now been determined. He is like a snake whose head has been cut off. The body still moves, but his death is sure. In Rev. 20:1-3, 10 we are told how with great ease God casts Satan into a pit and later into hell when his plans are determined. So we should not fear Satan, because with the power of Jesus on our side, we will always overcome him. This does not mean that Satan can't tempt us or use events to cause us to suffer. Rather, it means that in all things we are overcomers for the victory is eventually ours. (Rom. 8:37-39)

Q. 15. a) Describe ways Jesus is overcoming Satan's kingdom in your community. b) Why is it an encouragement for Christians to know that Jesus is stronger than Satan and that Satan can only do what Jesus allows him to do? c) Why is it an encouragement that one day Jesus will totally destroy Satan and his helpers, the demons?

b. No one can stay neutral in their stance towards Jesus. (Mt. 12:30) They are either joining with Satan and supporting his kingdom. Or they are following Jesus and are part of his kingdom. Jesus was probably saying this to the crowd who were following him. It was time for them to choose. They could side with the Pharisees who had taken an open stand against Jesus. Or they should choose to follow him as his disciples. But they could not remain neutral in their attitude toward Jesus. The New Testament always divides the world into two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of God, those who put their trust in Jesus and follow him as disciples. Or there is the kingdom of Satan. There are only two kingdoms--nowhere else for people who are neutral to be.

It is not clear what analogy Jesus was using for gathering and scattering. Some people think that the image is taken from the life of shepherds and the warning was to the Pharisees. If the Pharisees as leaders were not joining Jesus and his disciples in gathering the lost sheep and taking care of them, then they were used by Satan to scatter people and drive them away from God's kingdom. More likely it is the image of harvesting grain. If people do not join Jesus as he gathers people from the kingdom of Satan, then they are being scattered. Their life becomes as useless as if someone is throwing grain carelessly upon the ground or as if a strong wind blows the gathered grain all away. Jesus may also be hinting that if we are not actively involved in spreading Jesus' kingdom, if we do not try to help the church grow by sharing our faith, then we are indirectly helping Satan's kingdom. To sit and do nothing is a way of allowing Satan's kingdom to spread.

c. To speak against the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus is a sin which won't be forgiven. (Mt. 12:31-32) This is one of the most difficult verses in the Bible to interpret. Jesus strongly warns the Pharisees who were saying that the miracles he was doing was through the power of Satan and not the Holy Spirit that this was blasphemy. To blaspheme God is to speak against him and his character, to defame him and his work. Jesus told the Pharisees that they might sin against him as the Son of Man, but they must never sin against the Holy Spirit or their sins would not be forgiven "*in this age or age to come*" meaning either now on earth or later in eternity.

This is a shocking statement which Christians must understand. Out of love, Jesus had come to bring salvation and forgiveness from all sins. But these words of Jesus do not reflect "love." Why would Jesus speak such harsh words? Behind the teaching of Jesus is an Old Testament teaching. In Num. 15:30-31 God taught that when an Israelite knowingly sinned against God with a spirit of rebellion, there was no sacrifice for that sin. (See also Is. 22:14) And because there was no sacrifice, there would be no

forgiveness. There are similar warnings in the New Testament. The author of Hebrews warns people who had been in the church for a long time that if they renounce their faith, there would be no forgiveness for their sins. (See Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 1 Jn. 5:16)

What is the sin which Jesus was talking about? There are some Christians who are afraid that if they commit adultery or renounce their faith, they have committed this sin. Or others warn those who question a healer's power or a prophecy that they are in danger of committing the unforgivable sin. What can we know from this and other verses warning about an unforgivable sin? Let us start by looking at the whole Bible:

1) There is no case in the Bible where a person sought God's forgiveness for a sin he committed and was told that he had committed an unforgivable sin and could not be forgiven. The Bible always shows that anyone who comes to God in repentance, God always accepted him. People like David who committed both adultery and murder were forgiven. Others like Peter were forgiven of their denial of Jesus. So there is no sin which we can commit that puts us beyond God's willingness to forgive.

2) The only sin which brings eternal damnation is the sin of unbelief at the point of death. Jesus had earlier warned people that if they did not put their faith in him, they would be condemned. (Jn. 3:18) When we die, our state is fixed. If we are followers of Jesus, then we are the children of God forever and enjoy the blessings of eternal life with Jesus. But if we have refused to believe on Jesus or become his follower, then we will face God's eternal judgment of hell. There is no opportunity to repent after death and change our status. So our sin of unbelief is what ultimately causes us to face eternity in hell. We could say that unbelief is the "unforgivable sin" since death in the state of unbelief can never be changed through repentance and forgiveness.

3) When people, like the Pharisees, knowingly denied the evidence of Jesus' miracles and take an open stance against Jesus, something happens to their hearts. Their ability to sense the movement of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and understand spiritual truth begins to decrease. The Bible calls this the process of hardening of heart. (Ex. 8:32) The Bible indicates that the hearts of those who constantly reject truth will grow hardened to the point that they won't ever believe. Therefore their ability to be saved decreases. Jesus is saying that people like the Pharisees who are so close to the truth- watching it in miracles before their eyes and then knowingly turn against it, are in the position of great judgment.

So what did Jesus mean when he was talking about this unforgivable sin? There are different views:

1) Many scholars think this is a sin which could only be committed by the Jews living in Jesus' time. The unforgivable sin is the sin of saying that the miracles which Jesus did through the Holy Spirit was by the power of Satan. Clearly Jesus is not doing miracles in his fleshly body today. So they claim that this sin was only possible during the years that Jesus lived on earth. It was a sin which the Pharisees were ready to commit, a sin which would be unforgivable.

2) Other scholars teach that Jesus is speaking about himself before the resurrection. It might be understandable for them to be confused about Jesus before the cross and resurrection. So to speak against him was not yet a serious sin. But when the Holy Spirit comes after the resurrection of Jesus at Pentecost, then things would be different. The evidence of who Jesus is would be clear. Plus the Holy Spirit

will reveal truth to people. To take an active stand against Jesus at that time would have severe consequences leading to eternal death.

3) Most likely Jesus is offering a strong warning to people who are looking at Christ and trying to make up their minds. Until the death and resurrection of Jesus, there was a time of confusion and misunderstanding over who Jesus is which was forgivable. But once Jesus died, rose from the dead, and sent the Holy Spirit, people must be very careful how they respond to Jesus. They could no longer be neutral but had to take a clear stance for or against Jesus. If they joined the resistance of people like the Pharisees, they were putting themselves in a dangerous position. They would be taking a stand to support Satan's kingdom. And their lack of faith would so harden their hearts that their ability to believe would decrease. And ultimately they would end up in hell, dying in unbelief, which is the unforgivable sin. They would be resisting the revelation of truth by the Holy Spirit, and there will come a time when they would no longer recognize what is true. Not recognizing their need for Jesus, they would not repent and be saved. Plus since it is the Holy Spirit who is responsible to bring salvation, to resist the work of the Holy Spirit means that they no longer have a way of salvation.

Q. 16. a) What have you previously heard people teach about this unforgivable sin? b) What do you believe Jesus meant by the "unforgivable sin?" c) Explain why dying in a state of unbelief is the worst sin we can commit.

We might not know exactly what Jesus meant by this warning. But there are two things we should remember.

First, if we are Christians or fallen Christians or even unbelievers and our conscience is reprimanding us about a certain sin we have committed and we are wondering if we have committed an unforgivable sin, then we show by our question that we have not committed an unforgivable sin. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, no matter how great. (1 Jn. 1:9)

Second, if we are Christians contemplating returning to the world, or if we are unbelievers who hate those who follow Jesus, this is a clear warning to be very careful. Such a stance will start the process of hardening of our hearts so that it becomes less likely that we will ever repent. And if we do not become a follower of Jesus before we die, we have committed the unforgivable sin. After death there is no chance to repent and be forgiven. Of course we never know when we will die. A sudden disease or car accident could take any of us today. So the Bible always says "Today is the day of salvation." Please choose wisely today. Choose to follow Jesus before it is too late.

d. People's hearts must change so their lives become good. (Mt. 12:33) Jesus compared a person's life to a fruit tree. We only see the fruit. But we can't see the root. But the fruit evidences what the root is like. If the fruit is a sweet orange, then the root was good. If the orange is bitter, then the root was not good. Jesus meant that as Pharisees and Jews, they were focusing upon changing their external actions, upon rules of ritual purity, or tithing, or praying in public. But their understanding of spirituality is wrong. They needed to focus upon changing their hearts (the center of human personality and the source of moral decisions), which is the root of all actions. If, through following Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, they change their hearts, then the actions of their lives will naturally change to agree with what God wants.

e. The major indicator of a bad root is the speech of a person. (Mt. 12:34-37) The Pharisees had just angrily said that Jesus was doing his miracles through the power of Satan. They might not have thought saying this was very evil. But Jesus tells them that rather than external actions like not eating certain food or fasting on Tuesdays and Thursdays, what reveals the condition of their hearts the most is the words they speak. This is true of us as well. We might be able to hide many evil things from others, but the way we usually reveal our spiritual character is through our words. Do we use our words to build people up, to encourage them, to help them grow spiritually? If so, then in our hearts we are spiritual. Do we use our words to speak demeaning words against others like the elders or youth? Do we make fun of the poor or uneducated or others whom we do not like? Then our heart is still evil, even though we may go to church every Sunday.

Jesus did not only warn us against things we say in public, but the words which we say carelessly with our friends. Jesus calls these words in private ordinary conversation "*careless words*," which are words spoken with little thought. Often we can make our words sound spiritual when we are in church. We sing, preach, teach, or lead programs- all the time seeming to be spiritual. Or in meetings we are careful to say the right things. But the place where we evidence our true spirituality is when we are in private with our family or friends. If we tell dirty jokes, make fun of others in the church or in the community, or gossip against the elders or others, that we are revealing the condition of our hearts. Jesus says that each one of us will be evaluated on the judgment day for these careless words. These words will determine whether or not we are true followers of Jesus.

Q. 17. a) Describe how our conversation with our family or friends often reveals our true spirituality more than what we say in church or in a Bible study. b) Examine your conversation with your friends. What is that conversation revealing about the condition of your heart?

THIRD DAY

Q. 18. Read Mt. 12:38-45. a) What did the Jewish leaders ask of Jesus? b) What sign did Jesus say he would give them? c) Who would accuse the Jews at the judgment? Why? d) What do you think the story of the demon means?

THE JEWS ASK JESUS FOR A SIGN TO PROVE THAT HE IS THE MESSIAH (Mt. 12:38-45)

Jesus had done many miracles in front of the Jews, even with those who resisted him like the Pharisees watching. But still they were not satisfied. "Show another sign to prove that you are the messiah." they kept saying. A "sign" was a special miracle which they thought would provide clear evidence that he was the Messiah. One wonders what sign they were looking for. Jesus had already raised people from the dead, wasn't that enough? Perhaps they were looking for a great sign which defeated their enemies, the Romans. In any case, none of Jesus' miracles were big enough to convince them. Where there is no faith, no miracle will provide proof. People can always find excuses not to believe.

Jesus refused to do his miracles for show. His power wasn't to be used to astonish and entertain people. Rather, his healing power was his way of serving people who were in need. It was a tool of compassion, not a tool to impress people. (Isn't this different from how some treat miracles today?) So Jesus refused to give any sign except "*the sign of Jonah*." In sharp reprimand, Jesus called this continued desire to have a great miracle but never put their trust in Jesus "*adultery*." In the Bible, the relationship

between God and his people is pictured as being similar to the relationship of a husband and wife. Just as having a sexual relationship outside of marriage is called adultery, to have any relationship with idols or to not keep God's commands was seen as spiritual adultery. (Jer. 3:6-11) Jesus is telling the Jews that although they might no longer worship idols like their ancestors in the Old Testament, they still had the spirit of adultery in their hearts as they refused to relate to God the Father through repenting and following Jesus. (Note: Could Jesus be warning some of us that to always be looking for miracles to support our faith is actually a sign of lack of faith or spiritual adultery? We must grow to trust Jesus even though the miracles we might like to see are absent.)

Jesus said about the sign of Jonah, "just as Jonah who almost died in the belly of a whale where he was for three days and night was a sign to the Ninevites, I am a sign to this generation. I too will be 'buried' for three days and nights." (Note: Some scholars think the reason the Ninevites were so quick to believe is because Jonah's skin would have changed from brown to pale because the acid in the whale's stomach would have bleached Jonah. Jonah's appearance was an external sign which validated Jonah's message so people would believe what Jonah predicted.) Jesus was referring to his coming death and resurrection. His resurrection would validate that all he said and did was true. To Jesus and the early church, the ultimate proof that Jesus is the Messiah was Jesus' resurrection. Every other resurrection took someone else to make it happen, just like Elijah caused the child to raise from the dead. But Jesus rose from the dead without any human help. Amazingly, even though the Pharisees would know that Jesus rose from the dead, they still would not believe on Jesus. Not even this miracle would convince them.

This is the first time Jesus publicly predicted his death on the cross and resurrection. Hidden in his statement is the assumption that the Jews would reject Jesus and cause his death. It was still over a year before Jesus would die, but increasingly over the next year Jesus would tell people, especially his disciples, that he would die and raise from the dead. Jesus already knew that he was on the way to the cross. The cross was not an accident which took him by surprise.

Scholars struggle over Jesus' words that he will be in the grave for three days and nights. Jesus was buried on Friday night and rose from the dead on Sunday morning. Some try to make the crucifixion story fit Jesus' prediction by saying Jesus died on Thursday. However, it is more likely that Jesus was using a Jewish way of expressing things. For the Jews to say "day and night" they are saying "one day." So Jesus was saying that he would be in the grave for three days. And Jews counted a "day" as any part of the day. So because Jesus was buried on Friday, that was the first day, Saturday was the second day, and since Jesus was raised on Sunday (third day) Jews would classify this as three days.

Jesus tells the Jews that they would one day be accused for their lack of belief in Jesus by the Gentile nations whom they despised. Nineveh was the hated Gentile nation responsible for the captivity of Israel. However when Jonah witnessed to them, they quickly repented. And yet, the Jews would not repent when Jesus, who is God's Son and greater than Jonah, was in their midst. And the Gentile Queen of Sheba traveled all of the way from Ethiopia to witness the wisdom of Solomon. But Jesus was greater than Solomon and living in their midst, but the Jews refused to turn to him for wisdom. So these Gentile nations would act as witnesses against the Jews over their amazing lack of faith on the day of judgment. (Note: Through this comparison Jesus was hinting that Gentiles are often more receptive to God than the Jews. When Matthew wrote, Gentiles were increasingly believing in Jesus, but few of the Jews were believing. So the Jews, while claiming to follow the God of Abraham, were actually further from faith than the Gentiles whom the Jews classified as evil.)

The debate between Jesus and the Pharisees had all started when Jesus cast out a demon. So Jesus tells them a story of a man and a demon. A demon was cast out of a man. The demon went out into the desert where demons usually live according to Jewish understandings. But the demon found no convenient living place. So he returned to look at the man in whose heart he once lived. He found a clean, but empty room. So he went and got seven demons that were more evil to come live with him. Now there were eight demons living in the person. To say someone is seven times worse is a Jewish expression saying that a person's final condition will be much worse than his situation under demon possession. What was Jesus teaching through this parable?

1. It is not enough to get rid of demons as the Jewish exorcists did. That only provided a temporary solution. Unless the house is filled with the rule of Jesus, the life of the person will eventually be worse off than it ever was before. This is an important principle for us to remember as we talk with those who are demon possessed. Just as important as casting out demons is the need for us to make sure the person believes on Jesus and lives under his kingly rule in obedience. There is little lasting benefit to casting out a demon in Jesus name unless that person fills his heart with faith and with the Holy Spirit.

2. Perhaps this story is a parable about Judaism. Jewish religious leaders, like the Pharisee, worked hard to get people to follow their rules. They sought to clean up the hearts of people. But they had nothing with which to replace the old actions. This would not work for soon their lives would go back to a sinful way of life. It is only by becoming disciples of Jesus, by bringing him into their hearts to rule, by having the Holy Spirit and his power fill up the empty heart, that brings lasting change. In the end, because the Jews never accepted Jesus, Judaism would face a worse situation, the coming judgment of Rome that would scatter the Jews over the face of the earth and eventually bring eternal damnation.

3. Jesus is again warning people not to remain neutral to him. To remain a good Jew was only to have an empty clean room. It did not provide lasting deliverance. If they don't become his followers, they might think they are escaping judgment, but their eternal judgment would be severe.

Q. 19. a) Describe ways Christians today can have a similar attitude as the Pharisees, desiring more and more miracles so that they will believe in Jesus. b) What are ways we can commit spiritual adultery today?
Q. 20. Read Mt. 12:46-50. Whom did Jesus say his real family is?

JESUS SAYS HIS REAL FAMILY ARE HIS DISCIPLES (Mt. 12:46-50, Mk. 3:31-35, Lk. 8:19-21)

Not long after this confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus was teaching in a house. People were crowding all around the house, both inside and out, listening to Jesus teach and hoping to see him perform a miracle. Jesus' family became concerned about him, thinking that perhaps he had become mentally unstable. Therefore they wanted to take him home with them. Most likely their concern increased as they witnessed the open hostility of the Pharisees towards Jesus. They would have known that open opposition to religious leaders was dangerous. Mentioned are Jesus' mother and brothers. Since Joseph is not mentioned, this is a good indication that Joseph had died. The most natural reading of this passage is to assume that Jesus' brothers are the children born to Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus. Although Mary must have realized Jesus was the promised Messiah, it is doubtful she understood that he had come as the suffering servant. We are told that the brothers did not believe on Jesus at this time. (Jn. 7:3-5) Only after the resurrection of Jesus when he appeared to his brothers (1 Cor. 15:7 mentions James, the brother of Jesus) would they put their faith in Jesus. (Acts 1:14)

Because it was too crowded for them to enter the home, Mary and Jesus' brothers sent a message in to Jesus that they were waiting for him outside. Jewish culture placed a high value on family relationships. To honor a person's mother and father was seen as one of the most important commandments. Like in Ethiopia, there was a strong obligation to help the family more than any other relationship. So the Jews would have been shocked when Jesus turned to his disciples who had chosen to follow him and said "do you want to know who my real family is? It is my disciples. They have become my mothers, brothers, and sisters. I am now their brother. And we all have one Father, who is God. It is to them that I owe my first allegiance, not to my physical family."

(Note: Jesus also went against Jewish culture by saying women were also part of his family, his sisters. The Jews believed women could not understand spiritual truths and so it was of little value to teach them things like the Law. But Jesus did not believe this. Not only did Jesus teach women, but he included them in his wider group of disciples. Luke 8:2-3 tells us that women were included in the group who traveled with Jesus. Many of the parables that Jesus told were about women. Instead of portraying them in a negative light like Jews often did, Jesus portrayed women positively. Jesus treated women with dignity. Those who follow Jesus as their master today must also realize that women are co-heirs with them in God's kingdom. (1 Pet. 3:7) God plays no favorites in his family, so women are welcomed and honored just as much as men.)

In this story Jesus taught three very important lessons about the community which Jesus established.

First, it is "*doing the will of my Father*" that evidences that a person is part of God's family. Our actions do not make us a member of God's family. That comes when we place our faith in Jesus Christ and submit to his kingly rule in our lives. However, seeking to know and then obey God's will for our lives is an evidence that we are part of God's family. If our lives are characterized by indifference to God and his desires for our lives, or if we are living in open rebellion to God in some part of our life, this is a good indication that we are not part of his eternal family. But if we willingly choose to follow Jesus and do God's will for our lives, then this indicates that we are part of the true family of God.

Second, Jesus is warning that it is often the family who are the greatest hindrances to following God wholeheartedly. Mary and Jesus' brothers misunderstood Jesus' calling and wanted to limit his ministry. But Jesus refused to allow them to dictate what he should do. In the same way, many people want to believe in Jesus, but they are afraid what their family will say. And so many refuse to follow Jesus because they are putting their family above faith in Jesus. Our natural families can keep many people from gaining eternal life. But this is also true in Christian homes. Many Christian families work against one of their members becoming an evangelist or missionary. "It is dangerous. The pay is not good. Become a lawyer or doctor instead" they advise. Listening to them, many people whom God has called to serve him turn away from full-time ministry.

Third, Jesus is saying that within the family of God, we must not allow our human family relationships to be our major focus. Humans naturally tend to see their birth family as the most important. But Jesus is saying that when we come into the community of his disciples, now all are to have the same type of love and support that they would expect from their natural families. It is only this spiritual family that continues after death. When we get to heaven, we will not have any natural families. Instead, everyone there is a part of our family. So it is wrong when elders play favorites to their children getting them into the choir or giving

them the best jobs. In doing this, they are doing what Jesus refused to do, which was to honor his natural family more than his spiritual family.

Q. 21. a) Describe ways that human family ties have hindered many people from believing or from serving Jesus. b) Describe ways that a wrong focus upon ones' human family has hindered the church. c) How would things in our churches change if we all treated each other as family members rather than focus primarily upon our human family?

Q. 22. Read Mt. 13:1-9, 18-23. a) Write a summary of the parable Jesus gave in this section. b) What was Jesus teaching about preaching the Gospel in this parable?

JESUS TEACHES PARABLES ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD (Mt. 13, Mk. 4, Lk. 8:4-18)

As we have seen, opposition to Jesus and his ministry began to grow. Although that opposition was most clearly seen among the religious leaders, even ordinary people began to resist Jesus' strong teachings so that Jesus reprimanded "*this generation*." One of the ways Jesus handled the opposition was to change the way that he taught. Although Jesus had used parables previously to illustrate his truths, now more of his public teaching was given in parables, concealing truth from those with no interest in following Jesus.

The Greek word "parable" refers to many types of figures of speech like riddles, fables, allegories, proverbs, as well as parables. The idea behind a parable is a saying or a story which illustrates a truth. One of the types of parables which Jesus enjoyed to use the most is to take an illustration from daily life of people and use that to explain what spiritual realities are like. In many ways, Jesus' parables are like a series of pictures from a wedding. Each picture shows us a group of people, but never everyone. So no one picture gives us a complete picture of the wedding. In the same way, parables illustrate a specific spiritual truth. But a parable does not provide a complete picture of spiritual truth. Often, each parable provides a look at a spiritual truth from a different angle. In order for our understanding of what Jesus taught to be complete, we must always keep in mind the many other truths found in God's Word which balance out the teaching.

Matthew 13 lists several parables Jesus taught. Throughout the history of the church, these parables have been greatly misinterpreted, usually by people trying to see hidden meanings in the details of the story. But when interpreting parables, it is best to focus upon the major characters of the story and look just for one or two major truths.

Jesus left the house where he had been teaching and walked down to the Sea of Galilee. The crowds continued to follow him so he used this opportunity to explain in more detail what it means to be his follower and to be part of God's kingdom (also called "the kingdom of heaven."). Jesus got into someone's boat, sat down like the Jewish teachers did when teaching important truths, and began to speak in parables.

1. PARABLE ONE: The sower and his field (Mt. 13:3-9; 18-23)

Most of the people listening to Jesus were farmers and no doubt there were fields of grain close by. The first parable was taken from how farmers sowed grain. Jesus told this story not from the perspective of the sower and his hard work in preparing the soil. It is assumed that the farmer did all he could to

properly prepare the soil before he sowed his grain. Rather, Jesus' story looks at farming from the perspective of different types of soil which produces different levels of crops.

Jewish farmers usually had small plots of land. On the sides of the field were hard footpaths where people would walk to their homes. Sometimes the farmers planted thorns along the boundaries of their fields to keep out animals. Once the Jews plowed with their oxen, the farmer would take the grain and scatter it by hand like farmers in Ethiopia broadcast teff or wheat. This is probably the type of sowing that Jesus used in his illustration.

This first parable was the most important parable which Jesus taught. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention it first in the list of parables which Jesus taught. It is also important because it is a model of how we should interpret all of Jesus' parables. The spiritual issue which Jesus is seeking to explain through parables is "*the kingdom of heaven*." You will remember that the word "kingdom" was used by Jesus in many different ways, but it always meant where God is reigning. It could refer to the heart of a person, or the community of believers, or of the world, or heaven. So when trying to understand what Jesus is teaching, we must always determine what God is reigning over.

The Jews assumed that when the Messiah came, he would quickly introduce his political kingdom. With great power he would destroy the wicked Gentile armies and set up his glorious kingdom ruling from Jerusalem. It was primarily because Jesus did not start this type of kingdom that the Jews were frustrated with him. Because it was different from what people expected, Jesus wanted to clarify to the disciples and others what his spiritual kingdom would be like.

What can we learn from this story about the kingdom that Jesus, the King, has come to start?

a. The "**farmer**" who sows the seed is probably **Jesus**. But since followers of Jesus preach the Gospel, we are also farmers.

b. The "**seed**" is the **Gospel**, the truths that Jesus taught of who he is as the king, his dying and raising from the dead, and how his followers are to live as illustrated by the Sermon on the Mountain.

c. The "**field**" is the **world of people**, like the crowd around Jesus who are listening to the truths of the Gospel. It is assumed that Jesus and his followers, like all good farmers, would do all they could to prepare the field of listeners to receive the seed. We must have good seed of clear truths of the Gospel. We must have good relationships with people in our community. We must share the Gospel in a culturally sensitive way so that people are more willing to listen to us. This means we don't insult them by calling them names like "you are like goats eating that chatt." We should study how to graciously share our faith with people of different religions. So as those who sow the seed of the Gospel, each believer must learn to have a friendly relationship with people which improves their attitude and willingness to listen to the Gospel. We must prepare the soil through friendship and sow good seeds of clear truths from Scripture.

d. The **four different types of soil** refer to **four different ways people can respond to the Gospel**. Anytime the Gospel is preached or we witness, there may be four different responses. No matter how carefully Jesus taught and how many miracles he did, he faced these four responses. And any time we share our faith with others, we can expect one of these four responses:

1) Some seed falls upon the hard footpath and do not sprout. The hard path represents the hardened hearts of those who totally resist Jesus. Jesus shares there are two reasons why many people will not receive the message of the kingdom of God. First, people have hardened hearts, just like the hard foot paths. Like the Pharisees, some people have already decided that they will not listen to Jesus, so there is no way the Gospel message will penetrate into their hearts. We need to remember that no matter what we try, there will be people who will not be willing to listen to us, so our preaching will bear no fruit with them. Second, the "birds" or Satan will try to take the Gospel message away. Satan knows that the more people think about the Gospel, the more chance they have of accepting the message. So Satan will use family, or another religion, or the traditions of the past or just keep people busy to take away the Gospel message so people will not think about it or accept it.

2) Some seed falls on rocky soil and quickly sprouts. The soil with rocky ground underneath represents professing believers who become afraid of persecution and do not persevere in their faith in Jesus. Jesus was not talking about soil with rocks in it, but soil which had a layer of rocks underneath. In Palestine, many areas did not have good soil. Often there was a thin layer of soil, but underneath was limestone. Seeds falling on this soil sprouted first because during the rains this soil was a little warmer. But once the rains ended, this crop would quickly dry up for two reasons. First, the sun quickly heated this soil up so the plants would get too hot and wither. Second, the roots of the plants could not go through the rocky soil to where the moisture was. Jesus said that as he and his disciples preached their message, there would be some people who would accept the message with great emotional joy. "I have come to Jesus so he will heal me. He will prosper me and give me many blessings" they think. They are often the ones who sing the loudest, showing great emotional joy in worship. But when the sun of persecution comes, their faith quickly withers and they return to the world. Note how Jesus told his followers that persecution and trouble was a normal part of being his follower. He did not promise them riches and earthly blessings, only earthly troubles and persecutions. The blessings he promised were primarily blessings coming in the next world. These followers of Jesus who only look for earthly blessing and do not persevere during persecution do not bear the fruit of following Jesus and living his kingdom life. They are not true disciples.

3) Some seed falls among the thorns. The thorns represent the things of the world which we desire which clutter up our lives so that we do not focus upon Jesus and his kingdom. Often farmers in Jesus' time would plant thorns around their field. The seeds from these thorns as well as thorny-like weeds would often get scattered in the field. Although the farmer would try to dig these thorns and weeds out of his field, almost always the roots from these weeds would remain under ground. When the farmer scattered his seeds, these thorny weeds would grow faster than the wheat and crowd out the wheat so that it would not bear fruit. Jesus was teaching his disciples that there would be other people who make a profession of faith. But their lives are crowded with things which they love more than the kingdom of God. It might be wealth, or education, or family, or a good life. These things will cause the follower of Jesus to focus more upon his life and not the kingdom of God. So they will choke out the spiritual life of the person. Such a person will never be fruitful; they will never live a life totally committed to Jesus, loving and obeying him more than everything else. Such a follower bring little benefit to God's kingdom and it is questionable that he is a true believer.

4) The rest of the seeds falls upon good ground. The good ground represents the people whose hearts accept the teachings of Jesus and become true disciples. All farmers sow wheat wanting to see their seed multiply. Jesus said that would happen in his kingdom. As he and his followers sow the Gospel,

there would be those who would accept the Gospel and become committed followers of Jesus. They will evidence that their faith is real by persevering during times of persecution and by giving Jesus and his kingdom the priority of their lives. As they obey the teachings of Jesus, their lives will become fruitful. Jesus admits that all of his followers will not have the same level of fruitfulness for the kingdom of God. Normally a farmer in Palestine expected from 10% to a 30% yield on his crops. Only occasionally would the yield be more than 30%, and to have 100% increase was unheard of. Jesus meant that his followers will have fruitful lives. They will at least bear 30%, but some will bear much more, even up to the amazing yield of 100%.

The Jews expected a sudden coming of the Messiah's kingdom. Evil would be quickly destroyed and the blessed eternal kingdom come. However, this parable teaches us several important lessons about Jesus' kingdom:

a. The "*mystery*" about Jesus' kingdom is that when King Jesus comes, Jesus' kingdom would not have visible signs of power. Instead people will respond in different ways. Jesus wanted his disciples to realize that when they began to preach the Gospel many would not accept it and some of these would renounce their faith. Some will openly oppose the kingdom, others will seem to embrace the kingdom as followers of Jesus but fall away either because they do not want to face trouble or because they are more concerned about the matters of this earthly life. Only some will receive Jesus as their king and submit to his rule over their lives and will have lives filled with obedience and spiritual fruit.

This story is useful in two ways.

First, Jesus wants each one of us and all who were considering becoming Jesus' disciple to ask ourselves "What type of soil do I have?" Clearly most of us are not in the first group openly rejecting King Jesus. But are we allowing the fear of persecution to keep us from being fruitful for Jesus? Or do we so desire the things of the world that we do not commit ourselves totally to obey King Jesus?

Second, Jesus wants us to remember that we will never know in advance the impact for the kingdom we will have when we share the Gospel. Our job is to share the Gospel and leave the response up to God. Who knows, some unexpected person could become a Billy Graham or a Paul, serving God in unusual ways. We are to faithfully plant the seed and let God determine what happens to that seed.

b. It is important to realize that Jesus is not only looking for followers. He seeks fruitfulness. Many believers say they want to "believe" on Jesus, but they never get involved in ministry and bear little fruit. No or little fruit is an indication that there is something wrong with the soil of their hearts. It calls into question whether or not they are true believers in Jesus. We should not focus on the decision to believe which people make on Sunday to much excitement by the crowds. Rather, we should stress the perseverance needed in their faith in Jesus and the need to live obedient lives to the Lord.

c. All of us, but especially evangelists, need to remember this teaching when sharing the Gospel. We must not get people to make emotional decisions based upon some physical blessing like healing or the desire for wealth. Rather, we must challenge people to make a conscious decision to believe in Jesus because he alone is their Savior, even if it brings them persecution. Evangelists must not rush people into a decision, but share the Gospel in such a way that people make a conscious decision to follow Jesus knowing what Jesus demands of his followers. New believers must be warned about the weeds of the

world that will seek to choke out their new faith. The evangelist must encourage them to persevere, for only those who persevere are true followers of Jesus. Only those who persevere are those who bear lasting fruit as God desires.

(Note: The Bible does reveal that followers of Jesus can fall into sin or temptation and renounce their faith. But Jesus is seeking to cause us to evaluate our lives, and if we are in consistent disobedience or care little about spiritual things or show no fruit, then we should honestly examine ourselves to see if we are followers of Jesus.

Q. 23. a) Give examples of how you have seen people respond to the Gospel in each of the four ways described in the parable. b) Look at your life- which type of soil do you have? Explain how you know your soil is like that. c) List some of the ways following Jesus has made your life more fruitful for the kingdom of God.

Q. 24. Read Mt. 13:10-17; 34-35. a) What question did the disciples ask Jesus? b) Summarize Jesus' response.

2. Jesus explains why he used parables to teach (Mt. 13:10-17; 34-35)

The disciples noticed the change in the way Jesus was teaching. In the Sermon on the Mountain he had openly and clearly taught spiritual truths. But as opposition increased, Jesus started teaching using more parables. It was hard for the disciples to understand the spiritual truths which the parables taught, and it was causing confusion among the crowd. Later when they were alone, the disciples asked why Jesus was using parables. There were different reasons for these parables:

a. One of the major reasons Jesus used parables was because he was a skillful teacher. A skillful teacher or preacher knows that people understand truth the best when they see it illustrated in a real life example. This is especially true because most of Jesus' crowd were illiterate and preferred listening to stories rather than theoretical truths. Not only do people better understand truth when it is illustrated by a story, but they remember the story longer and also the truth that it teaches.

b. Matthew says that the major reason Jesus changed his teaching style and began to teach more unexplained parables to the crowds was because God's judgment was upon those who were refusing to become Jesus' followers. (Mt. 13:11-17) He told the disciples that "*the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.*" In his response Jesus was emphasizing several truths:

1) God's truth about Jesus' kingdom is a "*secret.*" This word secret usually means to us something that we knowingly hide from someone so that they cannot know what we know. But the Bible has a very different meaning for this word. The word "mystery" was used in two ways.

First, it refers to information which God previously unknown had just revealed. Paul often used the word "mystery" in this way. What the Old Testament prophets did not understand, God revealed in the New Testament times. (Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:51; Eph. 3:2-6)

Second, the word "secret" was also used for truths that were difficult to understand or hidden from a person who is not part of the group. Those who were not followers of Jesus would have a difficult

time understanding what Jesus meant. But those who were part of the group of disciples could understand it.

During the New Testament times, there were many Gentile religions called "mystery" religions. These religions told people that before they can have a special relationship with their god, they must become followers. After they had proved that they were good followers of that religion, then they would be given some secret knowledge known only to the group. It is in this type of "mystery" that Jesus refers to. Jesus was not trying to hide the truth from people by not sharing what he knows. Rather, Jesus was saying that only those who had joined his kingdom and become his followers were able to fully understand Biblical truth. Those who refuse to follow him would not have the belief needed to understand what Jesus' kingdom is like. So to those who choose to follow Jesus, parables reveal truths about Jesus' kingdom which they can understand. But to those who have set their hearts against Jesus, the parables cover over spiritual truths so that they do not understand. Often what is hidden is not the meaning that Jesus wanted to communicate, but the fact that people can hear the Gospel and the truth before them, but still not understand and apply the Gospel to their lives.

The "mystery" of the kingdom that Jesus was teaching was that Jesus' kingdom would first come in a hidden way, with no great division between the good and wicked people or between Jesus' kingdom and Satan's kingdom or in the defeat of the Romans. Rather the kingdom would be hidden in people's hearts. Only at the end times would the wicked be punished and the good rewarded in the eternal kingdom of God. We often want God to make a clear distinction between his people and the wicked. We want the followers of Jesus to earn the most money, to be healed from every disease, and to have the best life style and live long lives. We want the wicked to be quickly punished and God to humble all of his enemies. But that usually does not happen here on earth. Jesus is warning us that it is only at the end that this difference will be evident to all.

2) An active stance against God causes people to lose spiritual insight. (Mt. 13:12) In the Bible there is a principle that if we take a stand against God and his Word, one of the ways God judges us is by making our heart less sensitive to spiritual truths so it becomes even more difficult to understand and believe. If we don't want to believe, God makes it difficult for us to believe. Many in Galilee were now openly resisting Jesus. So Jesus warns them that those who think they have special insight into the will of God, like the Pharisees, will lose their spiritual understanding. But those, like the disciples, who have chosen to follow Jesus with their open hearts to what Jesus was teaching, would gain more understanding.

3) Part of God's judgment would be for Jesus' teaching and miracles to cause increased hardening of those who resist him. (Mt. 13:14-15) Jesus reminds his disciples of the truth of Is. 6:9-10. When Isaiah started his ministry, he was warned that because people had already chosen to rebel against God, the teachings of Isaiah would harden peoples' hearts more. The Jews in Jesus' day were in a similar situation. Jesus was in their midst teaching them. But they had already made up their minds to resist Jesus. So for them, parables would become a tool which would increase the hardness of their hearts.

4) Jesus tells the disciples that they are blessed. (Mt. 13:16-17) They have chosen to listen to Jesus and have their spiritual eyes and ears opened so that they could understand and obey the truths Jesus wanted to teach them. They had submitted to the reign of Jesus, so the eternal blessings Jesus promised would be theirs. Jesus wanted to show the disciples how privileged they were. They were more fortunate than any prophet of the Old Testament. The prophets looked into the future and understood that the

messiah would come. But they did not personally meet the Messiah or enjoy his rulership. But the disciples had Jesus, the King, living in their midst teaching them. Although the kingdom might not come in the way they had expected, if they submitted to the Messiah and obeyed him, they would enjoy the kingdom blessings prophesied by the prophets of the Old Testament.

Q. 25. a) Describe how you have seen God harden hearts of people who take an active stance against the Gospel making it difficult for them to understand spiritual truths. b) Describe how when we submit to Jesus and live under his authority our ability to understand truth increases.

FOURTH DAY

Q. 26. Read Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43. a) Summarize the parable. b) What does this parable teach about the kingdom Jesus started?

3. PARABLE TWO: The parable of the enemy who sows tares (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43)

The Jews expected the Messiah to come and quickly start his kingdom. He would destroy the Gentile nations who resisted God. And he would also punish all who are wicked. Then the Messiah would start his righteous kingdom. But Jesus did not have any army to fight against the Gentiles and he taught that his followers were to love their enemies. And he was a "friend of sinners" rather than seeking to punish them. So Jesus used a parable to describe what his hidden kingdom was like. He again used an illustration from farming.

a. The **owner** of the field is **Jesus**. Jesus is pictured like a rich land owner who had a large field and many servants who helped him with the planting and harvesting.

b. The **field** is the **world**. Jesus is hinting through his parable that God is no longer going to limit his work to the nation of Israel. Rather, the Gospel is to be preached throughout the whole world. And people from all nations are to be made Jesus' disciples. (See Mt. 28:19)

c. The **servants** are the **followers of Jesus**. They are the 12 disciples and the other followers of Jesus, especially leaders, throughout history.

d. The **wheat** are the **true followers of Jesus**.

e. The **enemy** who sows tares is **Satan**. Jesus said that soon after the owner had planted good wheat seed in his field, his enemy came and sowed tares. The enemy could not destroy the crop, but he could make it very inconvenient for the owner by causing extra work by having the two plants growing together. In Palestine there was a weed which when it sprouted looked just like a wheat plant. It sprouted quicker and grew faster than wheat. To pull out the tares like we pull out weeds would also cause the wheat to be pulled out. It also had a more aggressive root system and would spread out its roots around the good wheat. This was a conscious effort by Satan to hinder the crop that the owner, Jesus, was hoping to receive.

f. The **tares** are those who **do not believe on Jesus**.

g. The **harvest** is the **day of judgment**. The Jews often used the image of harvesting to refer to the day when people would stand before God for judgment. But here Jesus is saying that he is going to judge in place of God. He is the one who will separate the good wheat (his righteous followers) and the tares (those who refuse to be his disciples).

The Jews had two ways to harvest a field when there were tares in it.

First, if the wheat and tares got mixed together in the field, they could wait until the wheat was ready for harvest. Wheat grew longer than tares, so they would take their sickle and cut just below the heads of wheat to harvest the wheat. Then they would come back and cut the tares and the stocks of wheat and burn the tares in their ovens at home when making bread.

Second, if the wheat and tares got mixed together, after the harvest they would hire women to carefully separate the wheat seeds and the tare seeds (which were bitter and slightly poisonous if eaten). Just like women separate out the rocks and dirt from lentils, the women had to take a lot of time to get the tares out of the wheat. It was this wasted time which the enemy was seeking to accomplish.

h. The **barn** of the owner is **heaven**. After the judgment, Jesus' righteous followers will be with him in heaven.

So what does this parable teach about Jesus' kingdom? Jesus is teaching four major truths:

1) In the present kingdom which Jesus has started, the righteous and evil will live within one community. The disciples should not expect Jesus to start his totally righteous kingdom right away. Rather, that would only come at the end of time. So followers of Jesus must prepare to live in a world where Satan working with his followers are living in the same communities as the righteous followers of Jesus. Jesus is warning us that there will never come a time on earth where only the righteous wheat will be left. That will only happen after Jesus comes again to set up his eternal kingdom. It is foolish for followers of Jesus to try to set up their own little communities of believers. Even there, the righteous and the wicked will be intermixed. It is also a warning to believers to never use force (like the government) to separate out the righteous from the wicked. Throughout history the church has often tried to use the government to force people to be righteous, often by forcing people to be baptized as "Christians." But in almost every case this destroys the purity of the Gospel and the witness of believers. We become legalistic rather than people of grace who win people to Jesus by our gracious love.

2) It is impossible for believers to ever know completely who is wheat and who is a tare. Often those we think are believers eventually show by renouncing their faith that they aren't believers. And those whose lives reveal little of the evidences we expect of believers are those who later become strong followers of Jesus. So it is impossible for us to be certain now who is a true follower of Jesus and who isn't. Therefore, it is only Jesus' role to try to distinguish who is righteous and who is not righteous. Just like the owner warned that servants that to pull up the tares before harvest time would destroy the good wheat, Jesus is warning his followers that it is not our role to seek to remove the wicked from our midst. We cannot know who is righteous and wicked because we do not know the hearts of people.

This is also a warning to church leaders not to be too aggressive in church discipline. There will always be true and false believers in the church. We will see in Mt. 18 that church leaders are to bring church

discipline on those who are openly and rebelliously sinning. But when we try to root out all evil from the church, we begin to think that we are the judges and that we know who is righteous and who isn't. In our judgmental separation we can harm many who are true followers of Jesus. Jesus could be indicating that there are some who might seem to us to be tares, but are really wheat. And there are some who look like wheat, but are really tares. Only Jesus will be able to know which is wheat and which is tares. And he alone will be able to separate them out at the end of times on the judgment day.

3) Satan is actively working against God. Satan does not attack God directly. He does not even attack the wheat, the followers of Jesus, directly to kill them. Rather, Satan does all he can to hinder the spread of Jesus' kingdom. He does this by planting false things among the true. He gets people to think about things that are not true eternal blessings but things of the world. Or he sows false teachings among the true teachings of Jesus. Or he gets believers to clutter up their lives with thing which they love more than Jesus. Many think that we are overcoming Satan by casting him out of our meetings. Or we are afraid of direct attacks of sickness or accidents. But the greatest danger to our faith is when the wheat of God's truth gets mixed up with the false things which Satan teaches.

4) A time of judgment is coming. Those who refuse to believe on Jesus should remember that that day is coming. Therefore they need to get right with God by becoming a follower of Jesus while they can. This should also encourage believers who are facing persecution. There will come a day when it will end and they will enjoy eternity with Jesus. But they must be careful that they do not reject Jesus or allow the things of the world to reveal them as tares.

Q. 27. a) Describe how life now consists of believers and non-believers living together. b) Describe how church leaders can cause harm when they try to get rid of all whom they think are not as righteous as they should be. c) Why is it important for all of us to remember that there is a day of judgment coming where God will separate the righteous and the wicked?

Q. 28. Read Mt. 13:31-33. a) Describe the two parables. b) What do you think Jesus was seeking to teach through these parables?

4. PARABLE THREE: The mustard seed (Mt. 13:31-32)

Although there are other seeds which are smaller than a mustard seed, from the seeds which farmers in Palestine often planted in their garden, it was the smallest seed. What made the mustard seed unusual was that this small seed grew into a large bush over 4 meters tall. Although large birds did not tend to build their nests in this bush, they would often sit on the bush and eat its seeds. The Jews often used the words "mustard seed" symbolically when referring to something that is very small which had a great impact. So a small sin which could destroy many people was called a mustard seed sin. Jesus described the kingdom of God by what happens to this mustard seed.

In this parable Jesus is teaching that the kingdom he had come to start would not start quickly as the Jews expected. They thought that when the Messiah came, he would quickly overthrow the enemies of Israel and rule with great power. But Jesus said that his kingdom would start small as seen in the few disciples around him. People would look at it and think it is insignificant. But one day his kingdom would grow greatly. Jesus' reference to birds probably comes from Dan. 4:21 where birds in trees is a symbol of great world-wide influence of a kingdom. (See also Ezek. 17:23; 31:6) Jesus is telling the people that they should not judge his kingdom by what they saw, by the fact that there were no armies or signs of overthrowing the enemy.

And Jesus' disciples were not to get discouraged when they seem so few in number. Little did these few disciples expect what would happen in their lives. By the time they would die, the small mustard seed planted by Jesus with the 12 apostles would grow until there would be followers of Jesus in almost every area of the ancient Roman empire. Today the small mustard seed which Jesus started, which the Jewish religious leaders mocked, has spread around the world. Churches are found in almost every nation on earth and in almost every tribe. This parable, however, does not teach that one day the church will conquer the world and all people will become believers. It is only teaching that through the preaching of the Gospel, the church would grow large, being found in all nations.

This truth should encourage evangelists starting churches in new areas, especially among difficult people groups. Often when evangelists take the Gospel to new areas, their work seems insignificant. There are just a few believers meeting in a home. It is easy to get discouraged, especially where the Gospel is resisted. But Jesus promises that the mustard seed that they plant will one day grow far past anything they could expect. The largest Protestant denomination in Ethiopia only had 150 members when the Italians came and drove out all of the missionaries. As many wondered whether the small mustard seed would die, five years later God changed the small seed into over 10,000 believers! Our God is not ashamed of small beginnings. Neither should we. Let us be encouraged by the mystery of the mustard seed!

Q. 29. a) Describe how you have seen a small beginning grow into a great ministry for the glory of God.
b) What does this teach us about being patient when we are in a ministry that seems insignificant?

5. PARABLE FOUR: The parable of the little amount of leaven in a lot of flower (Mt. 13:33)

Jews rarely told parables from the perspective of a woman's life. They thought women were of little value and believed women should be at home cooking and taking care of children, not learning from Rabbis. But Jesus honored women, and in the crowd were women who had come to listen to him teach. In fact, there were women in his small group of disciples. (Lk. 8:2-3) So Jesus illustrated the kingdom of God by a story from their experience.

One of the major foods of the Jews was bread. They did not have dried yeast like we do today in our stores. Rather, like injera, the women would keep a little of the batter from each batch of bread to start their next batch of bread. Jesus illustrates not from cooking bread in a home, but from preparing bread for a wedding. Jesus said that when a woman put a little yeast in over 22 liters of bread flour (enough to feed over 100 people), in a hidden, but visible way, the yeast would cause the bread to rise.

What was Jesus' teaching about the kingdom from this parable? Usually in the Bible yeast is a symbol of evil. (See 1 Cor. 5:6-9) In fact, on the Day of Passover the Jews had to get rid of all yeast from their homes as a symbol of getting rid of all sin from their lives. (Ex. 13:6-10; 23:15) However, Jews were told to sacrifice bread in which there was yeast for certain sacrifices so yeast was not always seen as evil. (Lev. 7:13; 23:15-18) Jesus is not using yeast here as a picture of the spread of evil. Some scholars think this parable is a repetition of the parable of the mustard seed, illustrating how the small beginning of his kingdom would grow to impact the whole world. Other scholars think the focus is on the hidden, but visible transforming power of the Gospel. Jesus was teaching his disciples that his kingdom had the power to transform and impact much greater than the numbers of believers. This transforming power is not instantaneous. Just like it takes hours for the yeast to work, so it takes a long time for the Gospel to do its transforming work in a life or in society. And just like leaven is often hidden from sight when it works, so also the Gospel won't transform things with a great show of power. Rather, in hidden unexpected ways it

will work to bring the change Jesus wants. A few believers in a community can change that community. Or a minority of believers in a nation can impact that nation much greater than their numbers would indicate. (This parable is similar to the teaching about believers being like salt and light in Mt. 5:13-16 with a small amount impacting many others.) It could be that Jesus was also teaching that when a person joins Jesus' kingdom, the Gospel slowly spreads throughout his whole life so that every part of his life is changed. He is a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), and the way he thinks and acts will slowly change. Following Christ would not be limited to how a believer worships on Sunday, but change how he acts in school, or works on his farm or in his business or office.

Q. 30. a) Describe how you have seen believers have an impact in society far beyond their numbers. b) Describe ways believers could have a greater impact than they currently have in their community and in Ethiopia. c) Describe how the Gospel has impacted areas of your life besides how you worship.

Q. 31. Read Mt. 13:44-46. a) What are the two parables Jesus gave? b) What was Jesus seeking to illustrate through these parables?

6. PARABLE FIVE: A man finding a treasure in a field (Mt. 13:44)

Matthew mentions that the next four parables were not given to the crowd, but to his disciples. In ancient times there were few dependable banks where people could put their money so thieves would not steal it. So people would often bury their money in clay pots. This was especially true in times of political insecurity when Gentile armies were traveling to Palestine to fight. Rather than have these armies steal all of their wealth, the Jews would bury their treasure in the fields. Often the owner of the treasure would be killed and no one would know where his treasure was buried. Jesus pictures a person who is farming as a day laborer for another person. As he is digging, he finds buried treasure in the ground. Jewish religious teachers taught that if a person found buried treasure in the ground and they dug it up, they had to give it to the owner of the field. But if they left it in the ground, it would belong to them if they could buy the field. The emphasis of the parable is how the man sold everything he owned and used his money to buy the field so that he could get the treasure.

Jesus is teaching that the kingdom he brings is like this treasure in several ways:

a. Those who hear the Gospel are like the man who unexpectedly finds the hidden treasure. The treasure is the kingdom which Jesus has come to bring. When hearing the precious Gospel, people must choose what they are going to do. Those not willing to sacrifice their all will never get the treasure of eternal salvation and membership in Jesus' kingdom. Only those who are willing to place their total faith and obedience in Jesus are ever going to get the treasure of the kingdom. (Note: This went against the Jewish idea of God's kingdom where the focus was upon God bringing in the victory over his enemies, not the role which people have of looking for God's kingdom.)

b. Often the kingdom of Jesus is something we find unexpectedly. Few people go around looking for salvation from Jesus. They are living their lives when suddenly they hear the Gospel. Hearing the Gospel, they immediately know that it is true. But the majority of people live around the Gospel all of their lives and never recognize that it is a treasure more important than anything else in life.

c. To get the treasure of the kingdom which Jesus offers, however, is costly and comes at great sacrifice. It means that we have to give up all of the other treasures we own which we think are more important than salvation. It could mean giving up our families when they resist our following Jesus. It could

mean giving up a financially successful convenient life when Jesus asks us to serve him. It will above all mean that we must "crucify" our living for our personal benefits, and live in submission to Jesus and his kingdom. (See Mt. 6:33; Gal. 2:20)

d. This treasure is not valued by the majority of people. Just like the original owner of the field walked over the field every day without knowing there was a treasure there, so also most people don't realize that it is in joining Jesus and submitting to his kingly reign that they gain the true treasure. It is only there that we receive the type of treasure that lasts for eternity.

7. PARABLE SIX: A merchant buys a great pearl (Mt. 13:45-46)

In Jesus' days the most desirable jewel was a pearl. In fact, it was valued more than gold. Pearls are jewels not found in the ground, but in the sea, often in distant places like the Red Sea. Jesus told the story of a merchant who bought and sold pearls. One day he found a very large pearl. But he did not have enough money to buy that pearl unless he sold everything he had. Because he wanted the large pearl so much, this merchant risked everything he had to buy the pearl.

This parable illustrates certain things about gaining the kingdom that Jesus brings:

a. The kingdom Jesus gives is more precious than any other thing there is. It is more precious than Judaism or being Jews. It is more precious than wealth, or education, or living in America. It is the most important treasure a person can own.

b. God's kingly rule and blessing do not automatically come to a person. It is only for those who seek it. No one is born into Jesus' kingdom just because they are a Jew or because they have Christian parents or because they are members of certain church. To get the kingdom of Jesus means we must look for it. As God said, we will find him when we search for him with all our hearts. (See Jer. 29:13)

c. We can't fully know Jesus and experience the treasures of his kingdom until we get rid of all other treasures in our life. Jesus taught on the Sermon of the Mountain that we cannot serve Jesus and Money. (Mt.6:24) In the same way, to get the treasure that Jesus wants to give us, it means that we must get rid of other things that tend to hinder our wholehearted allegiance and obedience to Jesus. (Note: Jesus is not teaching that we must pay money in order to get salvation. Rather, he is only illustrating that the kingdom of Jesus is worth more than all other earthly treasures. We must turn our backs on those earthly treasures in order to get the treasure of eternal life. It might seem like from the perspective of the world we are losing what seems important. But we are to know that it is actually the best treasure, more valuable than all of the other treasures the world is offering us.)

d. We can only know the depths of blessings found in knowing Jesus and his kingdom when we make looking for it a priority in our life and search for it. Paul shared how he struggled to grow in his experiential knowledge of Jesus. (See Phil. 3:7-14) Unless we have this deep desire to know all of the blessings Jesus offers us in his kingdom, we only have ordinary pearls. But the deeper treasures which Jesus offers are only there for those who seek to know Jesus more than all others things.

Q. 32. a) List some things that are "treasures" in non-Christians' lives which they have to "sell" in order to get the treasure of the Gospel. b) List some things which are "treasures" for Christians which can limit their ability to enjoy the greatest treasure Jesus has for them. c) Examine your life. What are some lesser

treasures in your life which are limiting your experiencing the greatest treasure of knowing Jesus as Paul described it? Confess these and determine to put all other treasures aside to gain the most important treasure.

Q. 33. Read Mt. 13:47-50. What truth was Jesus teaching through this parable?

8. PARABLE SEVEN: The net filled with different types of fish (Mt. 13:47-50)

Among Jesus' disciples were several who were fishermen. So Jesus told this parable from their experience. During Jesus' days, fishermen used two types of nets to catch fish. One was small and round, and the fisherman would stand in the water near the shore and cast the net. He would then pull it in with whatever fish he caught. But there was also a larger net. Often fishermen would tie one end of this net to the shore or a boat. Then using another boat they would drag the net out into the sea. (This net looked like a volleyball net, but much larger.) The boat would be rowed in a circle and brought back to the shore. Every fish in their path would be caught in the net. Once they got to the shore, the fishermen would sort out the fish. Some were too small to eat, others did not taste good or were of the type that was unclean food in Jewish culture. These they would either throw back into the lake or throw away. But the good fish they would place in a basket to carry to the town to sell to the people.

Jesus used this story to illustrate the following truths about the kingdom of God:

a. In the current "kingdom" that Jesus was introducing, there would be no quick destruction of the wicked as was expected. Rather, good fish and evil fish, or followers of Jesus and followers of Satan would live together. (This parable is very similar to the parable of the wheat and the tares which we studied earlier.) Often we get impatient with God. We wonder why he allows evil to thrive. There are wars around the world where innocent people are killed. Christians often face persecution from those in their community or nation. As a result, Christians can wonder if they made a mistake to trust Jesus as the Messiah. But Jesus is warning his disciples that the good and evil people will temporarily live side by side. We aren't to expect that slowly our nation will become Christian, overcoming evil. That will not happen in the current kingdom Jesus is starting.

b. Eventually Jesus will separate believers from unbelievers. One day there will be a time of judgment and the evil people will be destroyed, just like the bad fish were destroyed. God determines when the net is full. But when it is full, the final judgment will take place.

The biggest mystery of the kingdom which Jesus taught was that his kingdom had two forms. When Jesus came, he came as king to start a quiet kingdom in the midst of Satan's kingdom. As people choose to become followers of Jesus, they become part of this kingdom. But around them is still an evil world. As Peter says, Jesus did not come in great power to destroy the wicked because in mercy he is waiting patiently for others to believe. (2 Pet. 3:8-9) But that does not mean that it will always be this way. Although it was delayed, the mighty kingdom of Jesus as pictured in many Old Testament prophecies and expected by the Jews would come. At that time, evil will be destroyed.

Using Jewish imagery, Jesus described this day of judgment as the great day of separation. The Jews believed that God would use angels as his agents to separate out his people from those who resisted God's rule and were evil. Jesus used the imagery of Daniel 3 to describe eternal judgment. Just as Daniel's three friends were thrown into fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar in punishment, so also the wicked would face their "furnace" of eternal punishment. But this time there will be no deliverance from the furnace of

hell. Hell would not be the end of their existence as if we were blowing out a candle. Rather, the wicked would live forever in great agony, illustrated by weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus was warning his followers of two things.

First, he was warning them to choose wisely. They might join the crowds who resisted Jesus' reign over their lives. This would be the most convenient path, for it would bring relief from the persecution following Jesus would bring into their lives. It might not seem like it is worth it to follow Jesus. But in the end it will be worth it. Like the good fish, they would be separated out to enjoy God's blessing for ever.

Second, Jesus is warning believers to not get impatient with the evil that is in the world. Evil will not win, even though there are times when we might think it will as the world is becoming increasingly violent and evil. As drought or disease or persecution bring trouble into our lives, we can also become impatient. Satan will tempt us to believe that it is not worth following Jesus and that evil will always be there. But Jesus is saying that one day evil will be destroyed. We must be patient until that time.

Q. 34. a) Why is it important for believers to remember that there is a time where the good and bad fish will be separated? b) Describe from things you have seen in the lives of believers what happens when they forget that there is a day of separation as described in this parable.

Q. 35. Read Mt. 13:51-52. What was the final parable which Jesus taught?

9. PARABLE EIGHT: The parable of the owner with old and new treasures (Mt. 13:51-52)

Having ended his time of teaching in parables, Jesus asked the disciples if they now understood what he had taught them through parables. The disciples told Jesus that they did. Most likely they were too embarrassed to claim that they did not understand. It is clear from questions they would still ask that they did not fully understand that Jesus' kingdom would start in a hidden way and only come to completion thousands of years later. This would only be clear to them after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Jesus told his disciples one further parable. As those who now understood the truths about the kingdom of heaven, they were to be like "*scribes*." Christians who know God's Word are like an owner of a house who goes into his storehouse where there were various types of treasures. Some are old, which he had for a long time. Others are new which have never been used.

In this parable Jesus was teaching his disciples the following truths:

a. The disciples were the new "*scribes*" in his kingdom. The Jews placed great honor upon the religiously trained people called scribes. These scribes spent their whole lives studying the Old Testament and the teachings of religious leaders throughout history. It might seem that the apostles are not like them. Clearly they don't have the same amount of knowledge. But in Jesus' kingdom, the scribes of Judaism would have little role. All they have is the "old" knowledge (old treasures) of the past, none of the new knowledge (new treasures) provided by Jesus. So their knowledge was deficient. But followers of Jesus now have the complete knowledge, the old treasures of the Old Testament and the new treasure of Jesus' teaching, so they are now the real scribes. (Note: It is not clear if this teaching was primarily given to the Apostles or teachers and prophets in the church, or if Jesus was illustrating what was expected of all disciples. Probably Jesus was giving this parable primarily to those who are responsible to teach the

believers. But all believers are to be those who teach others like their children or new believers, so this applies to them as well.)

b. As teachers in Jesus' kingdom (the church), Christians are to teach a combination of "old" and "new." They are not to throw out their old treasures and only use new treasures. What Jesus is saying is that his followers are to know and use the truths God had revealed in the Old Testament. They were not to treat the Old Testament as if it was no longer valid. However, they were to also use the "new" teachings which Jesus taught. They could only understand correctly the Old Testament by the new teachings which Jesus and the Apostles taught.

As Christians we can make three mistakes.

First, we can be so interested in "new" truths that we are always looking for hidden teachings. If someone comes with an unusual idea, we quickly follow them. Some people even claim that they do not need to study God's Word. They claim the Holy Spirit will teach them and what he teaches is new and exciting. They forget that one of the spiritual gifts God gives is the gift of teaching, and we are commanded to study God's Word, with its old and new treasures.

Second, we can treat much of the Old Testament as if it is no longer valid for us. So many of us do not read or apply teachings from the Old Testament, especially books like Leviticus. But Jesus says we are to make use of the "old" as well as the "new."

Third, there are others who apply the Old Testament without understanding it from the perspective of the new truth that Jesus taught. So many apply directly the blessings pronounced in Deut. 28 without looking at whether the New Testament ever promised physical blessings to the followers of Jesus. So they preach a prosperity Gospel of physical blessing without reflecting how Jesus told his followers to focus their attention upon and seek treasures in heaven. Or they overlook Jesus' warning "in the world you will have many troubles." (Jn. 16:33) So Jesus is saying that his followers are to understand and apply the truths of the Old Testament through the perspective of the "new" teachings which Jesus and his apostles gave concerning the new kingdom. When they do this, they will like "scribes"- used by Jesus to explain true treasures.

c. Jesus has called us to "serve." Jesus is saying that we are not to hide our treasure of Christianity in a storeroom. Rather, we are to take those treasures out and use them, just like the man took out treasures which he then used. All of us are saved to serve Jesus by serving his body. (See 1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 2:10, 4:12) No one can be a true follower of Jesus and not get involved in serving in the church. Unfortunately, many people today come to church on Sunday and worship with great emotion. They might even enjoy being taught God's Word through the sermons. But they don't serve throughout the week. They refuse to come and help clean the church, or teach Sunday school, or witness to others in their community, or teach in a Bible study. The treasure of the knowledge of God's Word is buried in their storeroom, not used to teach others. This is not what Jesus wants of his disciples.

Q. 36. a) Describe how many Christians do not seek to use their knowledge to serve Jesus as "scribes."
b) Describe how preaching both includes the "old" and "new."

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. In Mt. 11:25-27 Jesus states that salvation originates in God's sovereign choice. Other verses focus upon people's ability to choose to follow Jesus. a) List different passages of the Bible that emphasize God's role in choosing people to be saved. Then list different passages of the Bible that emphasize the ability of people to choose Jesus. b) Discuss the relationship between these two truths. c) Why is it important to not focus too much on God's role in salvation or upon human responsibility in salvation, but to keep these truths in balance? d) Which do you think we tend to down play, God's sovereign choice or human responsibility?

2. In Mt. 11:28-30 Jesus offers rest to those who are weary. a) Discuss what Jesus meant by this promise. What type of rest was Jesus promising? b) What is the relationship between putting on a yoke with Jesus and rest? c) Do you think most Christians see following Jesus as a burden to bear or a rest for their souls? Explain your answer.

3. In Lk. 7:36-50, Jesus teaches that those who have sinned much, love much. a) What can we learn about our attitude towards sinful people from Jesus' teaching about the prostitute and forgiveness? b) Illustrate how you have seen people who are aware of how great sinners they are and the grace of God in forgiving them "love much." c) Describe how harmful it is to a Christian's life when they begin to think like Simon. d) Which attitude is most common in the church, Simon's or the woman's? What changes would come in our lives if we were aware of our sinfulness and God's amazing grace more?

4. In Mt. 12:25-37, Jesus responds to those who claimed he did his miracles in Satan's power. a) Jesus compared himself to one who entered a strong man's house, tied him up, and took his treasures. What did he mean by this? How do we see Jesus doing this today? b) Examine common practices Christians have about resisting Satan. Which of these are Biblical and which aren't? c) Jesus warned against committing the "unforgiveable sin." What sin do you think Jesus was talking about? How do we commit this sin today?

5. In Mt. 12:46-50 Jesus described his followers as his true family. a) What do you think Jesus meant by this? b) What lessons can we learn about how we are to view other Christians and our physical family? c) Christians often side with their human family against their spiritual family. Describe different situations you have seen this happen in the church. What harm did it bring to the unity of the church? If we were to really believe that our primary family is our spiritual family, how would this change how we live?

6. Read Mt. 13. a) List the parables that Jesus taught and the major teaching of each parable. What do these parables teach us about the kingdom that Jesus started? b) Do most Christians today understand the nature of Jesus' kingdom? Where do they err? c) Do you think people are taught enough about the nature of Jesus' kingdom and how we are to respond to it? If not, what could your church do to clarify what type of kingdom Jesus has started and how people are to respond to it?

LESSON THIRTEEN

FIRST DAY

Terefe lived in a part of Ethiopia known to have many witchdoctors. His family lived in great fear of the spirits of his ancestors and evil spirits who lived around them. They carefully offered sacrifices so that their ancestors would not get angry with them. Any time someone got sick or some unusual event happened to them, they would go to the witchdoctor with a chicken to find out what spirit was causing their problems. Terefe heard many stories of people who became demon possessed when walking past certain trees or rivers or who died because one of their neighbors cursed them. As he grew up Terefe lived in fear of the spirit world. And he watched as his family slowly became poorer through offering their crops and animals to appease the evil spirits.

Q. 1. a) Describe how many non-Christians live in fear of the spirit world like this. b) What difference does becoming a Christian make in one's view of the spirit world?

The fear of the spirit world is one of the most terrible bondages people have. Many Africans are afraid of what their dead ancestors might do to them if they are not honored properly. And they believe spirits are constantly around them seeking to harm them. Every time they are sick, they believe a spirit caused it. And when an accident happens, they are sure that some demon has caused it. Much of life is lived in fear and poor people spend a lot of money to try to appease the spirit world.

The Jews also believed that the spirit world was involved in everything that happened to them. When someone got sick or something unusual happened, they believed that because of some unknown sin that the spirit world was attacking a person. So it was important for Jesus to demonstrate that he is in total control of the spirit world. Today we will look at four stories which emphasize Jesus' authority over things which people fear: 1) the world of nature where there are storms and famines, 2) the world of powerful demons, 3) the world of impossible diseases, and 4) the world of death. Those who choose to follow Jesus must demonstrate their faith in Jesus in each of these four areas of their life if they are to be freed of their fear and bondage. Unfortunately, many Christians today still live in fear of these four things.

Q. 2. Read Mk. 4:35-41. a) Where did Jesus and the disciples go? b) Describe Jesus' attitude towards natural disasters. c) Describe how Jesus' power over natural events is illustrated in this passage. d) Describe why the disciples' attitude revealed their lack of faith.

JESUS CALMS THE STORMY SEA (Mk. 4:35-41; Mt. 8:23-27, Lk. 8:22-25)

Jesus had been teaching all day sitting in a boat with crowds of people listening to him. Although it was soon to be night, Jesus told his disciples to leave the area near Capernaum and travel by boat to the other side of the lake which was about 8 kilometers away. It would normally take two or three hours to cross the lake. Even though they had not made preparations for the journey, the disciples obeyed. His twelve disciples were in the boat with him and there were other boats with more disciples also traveling across the lake with Jesus.

There are four possible reasons for Jesus wanting to go to the other side:

First, Jesus had been ministering for long hours and he and his disciples were tired and needed a rest. It is important for those in church ministry to realize that if they are going to be effective in ministry, they must take occasional rests. These times of rest renew our body, our spirit and our vision, and make us more effective in ministry.

Second, Jesus might have wanted more personal time with his disciples. He wanted them to have a clear idea of what his kingdom was like so that they could learn to live in a much different way than they had previously lived.

Third, Jesus wanted to test his disciples' faith. Jesus knew that a storm would arise and he wanted to see how his disciples would handle a storm and see if they would still trust God when storms threatened their lives. God often brings his people into times of testing so that the level of their faith can be revealed and their faith can grow. (See 1 Pet. 1:6-7)

Fourth, Jesus wanted to meet a certain demon-possessed person. As we will see, when Jesus got to the other side of the lake, he met a demon possessed person and delivered him. One soul is important to Jesus. Just like he went through Samaria to meet with a woman at the well, now he traveled across the lake to meet with a demon possessed man. After that meeting, he immediately returned to the western side of the Sea of Galilee.

The Sea of Galilee is known for storms which arise unexpectedly. As Jesus and the disciples were traveling, a strong storm started blowing. As the wind blew and the waves splashed water into the boat, even experienced fishermen like Peter became afraid, thinking the boat was about to sink. Jesus, however, was sleeping at the back of the boat where there was a long bench. The fact that Jesus was sleeping in the midst of a storm shows two things. First, it shows how tired Jesus was. Although the Son of God, he was also fully human and like us Jesus got tired after ministering day and night. Second, it reveals his absolute trust in God. Just like a small baby can sleep calmly in the arms of his mother even when a disaster strikes, so also Jesus was able to rest because he completely trusted his Father with every situation he faced.

Thinking they were about to die, the disciples went to Jesus and anxiously shouted "Jesus, how can you sleep? Why aren't you helping us? Don't you care that we are in trouble?" In the Greek, their words were accusations against Jesus for what they thought was indifference. What were these disciples expecting Jesus to do? It is unlikely that they expected Jesus to do a miracle and rescue them since they were amazed when he did calm the storm. Probably they were just expressing their fear and frustration with Jesus for not joining them in their worry.

Jesus got up and just spoke two commands- "Be quiet. Be still." With just a word of command, Jesus was able to control nature and stop the storm. The Old Testament shows God as being the one who controls storms. (See Ps. 107:29-30) Jesus, the one who created the world, continues to control the world of nature. It obeys his commands.

Jesus strongly reprimanded the disciples for lack of faith. Not only did they doubt God's protection of their lives, but they doubted Jesus' ability to help them. Why did Jesus reprimand them? Wouldn't we have been afraid if we were about to die in the storm? For over a year now these disciples had watched Jesus heal the sick, raise the dead, and work many other miracles. Jesus had taught them not to worry because God knows every hair on their head. They should have realized that with Jesus, they were safe since God

would not allow a storm to overcome him. They should have learned to absolutely trust him in every situation. But they hadn't turned their understanding into a truth they lived out in the storms of life. Faith is not only a mental belief that we have; it is demonstrated by how we live. So if we can't trust God when there is a "storm" like a severe disease, the death of a loved one, or persecution, then we don't really have faith that God is in control!

This was a learning experience for the disciples. "Who is Jesus? Even the world of nature obeys him" they thought. Just like people meeting with God were struck with awe of almighty God (Rev. 1:17), these disciples knew they had met someone much greater than a simple man and also were struck with awe. So what does this story teach us as followers of Jesus?

1. Jesus is God. And as God, he has the power to control even the mighty forces of nature. Jesus wanted to demonstrate that he is in control of all things, even natural disasters. No drought, or storm, or flood is outside of his control. It is never a "mistake." Although God expects us to use wisdom and not needlessly endanger our lives, as followers of Jesus we must realize that he is the one who is in control of these things and therefore we should not fear them.

2. As long as we are with Jesus, we never have to fear any type of "storm" which we might meet. Is there a storm of a terrible disease? Jesus can still that storm. How about persecution? Jesus can still that storm as well. But remember, Jesus can still a storm in two ways. First, he can calm the storm now and either by healing us or removing the persecution take the storm away like he did for the disciples. But he can also use the "storm" to bring us eternal deliverance. Death in a storm which brings us our eternal life with God in heaven, is not a defeat, but a victory.

3. The followers of Jesus must learn to turn their knowledge about Jesus into actions. To allow worry and fear to control our lives in the midst of persecution or any other storm demonstrates that we are not trusting Jesus. We do not reveal our faith in times of blessing or as we sing in church. The major place we reveal our faith is when a storm comes. In the midst of those storms of life, we are to be able to trust Jesus totally just like Jesus trusted God the Father and slept in the midst of the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Q. 3. a) Describe how you have seen Christians who sing that Jesus is Lord and in control struggle to trust him when a "storm" comes. b) List a "storm" you have faced. What did that storm reveal about your faith in Jesus?

Q. 4. Read Mk. 5:1-20. a) How is the man described who met Jesus on the other side of the sea? b) What does this story reveal about Jesus' power over demons? c) What was the attitude of the local people towards Jesus? d) What was the attitude of the delivered man towards Jesus?

JESUS DELIVERS A DEMON POSSESSED MAN (Mk. 5:1-20, Mt. 8:28-34, Lk. 8:26-39)

It was probably still night time when Jesus and his disciples reached the other side of the lake. They were in the southeast corner of the Sea of Galilee in "the region of the Gerasenes." Scholars debate where exactly this place is. The major town in the region was called Gerasa, but it was 50 kilometers away from the Sea of Galilee. Many scholars think the place where Jesus landed is by a small village now called Khersa (Gersa) which was just 10 kilometers away. This is likely since just south of the town there are many caves and a cliff overlooking the Sea of Galilee which fits the story.

There were few Jews living in this part of Palestine and in the region of Decapolis. The region of Decapolis related politically directly to Rome. There were ten major towns in the area which had the right of self-governance. Many of the people living in the towns were Greeks who had come to live in the area when Alexander the Great had conquered the region. The people were proud of being Greeks and following the Greek religion. So the demon possessed man and the villagers were probably Gentiles and not Jews. This is the first time we read that Jesus traveled into a Gentile territory.

Although it was night time, just as Jesus was stepping out of the boat, a demon possessed man came running up to Jesus. (Mt. 8:28 mentions that there were two demon possessed men, one of whom seems to have the greater possession and was the leader. Mark and Luke focus more on this person.) Even though it was dark, the demons living inside the man recognized that Jesus, who would one day punish them, had arrived.

The condition of this demon possessed man was extremely severe. He lived in tombs not among the people. This part of Palestine had many caves and people used these caves as burial places. It was in one of these caves that he slept and lived. Jews believed that demons liked to live among the tombs so most likely the demons in him caused him to live in these caves. Or perhaps people, afraid of the man, drove him away from living with them in town. No one could control him because of his great strength. Seeking to control him, village people would tie him up in strong chains, but he would break those chains. He was unceasingly tormented, crying out in anguish day and night. And he was self-destructive. He would take rocks and cut himself. Demons like to cause pain and destroy.

In his story, Mark emphasizes the total domination of Jesus over the demons in the following way:

1. Upon seeing Jesus, the man possessed by demons knelt in front of Jesus. They were not kneeling in willing submission but out of recognition that a greater, more powerful person was in their midst. Just like Roman captives were forced to kneel before a conquering king, the demons had met their Master and conqueror and were kneeling before Jesus.

2. They recognized Jesus for who he is. They shouted "What do you want with me (us)?" Most likely this means "What do you and we have in common? Why are you here?" They also knew that Jesus was God's unique, divine Son. The fact that they called God "the Most High God" indicates that the man was a Gentile. Often when talking about the creator God, Gentiles would use this name to acknowledge that God is the One who controls all things. Some scholars think the demons were foolishly trying to gain power over Jesus by using his name "the Son of God." They even used the name of God in an oath form to try to force Jesus to not hurt them. But using the name of Jesus does not force Jesus to do anything. He is the Lord who controls all situations, not us. When we pray "in Jesus name" we must never think that we are using it as a magical name to force Jesus to do what we want.

3. The demons recognized that Jesus had the power to "torture" them. The demons knew that Jesus was the one who would cast them into hell, the place of torture for all who rebel against Jesus. (See Lk. 8:31) They begged Jesus to not send them to hell before their time. (Rev. 20:1-3, 10) The demons knew that their ultimate place would be eternal judgment in hell, but they did not know when Jesus would punish them. So they were afraid that the day of judgment had come.

4. The demons had to tell Jesus their name. Jewish exorcists would often demand that demons reveal their names. By this they believed that they could gain power over the demon and force it to obey. This is the only time that we know of where Jesus asked for the name of the demons since Jesus did not have to use tricks to force the demons to leave. As God, the demons were obligated to obey Jesus. But this time Jesus asked the name of the demons. Perhaps he did this to reveal his mighty power to the disciples who were listening and watching. (Note: We do not need to know the names of the demons who live in a person. Rather than following this unusual case of demon possession, we should model our exorcism after how Jesus usually treated demons, with a command for them to leave without having to learn their names.) There seems to have been one major spokesman for the demons and that spokesman said that their name was "Legion." It is not clear if this is the real name of the demons or if the demon was just revealing to Jesus that there were "many" demons living in the man. The word "legion" is a military word and referred to a division of the army where there were between 4,000 to 6,000 soldiers. This title could indicate that in this one man dwelt up to 6000 demons. (Note: Demons are spirit beings so do not take up space like we do. So it is possible for thousands of demons to live in a person.) What we have is a "battle" between thousands of demons on one side and Jesus on the other side. Who is going to win? It is no contest. Even thousands demons must submit to the authority of the one Jesus.

5. When Jesus commanded the demons to leave the man, the demons tried to negotiate their release. They asked to be allowed to go live in pigs. They did not want to be spirits with no one in whom to live. To the Jews pigs were a despised, unclean animal. But to the Gentiles, pigs were a regular animal raised for meat just like we raise sheep. Jesus allowed the demons to go into the 2000 pigs. Little did these demons know that when they entered the pigs, the pigs would run off the cliff and die.

6. Released from the demons, the man became calm, in his right mind, dressed, and sat at Jesus' feet.

It is interesting to note what happened next. The people taking care of the pigs ran to their town to report what happened. It was probably early morning when the people came from town and begged Jesus to leave the area. Why did they do this? They selfishly were more concerned about their financial loss than the deliverance of the demon possessed man. They believed Jesus threatened their financial condition so they preferred that Jesus leave. They expressed no amazement at the deliverance of God. Perhaps these Gentiles believed that Jesus was a mighty "magician" and so were afraid of him. Most people don't want a mighty witchdoctor living in their midst!

Jesus did not force himself on anyone. So when they asked him to leave, he agreed. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been delivered begged to go with Jesus and be one of his disciples. Jesus, however, told him to be his witness to the Gentiles in the region of Decapolis. (See the map in Appendix A at the back of the book.) It is interesting that when Jesus did a miracle among the Jews, he often told them to not reveal what he did to others. But here he told the Gentile believer to reveal what God had done to for him. This is probably because the Jews would have misunderstood Jesus' role and Jesus did not want to be known as just a "miracle worker." But among the Gentiles, they were less likely to misunderstand his role as the Messiah.

What does this story teach the followers of Jesus?

1. This story tells us about the deliverance from Satan's bondage of the first Gentile. Mark was probably making a play on words in this story. The Jews considered both the Gentiles and the pigs "unclean" and that God hated both of them. But Jesus never classified anyone as "unclean" and he delivered this Gentile from the dominance of Satan. The door for deliverance from Satan's kingdom is open to all people, even the Gentiles. Followers of Jesus are never to call anyone "unclean" for Jesus has made all people clean by dying for their sins on the cross. In just a few years, the early church would follow Jesus' example and take the Gospel to the Gentiles, delivering them from Satan's kingdom.

2. This story also illustrates the role of a follower of Jesus who has been delivered from Satan's kingdom. They are to go and tell people what God has done for them. This Gentile became a good example of a follower of Jesus- he obeyed and immediately began to witness about Jesus. We are all told to be "witnesses." To be a witness does not require a lot of special training and knowledge. It is not limited to the evangelists or pastors. Rather, the newest believer and uneducated Christians can all witness like this person who was delivered by Jesus. We are to share what Jesus has done for us. By witnessing about what Jesus had done for him, this man opened doors so that when Jewish believers took the Gospel of the death of Jesus for their sins into the region, the people would be more willing to believe.

3. This story teaches us that Jesus is in total control over the spirit world. Neither Satan or demons compare to him in power. A man with thousands of demons had to submit to Jesus. Each follower of Jesus has the Holy Spirit living in him. And Jesus has promised to be with them. (Mt. 28:20) So we need never fear Satan. As long as we walk in obedience to Jesus, close to him for his protection, then demons cannot harm us or unexpectedly take us into possession. Jesus has tied up the strongman, Satan and his demons. Jesus can enter into the worst part of Satan's kingdom, like this demon possessed person, and calmly expel the demons. If this is true, don't you think he will control all demons around us? Won't he control them so they can't cause an accident by turning over a bus? Won't he control them so they won't live in us so we become possessed? Our role as the followers of Jesus is to stay close to Jesus, obey him completely, fellowship with him in prayer and in the Word. Then our protection is secure. We don't need to shout at Satan or cast him out of our meetings unless there is a clear case when Satan is attacking someone in the meeting. We only need to trust our mighty Lord to protect us. And when we meet someone who is demon possessed, we can calmly use the authority which Jesus has given us to command the demon to leave. It is Jesus' power, not our shouting, which will deliver the person.

Q. 5. a) Review the three truths taught in this story. Explain why it is important for followers of Jesus to know these three truths. b) Describe ways that Christians often fear demons. How does the teaching of this story take that fear away?

Q. 6. Read Mk. 5:21-43. What two miracles did Jesus do in this story?

JESUS HEALS A WOMAN WHO HAD BEEN BLEEDING FOR 12 YEARS (Mk. 5:25-34, Mt. 9:20-22, Lk. 8:42-50)

It was morning when Jesus and his disciples returned to the western side of the Sea of Galilee, probably close to Capernaum. As they landed, immediately they were surrounded by a crowd who wanted to listen to Jesus and watch his miracles. There were two special people in this crowd who needed Jesus. The first was an important man called Jairus. The second was an unknown despised woman. The man

reached Jesus first. He had one daughter who was about to die and he wanted Jesus to hurry to his home and heal her. But it was the second, the despised woman, who got help first.

From the perspective of the Jews, this woman was at the bottom of society. First, she was a woman and few Jewish cared what happened to woman. But Jesus cared. He loved them as much as men and always treated them with respect and compassion. Second, this woman was very poor. All of her money had been used up trying to find a cure for her sickness. Third, this woman had been bleeding for 12 years. Some scholars think that her monthly bleeding had started and never stopped. To have continual bleeding had many implications upon her. In Lev. 15:25-27 we are told that a woman was "unclean" during the time of her monthly cycle. Anything she touched was also classified as "unclean." This means this disease brought the following things upon the woman.

1. She could not marry because her husband would not be able to have sexual relationships with her. Or if she was married when the bleeding started, then she was probably divorced since she could not live with her husband because she would make him unclean. To not have a husband and therefore not bear children was a very great shame for her.

2. She could not visit people or live in the same house with other people. Everything she touched was classified as unclean. So her family would have expelled her from their home, perhaps building a small hut for her to live in. But no one would come to visit with her. She was like a leper, someone no one could talk with.

3. She could not worship God with others. She was not allowed to go into the Temple and probably not into the synagogue.

4. She was steadily getting worse and would no doubt die within a short period of time.

So this woman was suffering greatly from her sickness. She had sought a solution with doctors and healers. During Jesus days, there were some doctors who tried to help people using their limited knowledge. But many were only trying to make money and abused those who came to them for help. For instance, some taught that if such a woman carried some barley in the dung of a white donkey, they would be healed. As the years went by, no doubt this woman became increasingly desperate, trying more and more disreputable healers hoping for a cure. By the time she met Jesus, she had come to the end of her hope.

Although she was "unclean" and was not supposed to be among the people, in desperation this woman pushed her way through the crowds to get to Jesus. But she was too embarrassed to talk to Jesus. So she came up behind Jesus and touched the tassel on his coat hem. Each Jewish man wore an outer coat and at each of the four corners of the coat was a tassel which was to remind him of his need to obey the Law. (Num. 15:38-39) It was one of these tassels which the woman touched. It was a common Jewish thought that the power of a person radiated through his clothes, just like Elijah's power was found in his coat. (2 Ki. 2:13-14) There were occasions when both Jesus and the apostles healed by people touching their clothes. (Acts 19:11-12) But there is no evidence that they ever knowingly sold pieces of cloth and sent them to people to be healed as some healers today claim. As soon as she touched Jesus' clothes, she was instantly healed. She felt the power in her body and knew that the bleeding had stopped.

But Jesus also knew that something had happened. He stopped and asked the crowd "Who touched me?" We all know when famous people are in a crowd people try to get close and touch the person. So there were no doubt many who were touching Jesus. The disciples were probably anxious for Jesus to get to the home of Jairus to heal his daughter, so they impatiently told Jesus that because of the crowd, there were many who had touched him.

Jesus was not willing to let the woman go away "healed" without meeting him personally. Trembling in fear this woman came and fell at his feet in fear. Jesus wanted to teach this woman and us several important lessons which he could only do after she revealed herself.

1. Christian healing is not to be treated like "magic." This woman had a wrong understanding of healing. She thought of healing as "magic" and she only had to touch a healers' coat to be healed. But Jesus wanted to teach her and the crowd that there is no "magic" in his healing. The power is not in the clothes, but in him. So Jesus told her that it was "faith" that brought her healing. Jesus had agreed to heal her because she had turned to Jesus and trusted him for healing. The Bible does not prohibit us from using things like a cloth and James suggests using oil when seeking healing. (Jms. 5:14) But not only are these not necessary for healing, we should never think that the healing power is in the instrument. It is Jesus alone who heals, not some object.

2. Healing is not as important as salvation. Jesus made a play on words. In the Jewish language, the word healing and salvation are the same. So many scholars think that Jesus was telling the woman that because of her faith in him, not only was she healed physically, but spiritually. And Jesus used the word "peace" in the Jewish way to refer to a restoration of total wholeness which comes from a relationship restored with God. This is an important warning to us today when we tend to focus upon the miracle of healing. No matter how great of a healing takes place, it only delays death. All of us will die one day. It is only the healing of the soul through faith in Jesus which brings eternal life. So spiritual healing is much more important than physical healing.

c. Jesus is also telling his followers that no disease is too difficult for Jesus. No matter how impossible our sickness might be, we need to come to Jesus and trust him for healing. We submit to the "will of Jesus" knowing he can heal us now. But our faith in Jesus does not force him to heal us now- otherwise no believer would ever die! Jesus is not bound by an earthly perspective as we are. So often he chooses to "heal" us by releasing us from this earthly body so we can be with Christ for eternity. As Paul said, this type of healing was much better. (Phil. 1:23)

Q. 7. Describe why these truths are important for followers of Jesus to know and apply.

JESUS RAISES JAIRUS' DAUGHTER FROM DEATH (Mk. 5:22-24, 35-41, Mt. 9:18-19, 23-26, Lk. 8:40-42, 51-56)

Also in the crowd was a man called Jairus who was "one of the synagogue rulers." In Jewish tradition, each synagogue had two ministers. One, called an attendant who was often paid a salary; was responsible to take care of the daily matters of the synagogue. He cleaned the building, often taught the children, and on the Sabbath, would bring the scrolls to those who were reading. The other was the "ruler of the synagogue" who was like a chairman of the board. This person was elected by the Jewish community to

oversee all matters related to their worship and other Jewish affairs. This was a position of great honor given to those who were known for their spiritual piety.

Jairus was probably the leading elder in charge of the synagogue and Jewish affairs. He would have been rich and one of the most famous people in the community. It is unlikely that Jairus, like most religious leaders, was a supporter of Jesus, so it is amazing that Jairus turned to Jesus for help. However all Jews knew that Jesus had the ability to heal so in desperation he threw himself at Jesus' feet and begged him to come heal his daughter. (Note: This is the third person to "kneel" before Jesus to honor him on this day-the demon possessed man, the woman, and now Jairus, one of Mark's hidden truths that Jesus is the Lord before whom all are to kneel in submission.) Jewish culture emphasized that a man of great honor not humble himself by kneeling before others. So for Jairus to humble himself in front of the crowd this way was a sign of great humiliation and desperation. It was unusual that Jairus would personally go to Jesus rather than send his servants or another person. He would have wanted to stay with his sick daughter. But he probably wanted to make sure Jesus came to help his daughter. Jairus begged Jesus to come heal his daughter who at this time was just about ready to die. Jesus agreed and began to walk towards his house.

Imagine Jairus' frustration at seeing Jesus stop and address this common woman. But his frustration quickly turned to hopelessness as people came from his house and told him it was too late, that his daughter had died. They thought that Jesus might have helped her when she was still alive, but now she was dead and beyond help. So they told Jairus not to bother Jesus. Jesus overheard and encouraged Jairus to have faith in him.

Being so famous everyone in the community would have known about Jairus' daughter and heard that she had died. So they gathered at Jairus' house for the funeral of the child. Because it was a hot area, the Jews would bury the body as quickly as possible. In Jewish culture it was important to demonstrate public sorrow over the death of someone. This funeral would have been bigger and more sorrowful than usual because Jairus was famous, so everyone in the whole community was obligated to be there and join openly in the sorrowful occasion. Also the child was 12 years old. In Jewish customs, this was the year that she became a woman and would soon be married and have children. She was probably already engaged to be married in the next few years. To not get married was seen as an added sorrow. Some times when a virgin girl died, before burying the body, a marriage ceremony was performed just to say that she married.

Jews emphasized the sorrow of death. In their community were people who were considered professional mourners. Even the poorest family was supposed to hire two people to play flutes, the instrument of mourning. And they had to hire at least one professional mourner to cry loudly in despair over the dead body. These professional mourners would chant funeral songs. But for Jairus there would have been many people playing flutes and many professional mourners hired to wail. Everyone would have worn their funeral clothes, which was a rough cloth against their skin. Near relatives and friends would have torn their clothes, the family over their hearts and the others over their right breast. They were not allowed to wash and comb their hair, shave, and would often put ashes in their hair and on their face. No one was allowed to eat good food. Everything in the funeral showed their sorrow.

It was this crowd of mourners which Jesus met in front of Jairus' house. People were wailing loudly. Jesus told the mourners that the girl was not dead but "asleep." Jesus probably used this word to hint to Jairus that her death was not permanent and that she would soon be alive. The wails of the people quickly

turned to mocking laughter, for everyone knew that the little girl was dead. Jesus demanded that all of the mourners and visitors leave the house. He did not even allow most of his disciples to enter the house. Taking the parents and three of his closest disciples, Peter, James and John; Jesus went to the room where the dead girl lay. A dead body was unclean according to Jewish teachings. Only the closest relatives ever touched a body when preparing it for burial. But Jesus had no fear of "uncleanness." He held the girl's hand and ordered her "Little girl, get up." Such was the power and authority of Jesus' command that the girl immediately sat up.

Jesus then gave the parents two commands. He told them to give the girl something to eat. No doubt in her sickness she had eaten little, so Jesus told her to eat and regain her strength. Also eating was a clear sign of her being totally cleared of the sickness. Jesus also told the parents and disciples not to tell others about the miracle. Of course everyone would know that the girl had been raised from the dead. They had been told that she was dead, but now she walked out of the house where everyone could see her. Although Jesus knew that people would know about the miracle, he was commanding the parents and disciples to not spread the news to others. He did not want people to focus their attention upon him being a miracle worker. Rather, he wanted them to listen to his teachings and become his disciples.

What does this story teach us about following Jesus?

1. The importance of faith in Jesus. There will be times when everything looks impossible to us. Rather than give up hope, like Jairus, we are to trust Jesus.

2. Jesus has total power over death. Raising a person from the dead was considered the most powerful miracle by the Jews. Only great prophets like Elijah and Elisha had done it. But Jesus also had complete power over death. At Jesus' command, the one who gave life initially to the child when she was first born also had the power to return life when it had departed in death. We serve one who has complete authority over death.

3. For the believer, death is only "sleep." The story of the child who rose to life is a picture of how believers will also rise from our "sleep." When Mark wrote this story, many Christians in Rome were dying for their faith in Jesus. It was very important for them to know that Jesus had the power over death they faced as his followers. This story encouraged these believers that death is only sleep. Just like we go to sleep at night and wake up in the morning, so also death for the child of God is like going asleep to the earthly living and waking up in heaven. From now on, early Christians would refer to death as "sleep." No wonder Paul told us that it was not a tragedy for him to die, because after his death he would be present with God (Phil. 1:8-20-26). Christians might weep over the separation they feel from their loved one who dies. Or they might weep over the pain of those who now suffer the results of a parent who has gone. But we are never to weep over the condition of the believer in death. For him, life is much better. He is in a place of great blessing with Jesus whom he has trust in. Death is only a curse, a reason for wailing, for those who do not put their faith in Jesus. For them, death is not only separation from their loved ones, it is eternal punishment in hell. That is something we should weep about!

4. Jesus never revealed why he took only three of his disciples to see the miracle. From this time on there would be times that Jesus chose Peter, James, and John for special training. (e.g. Mt. 17) Jesus knew that they would become the apostles who would have important roles in the early church. We can't train all people equally. There must be a few whom we train to a deeper way for more important ministries.

Q. 8. a) Describe why these truths are important for followers of Jesus. b) Do you think most believers approach death as "sleep"? Explain your answer. c) What are things church leaders can do to prepare their members to understand death from a Christian perspective?

SECOND DAY

Q. 9. Read Mt. 9:27-34. a) What did the two blind men call Jesus? b) What question did Jesus ask them? c) What command did Jesus give to them? How did they respond to that command? d) What was the Pharisees response to Jesus' healing a mute person who was demon possessed?

JESUS HEALS TWO BLIND MEN AND DELIVERS A MUTE PERSON WHO WAS DEMON POSSESSED (Mt. 9:27-34)

After raising Jairus' daughter from death, Jesus left the house and probably returned to Peter's house where he often stayed. On his way he met two blind men. Hearing that Jesus was passing by and knowing that he had the power to heal them, the blind men started following Jesus crying loudly "Son of David, have mercy on us and heal us." The fact that they used the Messianic title "Son of David" shows that everyone knew that Jesus was a descendant of David and therefore qualified to be the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. (Note: It could be that Matthew uses this story to reveal a hidden truth. Ordinary people like the Pharisees could not see that Jesus was the Messiah. But the blind were able to "see" and accept this truth. Those from whom we don't expect faith can often see and believe in Jesus when others who are more respectable have a hard time seeing spiritual truths.) Initially Jesus didn't do anything but kept walking. These two blind men kept following Jesus and walked into the house where Jesus was staying.

Jesus asked the two blind men "Do you believe I am able to do this?" This is the only time in all of the Gospels when Jesus asked a person whether or not he had faith before he healed them. He is not telling them to somehow try to get more faith so that they could be healed. Rather, Jesus was asking if they have any faith. Having faith in Jesus is not like pouring water into a glass, where if it is only half full we try to fill it up. In every other miracle Jesus simply healed when people asked him for it. But in this miracle he delayed healing until the two blind men acknowledged that they had faith in Jesus' power to perform the miracle. So why did Jesus ask this question?

First, Jesus asked this question to force the two blind men to reflect more on who he is. Jesus is telling them that it is not enough to see him as a miracle worker. Rather, they needed to realize that he is the Messiah, the one whom the Old Testament prophesied would open eyes. (Is. 35:5) Jesus wanted them to move from a selfish view of a Jesus who meets needs without any obligation on their part to a Jesus who is the Messiah whom they should follow as their King.

Second, Jesus also wanted them to know the value of "faith." Jesus can heal even though people do not have faith in him. For instance, he raised the widow's son from the dead even though she did not have faith. But Jesus often does not work in power where there is no faith. We read of no miracles among the Pharisees who were resisting him even though it is likely they too got sick and could have used Jesus' healing touch. Jesus wanted the two blind men and his disciples who were probably watching to know that he, like God, values faith, and when his people have bold faith in him, he loves to honor that faith and work in power.

Q. 10. Explain why these two truths are important for believers to know.

Jesus then healed the two blind men. Before he sent them away he strongly warned them not to tell people that Jesus had healed them. Of course people would know that a miracle had happened because they had been blind but now could see. But Jesus did not want them to publicize that he was a miracle healer. The two men did not obey Jesus, however, but openly shared to all people how Jesus had given them sight.

As the two men left the house, people brought a demon possessed person to Jesus. That demon had caused the man to be mute. Jesus drove the demon out and the man could instantly speak. Notice the difference in peoples' reaction to Jesus' miracles. The common people acknowledged that Jesus was doing something great with God's power. However, we will see that although they acknowledged that Jesus did miracles and was a great man, they were not willing to become his disciples. It would not be long until these people would turn against Jesus, joining the religious leaders and shout "crucify him." Many people today are amazed when God uses a person to do a miracle. They get excited and say that great things are happening. But often they do not become faithful followers of Jesus. Miracles are evidences that Jesus is the Savior. But miracles by themselves are not enough to cause a person to place their faith in Jesus and follow him as their Lord. Although they too saw the miracles and could not deny that Jesus had performed miracles, the Pharisees said that Jesus was a sorcerer doing his work with Satan's power. They were forced to respond somehow to Jesus' healing power and so they chose to say it came from Satan rather than God.

Q. 11. What does this story teach us about miracles, their purpose and also what they are unable to do?
Q. 12. Read Mk. 6:1-6. a) Where did Jesus minister? b) What was the response of the people to Jesus?
c) What couldn't Jesus do because there was no faith?

JESUS IS REJECTED FOR THE SECOND TIME IN NAZARETH (Mk. 6:1-6, Mt. 13:53-58)

Jesus traveled over 30 kilometers from Capernaum to his home town of Nazareth. Because he was "famous" he was invited to teach in the synagogue. (Note: Although some scholars think Jesus only visited Nazareth once, it seems that the two stories (Lk. 4:14-30) are different and Jesus was rejected twice by those in his home town, once at the beginning of his ministry and later during the middle of his ministry.) We are told that the people listening to Jesus were "amazed." It would seem that they were amazed in a negative sense. "Who does Jesus think he is? How can he teach like this making himself to be better than us?" was probably their attitude.

It is amazing that the one place in all of Israel that Jesus was never honored was in Nazareth where he grew up. Familiarity with Jesus and his family caused the people to struggle with Jesus in a way that no other area did. They stumbled over three things. First, they struggled with the fact that Jesus was never formally "trained." They said "where did he get this wisdom?" meaning that since Jesus had never formally studied to be a rabbi, why should he claim to have wisdom they needed to listen to? Second, they stumbled over the fact that he was just an ordinary man born in a backward town just like them. Surely the Messiah would be a great person born in a palace, not a common laborer like them. They knew that Jesus was a "carpenter." The Greek word carpenter means one who does many different types of jobs with wood; like building houses, repairing furniture, or making yokes for oxen. Jesus had grown up helping his father Joseph, learning his trade. So people knew Jesus as a carpenter and they could not imagine that he was

the Messiah. "He is just a common person like us." is what they were saying. Third, they knew his family. The fact that Joseph is not mentioned means that Joseph had been dead for some time. Most likely Jesus was responsible to work to support his family until his half brothers were old enough to work. That is when he left his carpentry business to start his public ministry in Israel. The Jews called Jesus "the son of Mary." This was a very unusual expression for Jews who always called a son by his father's name. To say "the son of Mary" was most likely an insult. Probably all people knew that Jesus was Mary's son who was born illegitimately since Jesus was born when Joseph and Mary had been married less than nine months. This passage also indicates that Jesus had four half brothers as well as sisters. Two of these half brothers, James and Jude, would later play important roles in the church. They not only wrote two books of the New Testament, the epistles of James and Jude, but James became one of the major leaders of the Jerusalem church.

With such open opposition Jesus did not do many miracles in Nazareth. This was not because he could not do miracles, but because he chose not to do miracles where there was open opposition. There must have been a few people willing to trust him, however, since he did do a few miracles. To our knowledge, this is the last time Jesus would visit Nazareth. How his heart must have hurt when those who grew up with him as his neighbors and friends and even his relatives refused to accept him as the Messiah. Unfortunately, this same truth often happens today. When a person is saved and God uses them to bring salvation to many others, often the person's own family and friends are the most resistant to the Gospel he preaches. It is usually more difficult to witness to our family than any one else. It is also a person's home church that is most reluctant to acknowledge the spiritual gifting of an evangelist.

Q. 13. Read Mt. 9:35-38. a) What did Jesus see when he looked at the crowds who came for healing? b) For what did he ask the disciples to pray?

JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES ABOUT THE READINESS OF SPIRITUAL HARVEST (Mt. 9:35-38, Lk. 10:2, Jn. 4:35-38)

People can look at the same situation and see different things. The disciples of Jesus no doubt looked at the crowds surrounding Jesus and saw them as an evidence of how great Jesus was. Probably they were proud to be part of the inner circle of friends of the famous miracle worker, just like people like to be seen with a famous person today. But Jesus looked out over the crowds and saw them as "sheep without a shepherd." The disciples looked with physical eyes, but Jesus looked at people through the perspective of the Gospel. And these crowds were filled with people who did not have a personal relationship with Jesus. What do we think when we see people in a market place or going to worship in another place? Do we see ordinary people or perhaps our "enemies" who persecute us? Jesus wants us to see "sheep without a shepherd" and "fields ripe to harvest."

Jesus continued his itinerant ministry throughout Galilee visiting many towns and cities. Matthew lists three ministries which Jesus performed. He "taught." Jesus spent his time explaining the truths of God and how it relates to people's lives so that they could change. Jesus "preached." The word "preach" means to herald out or proclaim the message of God to people. Jesus was God's instrument to pass on truth to the people. Jesus "healed." There was not one disease that he met which he could not heal; he healed everyone who came to him for healing. But it is interesting that this is listed last. Could this be a hint by Matthew that this was the less important ministry of Jesus?

Matthew says that Jesus had "compassion" when he saw the people. The word "compassion" is a very strong word of deep pity coming from our stomachs. This word is often used for Jesus' reaction to the problems people faced. When they were sick, or had a demon, or had lost their son, we are told that Jesus had compassion. This reminds us that when we face problems of any kind, Jesus looks at us with deep compassion as well. But it should also teach us that if we are followers of Jesus, we are to never be indifferent with the problems of people, but deeply feel their pain and seek to help them.

Jesus used two illustrations to show what people are like from a spiritual perspective.

First, Jesus sees them as harassed and helpless sheep who have no shepherd. The words "harassed and helpless" refer to someone who has been so beaten that they are totally discouraged. It is not as if they did not have leaders claiming to be shepherds. Jesus is hinting that the political and religious leaders of the Jews were part of the problem, not part of the solution. The religious leaders increased the burdens on people by making up difficult religious laws. And political leaders only saw them as sources of wealth from taxes. The situations of life had beaten them down. They had no peace either externally or in their hearts. There was no one who would shepherd the people to give them the grass and gentle water and bring them the rest they longed for. (Ps. 2) This is a warning to church leaders today. If we are not bringing our church members the inner peace they need, we are part of the problem of beating them down. We are not shepherds, but oppressors. We have become like the Pharisees, not like Jesus. Or if we are not leading the sheep properly, our lack of godly leadership leaves them without a shepherd. Just because a church has leaders does not mean that church has shepherds!

Second, Jesus saw people as a ripe harvest to be reaped for the kingdom of God. Often the Bible shows a harvest of people for judgment (Rev. 14:14-20). But here Jesus is teaching his disciples that there is a harvest of souls waiting for salvation. There are always those who will trust in Jesus if only they can hear the Gospel of peace about Jesus. Jesus shared the problem is that the workers are few. There are always only a few people who are willing to work with God to harvest the souls of people for eternal life. Jesus offers two solutions. First, he tells the disciples to pray for more workers. Second, he tells the disciples to get busy themselves to be a solution to the problem. As we will see, Jesus immediately sends the 12 apostles out to gather in the harvest that was ready. (Mt. 10)

Jesus is telling us that he always has a harvest of souls ready for us. But as every farmer knows, a harvest is only ready for a period of time and then it gets spoiled. There was an urgency in Jesus' words-telling his disciples to hurry up and get busy. There are three problems which keep this harvest from taking place in our churches.

First, like the disciples, most of us never "see" the harvest. We are so busy thinking about our own personal lives or focusing upon the ministry of our churches that we have forgotten the souls of people around us. This is especially true when the harvest is outside of our community. Many of the people in the world have still never clearly heard that Jesus has died for them. They are a harvest ready- but we can't see it as we only look after our personal, often selfish, needs.

Second, few of us pray for God to raise up people to go with the Gospel. Listen to your prayers and to the prayers prayed every Sunday morning in your church. How often have you heard prayers pleading with God for more workers for the harvest? Some Christian parents even plead with their children to not

become evangelists. They are pleading that people not go to work in the harvest. We would rather people perish in their sins than have our children inconvenienced by going out as evangelists!

Third, few of us are willing to get involved in the harvest. God may answer our prayers to raise up laborers by telling us to go. The disciples were told to pray. God answered their prayer and told them to go. God works the same way today. Jesus is telling each church to not only pray about evangelists, but to actually send out laborers. God never preaches the Gospel from heaven. He does not send angels to reap the harvest. It is up to each one of us and every church to send out laborers into the harvest. This means that those of us who don't go should give to send out people. It means churches look for their most capable youth and encourage them to go.

Q. 14. a) Describe how these three reasons for why the harvest is not being reaped can be seen in your church. b) What could your church do to become more involved in the harvest? c) What could you do to become more involved in the harvest?

Q. 15. Read Mt. 10:1-15. List the instructions Jesus gave to his disciples when they were sent out as messengers.

JESUS SENDS THE 12 APOSTLES THROUGHOUT GALILEE TO WORK ON HIS BEHALF (Mt. 10:1-11:1, Mk. 6:7-13, Lk. 9:1-6)

1. Jesus gave authority to 12 apostles to go as his ambassadors (Mt. 10:1-4)

As long as a person tries to do the work by himself, that work is always limited and cannot expand. He is only one person with limited time to work, and he has only some of the gifts needed for the work. The secret to expanding a work is to get others involved. Up until now, Jesus was harvesting alone. But he wanted others to join him in the harvest. Jesus knew that he did not have time to visit everyone in Galilee and Judea with the message that he, the King, had arrived and the kingdom of God was among them. If the message was to be heard, others had to be involved. Jesus also knew that for someone to learn a skill, it was not enough to just teach them, they had to try to do what they had been taught. So in order to expand the preaching of the Gospel and to help train his future church leaders, Jesus commissioned the 12 disciples as apostles.

Almost a year has passed since Jesus had chosen the 12 disciples "to be with him" (See Mk. 3:14) He had spent that year teaching them and showing them how to preach about the kingdom of God and do miracles. Now Jesus formally commissions these 12 disciples to work on his behalf. Notice the following:

a. The disciples were "authorized" to do everything that Jesus had been doing. (See also Mt. 10:7-8) The Greek word for "gave them instructions" (Mt. 10:5) was often used of a military commander giving his troops instructions or of a king giving instructions to his ambassadors. So this is not just general teaching; this is the formal commissioning of his ambassadors to work on his behalf. They were authorized to be the formal spokesmen for Jesus just like an ambassador is the formal spokesman on behalf of a nation. Just as John and then Jesus had proclaimed the need to repent and get ready for the kingdom of God, so also these apostles were told to proclaim the same message. (Note: "Apostle" here means someone who has been deputized to work on behalf of another person with his full authority.) They were also authorized to heal all types of sickness and empowered to drive out evil spirits.

b. These apostles were sent out two by two. Later when Jesus sent out the 72 disciples, he also sent them out two by two. (See Lk. 10:1) Some people think that the way the names are listed in Mt. 10:2-4 reveals the teams being sent out. So Peter and Andrew traveled together, James and John together, Philip and Bartholomew together, Thomas and Matthew together, James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus together, and Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot together. This provides a good pattern for churches today to follow when sending out evangelists into areas where there are no believers. When an evangelist is alone, he is often overcome with discouragement and temptation. But if he has another person working with him, they can support each other. It might seem like we are more effective spreading out evangelists out one by one, but usually this makes them less effective.

Q. 16. List some benefits you can think of in sending evangelists in pairs rather than alone.

2. Jesus gives the 12 apostles specific instructions about their ministry tour (Mt. 10:5-16)

Many scholars think that Matthew gathers different teachings related to ministry as followers of Jesus into one section here. It is clear that some of Jesus' teaching related to the immediate tour which the 12 apostles were going to make. Jesus would later change some of his instructions about not taking an extra cloak or money. And there is no evidence that the apostles faced the predicted persecution during this ministry tour. It seems that Matthew 10:5-16 primarily deals with the immediate ministry tour which the 12 disciples were to take and Mt. 10:17-42 predicts what will be the pattern for the apostles and God's people throughout history until Jesus returns. Notice the following instructions given to the 12 apostles about their ministry:

a. They were to limit their ministry to Jews. Jesus told the apostles not to take the ministry to the Gentile nations surrounding them. So they were not to go to the north into the regions of Tyre and Sidon or Syria. Nor were they to travel to the east into the region of Decapolis or the Arab nations. Nor were they to go into the region of the Samaritans south of Galilee. Instead they were to limit their ministry to the regions of Galilee, Judea, and Perea where the Jews lived.

Why did Jesus give this command? There are several possibilities.

1) Most likely Jesus wanted to give the Old Testament people of God, the Jews, the first chance to hear the Gospel and believe. God had given the Jews many promises in the Old Testament prophecies and Jesus was offering the Jews the first chance to receive the fulfillment of those prophecies. Paul would later follow this pattern. He started his witness with the Jews. But when the Jews rejected the Gospel, then he would turn to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:46) Up until the death and resurrection of Jesus, the primary focus of Jesus' ministry was to the Jews. Only after Jesus' ascension would the church turn to the Gentiles with the Gospel. (Acts 10)

2) There was not much time before his crucifixion so Jesus did not want his disciples to focus on the more distant areas.

b. The apostles were to copy Jesus in what they preached and did. So they preached that God's kingdom had arrived in the person of Jesus. And they worked miracles to prove that what they said was true. The major role of miracles is to authenticate that the Gospel is true and that Jesus is the Savior and Lord. That is why often God will do a lot of miracles when the Gospel first enters into a new territory. But once people have begun to trust in Jesus and grow in their faith, these miracles are less frequent. At the

beginning miracles are beneficial to encourage faith. But if miracles continue, often they limit faith, because faith rests upon our believing the truths about Jesus whether or not we see evidence on earth. As Jesus would later teach Thomas, those who do not see him but still believe are blessed. (Jn. 20:29) In some ways a miracle is like a structural brace supporting the center pole of a hut. It is useful until the hut is built and the roof on. Then the support brace is removed.

c. The 12 apostles were not to charge anything for their ministry. Jesus told them that he had given them the Gospel and membership in his kingdom as a free gift. They in turn should never charge others for the message or ministry; they were supposed to share this free gift with others without cost. This was an important principle which the Jews and early Christians strongly believed. The Jews taught that a Rabbi had received his knowledge of the Law as a gift from God and was never to use his teaching the Law as a way to make money. He was never to charge for his service of teaching unless he was fulfilling a responsibility that others were supposed to fulfill but didn't. For instance, they were allowed to charge for teaching children because it was the parents' responsibility to teach their children. Since the parents weren't doing what they should do, then it was permissible for the Rabbi to be paid to work on behalf of the parents. Early Christians also had strong laws concerning this. They taught that anyone who traveled throughout the church and asked for financial help was to be classified as a false prophet. In fact, if they stayed in a town living off the hospitality of Christians for more than three days, they were viewed as false prophets.

Unfortunately in every age there are those who want to turn ministry into a way to make money. Paul later wrote that there were many in the church who were "traders" of the Gospel, something he refused to do. (2 Cor. 2:17) Any time a person uses a spiritual gift which God has freely given him (e.g. prophesy, miracles) to make money and become rich, he is in danger of becoming a false prophet! It is an important principal that those who give their lives to serving God and the church not view their ministry as a "job" by which they make money. They must view their ministry as a way to serve others. If a job and good pay becomes a major motivation for someone to become an evangelist or pastor, they have begun to market the Gospel just like a trader buys and sells butter in order to get money. Satan has used this temptation to destroy the lives of many evangelists and pastors.

d. Because of the urgency and temporary nature of their tour, the apostles were supposed to limit what they carried with them and trust God to meet their needs. The words "do not take" could also be interpreted "do not purchase or take extra supplies." Jews had a wide cloth wrap around their waist and in that cloth wrap many people would put a small purse in which they kept their money. So the apostles were not supposed to take extra money with them in case they had special needs. Nor were they to take a "bag." Travelers often carried a large bag on their backs in which they carried supplies needed for a long journey like extra food or clothes. Jesus told them not to carry any extra supplies. They were also not to take an extra tunic. The tunic was a spare outer coat. If they thought they were going to sleep outside, many Jews would carry a spare coat to keep warm. Nor were they to take spare sandals in case their sandals wore out or broke or a staff which was used both as a walking stick to help them in traveling and protecting themselves from enemies. They were to trust God to meet all of their needs and to protect them.

Jesus was warning the apostles to trust God to meet their basic needs rather than be concerned about what could happen to them. Jesus would later change some of these regulations. He knew that after his ascension, the disciples would no longer be on a short journey but spend months on the road and therefore needed to be better prepared (See Lk. 22:35-38.) But this is an important reminder to those

whom God sends out as evangelists. It is easy to think that we must do all we can to make sure we will not suffer in our work. We can focus upon a good system of getting our salary or having enough food which we like, etc. Or we can wonder what we will do if we get sick or what might happen to our family. Focusing upon meeting every possible need can distract from our ministry. Jesus is saying that when we go, we must trust him to meet our needs. He is the one responsible to take care of our family and their education. He is the one responsible to make sure we stay healthy. He is the one who will give us the food we need when we need it. Walking by faith and not by sight as an evangelist means trusting God to take care of us.

Q. 17. a) What are things evangelists often worry about when they go to remote areas to preach the Gospel? b) What are things you worry about? c) Why is this truth important for evangelists and each one of us to remember?

e. The apostles would have their daily needs met by those who benefited from their ministry. The Jewish practice was for those who traveled preaching and teaching to benefit from the hospitality of the community. This is what Jesus meant by "the worker is worth his keep." Jesus is saying that when they entered a town, the apostles were to trust God to supply their needs through the hospitality of people. When entering into a town, they were to look for someone who was "worthy." This no doubt had two meanings. First, the disciples were to look for someone with a good reputation. If they stayed with a known thief, people would question their integrity so they should stay with someone whom the community knew to be a good person. Second, they were to look for someone who was receptive to them and the Gospel. People whom the Holy Spirit had opened their hearts were worthy of hearing the Gospel and having the privilege of having an apostle living in their homes. (Note: Some scholars think this is an important strategy when taking the Gospel into a new town or territory. We are to prayerfully ask God to lead us to someone who is open to the Gospel. We are especially to look for those respected by their community who is open to new truths. When we associate with him and share the Gospel with him there are two benefits. First, often we won't receive the resistance of people so quickly since we are seen as friends of a respected person. Second, if God opens that person's heart and they believe, they are able to influence many others in the community. Their ability to open doors for the Gospel is greater than an ordinary person.)

Jesus gave his apostles three special commands about how to handle hospitality with others:

First, they were supposed to stay in one home for the duration of their stay. Remember, these apostles were not planning to stay for many days. Rather, their visit was only for a few days before they were supposed to move to a new town. The early church would use this principle for traveling prophets (preachers), offering them hospitality for only a few days. If they stayed more than three days, they were often classified as false prophets. The reason they were to stay with one person was so that they would not hurt people by leaving their home and going to a more convenient home. The thing Jesus was protecting them from was the tendency for the apostles to go into a town. The first night they would get invited into a poor person's home. But the next day, a rich person would offer them a better place with a good bed and food. Jesus said they weren't to change. Not only would they hurt the feelings of the poor person, but they would give the impression that they were seeking a comfortable life rather than serving people freely.

Second, they were to pass on a blessing upon the house. Lk. 10:5 says they were to say "May God's peace be on this house." (This is where our practice of pronouncing peace on a house when we enter comes from.) But if that household does not accept the Gospel and turns against the apostle, they were

to take the blessing back. There are two ideas in this practice. First, the Jews viewed blessings as something that worked independent of the person. (e.g. Is. 55:11; Zech. 5:3) So when they pronounce a blessing, that blessing had power to work and bring blessing to the person even if the apostle was no longer there. If the household had turned out to be resistant to the Gospel, they were to take the blessing back so that it would not continue to bless those who were resistant to the Gospel. Second, Jesus was saying that in the Gospel there is spiritual blessing. In proclaiming the Gospel to a household, we offer them true peace for their souls. But when they resist the Gospel, they remove themselves from the position of blessing which the Gospel brings. So Jesus is saying "Honor a house with your presence." They have the unique privilege of hearing the Gospel of peace in a deeper way than ordinary people with whom you do not stay. If they resist, leave the house taking the Gospel of peace with you, removing them from the honored position of having the Gospel clearly taught them.

Third, if the house or town resisted the apostles and the Gospel, they were to shake the dust off their feet. Every time pious Jews left Gentile territories and entered Galilee or Judea, before they crossed the border, they would take off their sandals and shake off the dust. This action symbolized that they were not bringing any of the uncleanness and immorality of the Gentiles into God's holy land. This sign also indicated that the Gentiles were under the judgment of God. Jesus meant that if a town did not accept their ministry, the disciples were supposed to treat that town as if they were unclean Gentiles. Jesus was warning these apostles that there would be people and towns who would resist their ministry. Not everyone would be excited about the message they would bring.

Jesus told the apostles that on the day of judgment those Jewish towns who resisted them and their ministry would face a more severe judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah. In Jewish thinking, Sodom and Gomorrah symbolized extreme evil which brought great punishment from God. It would have shocked the Jews to hear that if they resisted Jesus and his message and his messengers, they were more evil than Sodom and Gomorrah. The reason this is true is because "to whom much is given, much is required." The Jews had the privilege of having Jesus and his messengers living in their midst and rejected them. Sodom and Gomorrah did not have this privilege, so the Jews would be punished more severely.

This passage establishes three principles about church workers and wages.

First, church workers must serve because they are called and sent by Jesus, not because they are paid. They are not to treat the Gospel which they have received freely like traders seeking to gain profit. Evangelists and pastors are not "employees" who receive a wage. They are not like people we hire to build a house. Rather, they are "ministers" who serve God by serving others. No church should view their evangelists and pastors as "employees." This places them in a position of authority and employee-employer relationship which God does not desire. And when ministers begin to think that they are "paid" by the church it is dangerous. They lose their feeling of accountability to God and feel they are primarily accountable to those who pay them. They also lose their freedom to share truthfully, for then they are afraid that they will not get a raise or may be asked to leave the church.

Second, those receiving the blessing of being taught spiritually are to meet the financial needs of those who serve them. Churches are expected by God to take care of his ministers so that they can live without facing depravation. One scholar expressed it this way: "The church does not pay its ministers; rather it provides them with resources so that they are able to serve freely." The finances workers get are

a "gift" for their spiritual services similar to how we give a gift when a family is having a wedding to help them with their expenses.

Third, the church should never turn the Gospel into a business as a way to make money. The Gospel (including preaching and healing) is a free gift from God to people. This is a strong warning against some who use the spiritual gift God gives them as a way to make lots of money.

Q. 18. a) Describe how the financial relationship between a pastor/evangelist and his church is to be like from this section. b) What important lessons for evangelists and churches are seen in this section about taking the Gospel to unreached areas? c) Which of these principles do many churches and evangelists not apply? What problems does this bring in their ministry?

THIRD DAY

"God has crushed our enemies under our feet." "We go from victory to victory, overcoming our enemies." So goes many of our songs which we sing in church, especially since the fall of the communist government which had persecuted believers. It is true that God overthrew a government that stood opposed to him and we are enjoying religious freedom now. But it is easy to assume that the "normal" Christian life is one where life is free of enemies, where God protects us from persecution and blesses us with material prosperity. But this is not what Jesus taught his followers about the "normal" Christian life.

Q. 19. a) List popular songs being sung in church which praise God for defeating our enemies. b) Explain why it is dangerous to think that God will always protect us from persecution or will always give us an easy life.

Q. 20. Read Mt. 10:16-42. a) List the types of persecution that Jesus said his disciples would face. b) Why should they not be afraid of persecution?

3. Jesus warns his disciples of what to expect as they follow him (Mt. 10:16-42)

Often we want to hide bad news from people. We especially do this for new believers. We tell them how God will bless them and take care of them. Some evangelists even promise that if they believe in Jesus they will be healed from their disease or receive a job and other material blessings. Like some politicians in the world who knowingly make promises they cannot keep so people will vote for them, we try to "bribe" people to believe in Jesus by promises which Jesus never gives to his followers. It is not surprising that we have many people in the church who selfishly want things for themselves but are not committed to obeying Jesus and willing to suffer for him.

Jesus chose a very different approach. From the very beginning Jesus warned his followers that following him was a narrow, difficult road. (Mt. 7:13-14) He would tell people to carefully think through their decision to follow him before claiming to be his followers. (Lk. 14:28-33) In Mt. 10:16-42 Jesus clearly warned the apostles and disciples that ministry for him would involve great suffering. Many of those reading Matthew's Gospel had suffered these persecutions Jesus described. Jesus meant that the "normal" Christian life is one where we suffer. There is a "cross" to bear. Beware of those who try to take the "cross" of persecution out of following Jesus! That is not the Gospel which Jesus taught.

The disciples, like the other Jews, believed that God's kingdom, when it came, would come with great power. In an instant the evil nations would be destroyed and the godly people rewarded. From then on God's people would live with great peace. They must have been startled when Jesus said it would not happen like that. Instead, the kingdom that Jesus had come to initiate would be one where his followers would face resistance.

a. All believers should expect persecution as part of being a follower of Jesus. (Mt. 10:16-22)

1) The followers of Jesus will live in an antagonistic world. (Mt. 10:16) Jesus compared his apostles' ministry to sending sheep among wolves. In Palestine, the major wild animal which viciously attacked sheep was a wolf which is like a very large dog or a big hyena. Sheep are unable to protect themselves from wild animals. Normally shepherds did all they could to protect the sheep from the wolves. But Jesus said that he was knowingly sending his disciples (the sheep) out into a hostile dangerous world (the wolves.)

2) As they lived in a world that would be hostile to them the disciples needed to combine two characteristics. (Mt. 10:16)

First, they needed to be "shrewd." Because of the way the serpent was able to deceive Eve in the Garden of Eden, the Jews thought snakes were the example of shrewdness. In a hostile world, it would take great wisdom to know how to survive. For instance, it would take wisdom to know when to flee from persecution and when to accept it as from God. But it is possible to be "shrewd" and use worldly wisdom to escape persecution. For instance, there are some believers who have pretended to renounced their faith so as to not suffer. This is not Godly wisdom. Others have lied in order to get land for a church. This too is not the shrewdness God desires.

Second, Jesus said that the disciples must also be "innocent." To the Jews, the dove was a symbol of innocence. The word "innocent" means to have no hidden motives or no trickery. There is no lying or seeking to deceive. Rather, our character must be totally pure of deceit or selfishness. Jesus is saying that in the hostile world, we will need wisdom combined with a pure heart.

Q. 21. Describe several situations where a Christian needs wisdom when living in a hostile world. b) Describe situations where "wisdom" without "innocence" is wrong but Christians often try it. c) Explain why both shrewdness and purity are needed for followers of Jesus.

3) The Christians will face persecution from the Jews. (Mt.10:17) The disciples might have expected persecution from the Gentiles like the Romans. But they would have been surprised that the initial fulfillment of Jesus' words was when the Jews persecuted the followers of Jesus. Jesus said that the local Jewish councils in the towns scattered throughout the Roman empire and the ruling authorities of the synagogues would turn against the Christians. One common punishment the Jews brought against those who did not obey the teachings of the Old Testament was to flog them. (e.g. Acts 5:40-41) Jesus said that the disciples would be treated like heretics and then expelled from the Jewish community. When Matthew was writing this Gospel, most Jewish Christians were experiencing this type of persecution. Jewish Christians were being expelled from synagogues. And the Jews were turning the Jewish Christians over to the Romans to be punished. The major persecutors of the early church up to 70 AD were the Jews.

Not long after Matthew wrote this Gospel, the Jews would publicly curse Christians during their worship services.

4) The followers of Jesus would face the persecution of the Gentiles. (Mt. 10:18-20) Jesus indicated that one day the disciples would take the Gospel to the Gentiles. But they would face resistance and persecution there also. Local governors and kings like Caesar would all turn against them. Like Paul, they would stand before Caesar to be punished. (Note: During the days of Matthew, the Jews were formally "handing over" Christians to the Gentile officials for punishment. Only the Jews were allowed to not worship the emperor and not say "Caesar is Lord." But the Jews were now saying "these Christians are not part of us, they are different. So the law does not protect them from not sacrificing to Caesar. See, they don't sacrifice, therefore they must be punished. It is rebellion against the emperor.") This persecution was to be viewed as an opportunity to witness, not something to be feared. The apostles and early Jewish disciples would no doubt have been more afraid to stand before the Gentile rulers than the Jewish rulers. They knew the Scriptures and so knew how to respond to the accusations of the Jews. But the Gentiles had a different culture and it would be easy to worry about how they should respond to the Gentile accusations against them. Jesus tells them not to worry about what they were to say. Rather, they were to depend upon the Holy Spirit to give them the words to speak. (Note: This verse is not teaching that we do not need to prepare before we preach and that the Holy Spirit will tell us what to say. Other verses like 2 Tim. 2:15 tell us that an approved workman is one who studies God's Word and rightly interprets it.)

5) Followers of Jesus can expect their own families to turn against them and persecute them. (Mt. 10:21, 35-36) On the basis of Micah 7:6, the Jews taught that at the end times, there would be a time of great family division between those who chose to be faithful to God and those who don't. Jesus meant that he has started that time of division among families. Parents will turn against and punish their own children who choose to follow Jesus. Children will turn against and turn over for persecution their own parents. There is probably no greater pain that new Christians face than to have their family whom they love more than any others on earth turn against them. And yet even today in parts of Ethiopia, when a person chooses to follow Jesus, their parents expel them from their homes and refuse to support them. Some religions even demand that the parents kill any child who chooses to accept Jesus as their Savior. Jesus told his followers that we should expect this.

6) Societies as a whole ("all men") will hate the followers of Jesus. Society hates anyone who is different, especially anyone who seeks to live in holiness. The different way that followers of Jesus live reveals other's evilness and they don't like that. So generally Christians should expect the hatred of most people in society. They should never expect to be popular because they are believers. This hatred was to be "because of me" to demonstrate that people will hate believers because they bear the name Christian and because they identify with Jesus. (Note: We must remember verses like 1 Pet. 3:8-17 which teach that this animosity from society must only be because we are followers of Jesus, not because our character or actions are not proper. If we think we are too good to participate in community meetings and help out our communities, or if our house prayer meetings are loud and disruptive, then any hatred we face is not because of Christ, but because we are prideful and not living as we should.)

Q. 22. a) Describe how Christians have experienced persecution in Ethiopia. b) Why do you think few Christians today expect persecution as part of the normal experience of a believer?

b. What Christians should do when persecution comes (Mt. 10:22-23)

1) Believers must persevere until the end without renouncing their faith. (Mt. 10:22) Jesus said that it is only those who maintain their faith (stand firm without denial) in him until the end who are saved. We must patiently persevere during times of persecution. It is not clear what "the end" refers to. It could be the end of their earthly lives. So until the day we die, believers must make sure they are persevering in following Jesus. Or it could be the end of persecution. So Jesus is encouraging us to stay faithful until the time that persecution will end. Finally, it could be the end of the age. Only those who are staying faithful when Jesus returns to rule will be saved. The "salvation" mentioned here refers to receiving the eternal blessings promised by Jesus. What Jesus meant is that perseverance in our faith is a major indicator demonstrating that we are true followers of Jesus. Anyone who does not maintain their faith and stays in an unrepentant condition or renounces Jesus for a long period of time should examine the reality of their decision to follow Jesus. Like Peter, we might fall and deny Jesus. But we repent and return to following Jesus. But like Judas, if we fall and refuse to repent, that indicates that something is deeply wrong with our faith. As John said, there are those who renounce their faith and leave the church because they were never really part of God's people. (1 Jn. 2:19) This verse clearly teaches that the way to escape persecution is not by denying our faith. That decision can bring eternal condemnation if the person does not repent and return to following Jesus.

2) Believers are to flee persecution when possible. (Mt. 10:23) Jesus has already said that when necessary, his followers should accept the persecution that comes because we are followers of Jesus. Being whipped and hated and killed are all possible for followers of Jesus. And these persecutions are preferred to renouncing our faith to escape persecution. But Jesus tells his followers that we are not to seek persecution and death just to show that we are courageous like some soldiers knowingly invite death by running at people shooting at them. Rather, being "shrewd" means that we know when we are supposed to flee to escape persecution. The Jewish religious leaders taught that if someone demanded that a Jew do something not permitted in the law, like eat pork or die, they were to eat it and save their lives. This was wisdom. But if they were told to curse God or renounce their faith, they could not do this. They were to die for their faith. Believers should know that there will be situations that we can run to escape persecution. This allows us to continue to witness for Jesus. But there are other situations which they must never compromise and face death rather than deny their faith. Shortly after the days of Matthew, the Romans asked Christians to offer a sacrifice to worship Caesar and say "Caesar is Lord." The Christians knew that this was an act of denying Jesus and so refused and died by the thousands. As we study the life of Paul, we see times when he would run from persecution and times when he would face persecution. It is especially important that those who are church leaders think this through. If running from persecution leaves the members of their church who cannot flee without someone to take care of them, then the leaders should not run. Church leaders need to help church members consider situations where they can "flee" without renouncing Jesus and when they must accept the persecution that comes from following Jesus.

Q. 23. a) Describe several situations when you believe it is permissible for a believer to flee persecution. b) Describe situations when you believe a believer must accept persecution without denying their faith. c) Have you ever heard people teach that it is permissible to deny that we are believers in order to escape persecution? If so, what did they teach? d) Based upon what Jesus taught in Mt. 10:16-23, do you think Jesus would agree with their teaching? Explain your answer.

Jesus told the apostles that "you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes." This is a very difficult saying to interpret. Scholars have different ideas. Some scholars think Jesus

meant that the 12 apostles would not finish visiting all of the villages of Israel before Jesus (the Son of Man) came to die on the cross. Other scholars hold that Jesus is talking about the days just before Jesus returns again. Jesus is saying that during the tribulation period, the Gospel would be preached to the Jews but before all hear Jesus would return. Still others think that Jesus is saying that the Gospel would be preached among the Jews with them receiving the primary focus until Jesus comes in judgment against the Jews. They believe that Jesus was prophesying that in 70 AD the Romans would come and bring his judgment upon the Jews by destroying Jerusalem and the Temple. Up to that time, the church would focus upon the Jews. But after that time, the focus of the Gospel will be upon the Gentiles.

c. Followers of Jesus should not expect an easier life than Jesus, our Master and Teacher, experienced. (Mt. 10:24-25) Jesus experienced the rejection of his family who thought he was insane. (Mk. 3:20-21) And his friends in Nazareth rejected him and even tried to kill him. Religious leaders said that he was a servant of Satan (Beelzebub). And within a year and ½ he would die on the cross. If this is the pattern of persecution that Jesus, the Master and Teacher faced, all of his followers should know that we too can face this type of resistance. Jesus did not watch his enemies being lowered under his feet. That will only happen at the end of times. And he did not receive an easy, materially blessed life. Rather, he lived in poverty, renouncing everything to obey God. So Jesus is warning his followers that since the path Jesus has chosen is the path of persecution, we too will need to walk that path.

d. Key things followers of Jesus must remember when faced with persecution. (Mt. 10:26-42)

1) Don't be afraid of persecution. (Mt. 10:26, 28) The worst thing that persecution can do is cause the physical death of a person. Persecution cannot take away our eternal reward so we should never fear those who have the power to kill us. But we should fear God. Not only will God cause the death of his enemies, but his authority of death is both over the body and soul. He alone has the authority to bring about eternal death. It is much better to die for Christ now than to face the wrath of God and his eternal judgment. And on Judgment Day, the hidden conditions of people's lives, their motives, will all be revealed. Fear of persecution and love of material blessings might cause us to hide our faith, but on that day it will openly bring us God's judgment.

2) Keep sharing the Gospel. (Mt. 10:27) Most likely the things Jesus tells in darkness and whispers to the disciples are the hidden truths he had been teaching them. Until the death of Jesus, those truths that Jesus is the Messiah, has brought in a new kingdom, and is the one who would die for mankind's sins were kept within the community of followers of Jesus. But once Jesus died and rose from the dead, that is the time to shout the truths to all people. Jewish houses had flat roofs. If someone wanted to make an announcement to the community he would often climb on top of the roof and give his announcement. So Jesus meant that even though we will face persecution, his followers must continue to have an open witness about Jesus. Hiding our witness is one way of being defeated by Satan. When told not to preach about Jesus any more or face persecution, Peter refused saying "we must obey God." (Acts 4:19-20) Followers of Jesus must never allow the fear of persecution to stop our witness. Eventually what we are proclaiming about Jesus will win over the lies of the enemy. Jesus and the truth he and his disciples taught will one day be verified.

Q. 24. Explain why it is important for Christians to continue to witness during times of severe persecutions.

3) Remember God deeply loves believers and knows the details about our lives. (Mt. 10:29-31) Often in times of persecution Satan tries to convince believers that God has forgotten them. But this is a lie. Even in the midst of persecution, God's sovereign loving concern is present. Jesus illustrated God's loving care by two illustrations. First, he compares the value of the life of a believer to a sparrow. A sparrow was the smallest bird that poor Jews would buy for food. They could purchase two small sparrows for just 1/16th of a day's wage. Yet God was so involved in the workings of earth that he determines every time a sparrow "falls" to his death. Believers are much more valuable to God. If he cares enough about a sparrow to control its life, God will also control situations for the sake of his children. Second, Jesus taught that the smallest details like how many hairs we have is known to God. These two illustrations teach us that God knows even the smallest, most insignificant details of our lives. And he is controlling those details to the fulfillment of his will. Jesus is not promising that he will deliver us from persecution. But he is promising us that every detail of our life is known and controlled by God. As Paul would later write "What can separate us from the love of God? Will trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword? Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:31-39) Paul does not promise that we will not experience these things. But he promises us that God is with us in the times of persecution, controlling every detail. And no type of persecution in any way lessens his love for us.

4) Be careful not to denounce Jesus out of fear. (Mt. 10:32-33) Jesus warned his disciples that their reaction to him during times of persecution will have a great impact on the day of judgment. If they openly acknowledge Jesus when their persecutors say "Are you a follower of Jesus?," then on the day of judgment, Jesus will say to the court of heaven "He is one of mine." To "acknowledge" Jesus is to declare our allegiance to Jesus. But if we deny him and say "I am not a follower of Jesus" then on that day of judgment Jesus will say "I do not know him. He is not one of mine." To "disown" means to deny a relationship with a person or to reject him.

We need to remember that there are different ways we can "disown" Jesus. First, we can deny him by our words, such as openly claiming that we are not his followers, or by our silence and not speaking to others about Jesus, or by the way we speak that does not reflect that we are living in obedience to Jesus. Second, we can deny him by our actions, by living in a way that ignores that Jesus is the Master of our lives. Many people think they are believers but live in open sin or in selfishness as if Jesus did not really exist. For them, he does not exist and therefore they are denying him.

Q. 25. a) Describe ways believers can deny Jesus through their speech. b) Describe ways Christians can live as if Jesus is not Lord of their lives and therefore "deny" him.

5) Realize that the Gospel often causes division, not peace. (Mt. 10:34-36) Jesus warns his followers that the Gospel divides people, often with great emotional hatred. The "sword" was a symbol of this hatred. The Jews thought that when the Messiah came, after a time of great war and division there would come great peace. We too think that the Gospel is about peace with God and with others. And on one hand it is. The Gospel tells us how to be reconciled with God so that we can live at peace with him. And it tears down the dividing walls between people and tribes bringing peace. But the reality is Jesus and the Gospel cause strong divisions. How people react to Jesus separates them. The majority turn against Jesus and a few choose to follow Jesus. There is rarely true peace between these two groups. This division is not only in society, but even in the closest families. Jews placed a lot of emphasis on family solidarity. However, they believed that just before the Messiah came, families would strongly divide over the way of

righteousness and the way of evil. This was a sign of the end of the age. But Jesus is telling his disciples that now with his coming and until he returns to reign, that division would continue. And the strongest divisions would be felt among families, those whom we love the most.

6) Make sure your love for others, especially family, never overshadows your love for Jesus. (Mt. 10:37) We naturally love our families more than all other people. But this natural love can be dangerous if it comes between us and Jesus and hinders following him. So Jesus warned his disciples of this love. If the love of family limits complete obedience to Jesus, then we are not worthy disciples of Jesus. To be a worthy disciple means to be an acceptable disciple. Jesus requires the primary love from his followers. We face this danger of loving our family more than Jesus in three situations. First, we face it when we first make the choice to believe on Jesus. If our family members are not believers and strongly resist us believing on Jesus, to love Jesus more means to choose to trust Jesus even though our family might disagree and reject us. Second, we face it when we choose how to serve God, especially if we believe Jesus is asking us to serve him in full time ministry. There are many parents who tell their sons and daughters "Don't become an evangelist or preacher. That ministry does not pay well. Get a good education and good job and give money for evangelists instead. That is enough." If we listen to our parents when we know God has asked us to do something else is to love them more than God. There are many whom God has asked to be missionaries who never leave because they listen to their parents who do not want them to go. Third, we face this temptation to love our children more than Jesus when we refuse to go to a remote area and serve because our children will not receive the best education available to those living in a large city. (Note: This truth must always be balanced with other teaching in the Bible telling believers to take care of their family.)

Q. 26. a) Describe how allegiance to family has hindered a person's willingness to fully follow and obey Jesus. b) List four things we can do which demonstrate that we love Jesus more than we love our family and friends.

7) Take up your cross to follow Jesus. (Mt. 10:38-39) As Christians we have turned the cross into a piece of beauty. Many people, even non-Christians, will wear a gold cross around their neck. No Jew would ever have imagined a cross as a piece of jewelry. It would be as odd to them as wearing a image of a gun as jewelry is to us. For the Jews and Romans, the cross was an instrument of one of the most painful deaths mankind has designed. Just 25 years previously, the people of Galilee had watched the Roman army come in and crucify over 2000 people. The Romans crucified some of the parents of those in the crowd along the very roads which Jesus walked. So they must have been shocked when Jesus said they were to take up their cross and follow Jesus. Roman crucifixion practice was for the condemned criminal to carry the cross beam of the cross (not the whole thing) to where he was going to die. In this statement, Jesus is symbolizing three different truths:

a) Jesus is hinting that he would die on a cross. This is the first time that Jesus has mentioned his coming death, especially his death on a cross. He had just mentioned that the disciples are to resemble him and one of the ways they would resemble him was by the way of the "cross."

b) Jesus is indicating that following him would often be the way of death. "If you are not ready to come die with me, you are not a worthy disciple." Jesus was saying. At least two of the apostles listening to Jesus, Peter and Andrew, were crucified- most of the others were martyred as well. The cross was a symbol of death and Jesus was saying that as his disciples, they must be prepared to die for him and for

the cause of the kingdom. At the least, they should be ready to accept the persecution they would experience as his followers.

c) Jesus is using the cross symbolically to refer to "dying to self." Many Christians mistakenly use the word "cross" for a trouble they are facing. "My asthma is difficult, it is a cross I must bear" some might say. But the Bible never uses the word "cross" in this way. Jesus is saying that to follow him means we must "kill" our human desire to do what we want in order to live in a way that fulfills the will of Jesus. We put to death the desire to have an easy, comfortable life. We crucify our tendency to love others more than God and therefore do what they want and not what Jesus wants. In place of our will and desires, we follow the will and desires of Jesus. Paul expressed this truth this way: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal 2:20) "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Gal. 6:14)

Q. 27. a) Memorize Galatians 2:20 and 6:14. b) List 10 specific things we can "crucify" in order to be worthy disciples of Jesus.

Jesus expressed this same truth in another way. He said that giving up our desires and plans was "losing" one's earthly life. But living for self and the benefits the world gives to us, hiding our faith in Jesus, refusing to obey Jesus, or pleasing our friends and family- these are "finding" our lives in the perspective of the world. So if we choose to live for self, the world might praise us for "finding" a good life. But when the day of judgment comes, we will "lose," for we will spend eternity in hell. But if we "lose" our life for the sake of obeying and serving Jesus, throwing it away according to the views of the world, on the day of judgment, we will "find" our life for we will be rewarded with eternal life. (Note: This statement of Jesus must have been one of Jesus' favorite sayings, for he mentions it more than any other truth in the Gospels.) Jesus is saying that we are to examine our lives based on what happens in eternity, not based on what happens now. Our earthly lives are a short 70 years on an average. We might become a millionaire and enjoy life- but only for 70 years. But in front of us is eternity- unending days where we will either be blessed or punished, all depending upon how we live our lives now. We are living in days when Christians shake their heads at someone becoming a poorly paid evangelist and say "What a waste. He could have become a engineer with a good job." Or they say to someone who has gotten the opportunity to study in a Western country "Don't go back. You will enjoy your life much more here." These are ways today Christians are "finding" their life only to lose it. Choose wisely- remember eternity is coming. Make all of your decisions with eternity in mind.

Q. 28. a) Describe how you have seen Christians seek to "find" something in their lives and therefore "lose" their lives. b) Describe how you have seen a Christian choose to "lose" in this life so he can "gain" in the life to come. c) List things which tempt many Christians to focus upon this life rather than on the life to come.

8) Those who help the messengers of Jesus receive the same reward from God as the messenger. (Mt. 10:40-42) The Jews believed that when a king sent a messenger, that messenger represented the king in all ways. His words were viewed as the words of the king. But also everything the people do to that person indicates what they would do for the king. Jesus shares that this is true in the kingdom of God as

well. (Note: To receive a person means not just to show hospitality, but to be in total agreement with their ministry.) Jesus shared the following truths:

a) The originator of all things is "the one who sent me," meaning God the Father.

b) Jesus is the one "sent" by God the Father. So the Jews were to "receive" Jesus as God's representative. Whatever response they had to Jesus indicated their response to God the Father. This truth is very important for Christians to realize. For the Jews during Jesus' day, Jesus was telling them that they could not claim to follow the God of Abraham and not receive Jesus and his teachings. He was God's official representative and by rejecting Jesus, they were rejecting God the Father. This also means that unless a person receives Jesus' message and honors him as God's Son and official representative today, that person cannot have any relationship with God. There are not many ways to God as people in the world like to say. There is only one way and that is through Jesus Christ. As Peter would later say "there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we can be saved." (Acts 4:12)

c) Jesus sends his disciples. We are his official representatives. Peoples' relationship with Jesus and God the Father is demonstrated by how they receive Jesus' representatives. How we treat another believer, especially one who is ministering for Jesus, is as if we are doing that thing for Jesus himself.

Jesus gives three examples of how this principle works out.

First, Jesus' "prophet" who is helped by a follower of Jesus will receive the same reward as the prophet who is working on God's behalf. During the early church, there were traveling "prophets/teachers" who went from church to church delivering God's specific messages. During times of persecution, it was risky to be identified with these prophets who were often being sought by the Roman government. Human tendency was to refuse to associate with them to avoid possible persecution from the government. But Jesus said that believers must provide them hospitality, even if they suffer because of it. In doing so, they are accepting and serving the one who sent the prophets, Jesus. Therefore they would receive the same reward as the prophet who traveled, risking his life to serve Jesus by passing on his messages to the church.

Second, a "righteous man" is probably a church leader or mature believers. Like prophets they too were often being persecuted by the government so Jesus is reminding his followers that we must still identify with them. Even if identifying with these leaders did not bring persecution, the disciples were supposed to remember that church leaders are "representatives of Jesus." Therefore they were to be treated with the same type of respect and honor as they would Jesus. To rebel against their leadership, except in cases when the leader is committing open sin, is the same as rebelling against Jesus.

Third, there were "little children." Most likely this is a term given to the ordinary members of the church or perhaps new believers. They too are representatives of Jesus. And so to help them is the same as helping Jesus. Every simple act of helping is honored by Jesus. A "cup of cold water" is the lowest level of hospitality. Even if a person is very poor with little food in his house, he can at least give other believers a cup of cold water to help them. Even such a simple act of hospitality is honored and rewarded by Jesus.

Jesus is teaching several very important truths to all disciples of Jesus.

1. Rather than think about ourselves, believers are to help each other. Our acts of kindness, no matter how small, even if we are so poor all we can afford is a cup of water, is treated by Jesus as ministry of him. And these acts of kindness are rewarded.

2. God assigns people to different roles. To some he gives the ministry of being a "prophet" or full time church worker. To others he gives the role of working as farmers or government school teachers. One type of ministry is not more honored than another type of ministry. Both are given by God. So there are supposed to be those who go and minister and those who stay in their churches and partner with the evangelists by helping them financially and with prayer. Jesus says that when we do this, on the judgment day, we will get the same reward as the evangelist who goes.

Q. 29. How does this teaching encourage us to get involved with those who minister for Jesus as evangelists in remote areas?

e. Jesus sends out the disciples to minister and continues his work. (Mt. 11:1) Having taught his disciples, it was now time for them to experience ministry for Jesus for the first time. They were sent out throughout Galilee to teach and minister and they had an effective ministry. (Lk. 9:6) In fact, they were so successful that Herod Antipas heard about their ministry and thought John the Baptist had risen from the dead. Jesus also continued his ministry of teaching in various cities.

The Gospel writers do not say how long the 12 disciples spent on this first tour of ministry. They were probably gone for several weeks and then met up with Jesus again for further training. Jesus' method of training is a good model for us to follow. It is not enough to train people in a classroom. Students need to apply what they learned and then come back and reflect on their experience and look for ways to improve. The ultimate evaluation of effective training is not whether or not someone passes a test or gets a diploma, but whether they can apply what they have learned and minister effectively. It is not passing a preaching class that is important but becoming effective preachers.

Q. 30. a) Contrast the songs which many believers sing about the victory Jesus gives over our enemies with the teaching of Jesus in this chapter. b) What difference do you think it would make to new believers and evangelists if we were to follow Jesus' example and warn new believers in advance of persecution rather than promise them great blessings?

FOURTH DAY

Q. 31. Read Mt. 14:1-12. a) What did Herod Antipas say when he heard about Jesus' and the disciples' miracles? b) Why did Herod arrest John the Baptist? c) What happened to John the Baptist?

HEROD KILLS JOHN THE BAPTIST (Mt. 14:1-12, Mk. 6:14-29, Lk. 9:7-9)

The Gospel record does not tell us much about the last great prophet of the Old Testament era, John the Baptist, but focuses upon Jesus who introduced the New Covenant. The ministry of John the Baptist was important not only from the standpoint of the role he played in preparing people for Jesus, the King, but because he became a greatly respected person and people in the early church period continued to follow him as "disciples of John" for many years even after he died.

We saw previously that John the Baptist was thrown into prison by Herod Antipas. (Note: Herod was not technically a king, but a governor over two provinces. However, most likely most of the people used the title "king" for him.) There were two major reasons why Herod Antipas threw John the Baptist into prison. First, according to a Jewish historian called Josephus, Herod feared that through the ministry of John the Baptist an uprising would start against him. Second, the Gospel writers tell us that Herod Antipas arrested John the Baptist because he openly reprimanded Herod Antipas for disobeying God's laws by marrying his sister-in-law. Angered by John the Baptist's accusations, Herod threw John the Baptist into prison. Because John the Baptist was ministering in his province of Perea, he put John the Baptist in prison in a place called Machaerus. John the Baptist stayed in that prison for over a year.

Herod had mixed feelings about John. Perhaps he respected him as a great prophet since he was not anxious to kill him. He also knew that many Jews considered John as a great prophet so he did not want to risk their disfavor by killing John the Baptist. On the other hand, he was very angry against John for openly accusing him of sin and therefore did not release him from prison.

In order to understand these verses it helps to understand the background of this story. Herod Antipas' father was Herod the Great. Herod the Great had many wives and many children. One of his sons was called Archelaus who had ruled over Judea after the death of Herod the Great until he was deposed in 6 AD. Archelaus had a daughter named Herodias. Another one of Herod the Great's children was called Herod Antipas who was given Galilee and Perea to rule over. Herod the Great also had two other children who were both called Herod Philip. One was given the right to rule over the territories north of Galilee. But the other Herod Philip was not given any territory. He lived most of his life in Rome as a friend of the royal family. Herodias married this second Herod Philip and had a daughter from him called Salome. (This means that Herodias married her uncle which was normal in ancient times and then married another uncle.) One day Herod Antipas went to Rome to visit the emperor. While there Herod Antipas met Herodias and they fell in love. He convinced her to divorce Herod Philip and marry him instead. But this did two things. First, he was married to the daughter of an Arab king who lived to the southeast of him. This marriage was a political marriage to signify cooperation between the two rulers. When he divorced her, this so angered her father that he started a war against Herod Antipas and would have defeated him if the Romans had not supported Herod Antipas. Second, Herod Antipas broke the Old Testament law which strictly prohibited marrying the wife of a brother. (Lev. 18:16) It was against this sin which John the Baptist openly spoke out causing his imprisonment.

One day Herod Antipas held a big birthday party for himself. Although the Jews did not celebrate their birthdays, King Herod was following Roman customs. Jewish culture was that men and women were not together when celebrating, so Herod Antipas and Herodias were eating in different parts of the palace. Herod Antipas asked his wife's daughter Salome to dance for him and the men. Most likely Salome was between 12 to 15 years of age. Usually kings had dancing girls with low moral standards to dance for their entertainment. It was not culturally appropriate for the daughter of a king to dance in public like this, but she agreed. Herod was no doubt partially drunk and very pleased with her dancing. So he offered her a choice of a great reward. She went to her mother and asked what reward she should ask for. Her mother so hated John the Baptist that she told her to ask Herod for John the Baptist's head to be brought to her on a platter. Herod was not happy with this request, but because he had made the promise in front of all of his guests, he had to honor the request. So he commanded the soldiers to cut off John's head. John the Baptist was executed. Cutting off the head like this not legal since Jewish laws demanded a fair trial, which John never got.

John the Baptists' disciples heard the news and boldly got permission to bury John. They then went to tell Jesus that his cousin, and the one who had been his forerunner, was now dead. No doubt this was sad news for Jesus because not only did he grieve for his relative, but he knew that in a little over a year he would follow John and die as well. John the Baptist was also an example of how obeying God could bring about the persecution and even death of the followers of Jesus. With the death of John the Baptist, the Old Testament era was over. A new era initiated by the death of God's Son was about to begin.

Often we think that God's love and protection means that we will not die. However, God's love and care do not guarantee that we will not die from disease or persecution. It only guarantees that nothing will happen to us without God's permission. John the Baptist joined a long line of faithful prophets and followers of Jesus who gave their lives for God- people like Isaiah, Jesus, Stephen, James, Paul, and Peter. God could ask us to join this great group one day- are we willing?

Some time after the death of John the Baptist, Herod Antipas heard reports of all of the miracles Jesus and his disciples had been doing. There was also a rumor that John the Baptist had raised from the dead. Herod became confused and assumed that the rumor was correct and Jesus was actually John the Baptist raised from the dead.

About ten years later (39 AD), the brother of Herodias, called Herod Agrippa, who was a friend of the new Roman emperor, Caligula, was given the territories of Herod Philip who had died and the title of "king." Herodias became jealous and convinced her husband to travel to Rome and ask that he be crowned "king" as well. Herod Agrippa heard about this plan and sent word to his friend Caligula that Herod Antipas was seeking to rebel against Rome. So when Herod Antipas arrived in Rome, the emperor took away his territories and money and give them to Herod Agrippa. He sent Herod into exile to the most remote region of the Roman empire, to Gaul which is modern France, where they died. (This would be similar to taking a high government official and posting him in the most remote, backward region of Ethiopia.) Many Jews viewed this as God's judgment for what he did to John the Baptist.

Although God did not quickly punish Herod, his punishment did come. As one scholar has written, God's justice is like a grinding stone of a mill. It does not turn quickly, but it grinds everything finely. Those who stand up against Jesus and the Gospel might seem to prosper for awhile. But either in history or in eternity, God will punish them. But it is important that we stay faithful like John the Baptist, "even unto death." (Rev. 2:10) Otherwise, in our attempt to escape persecution we will one day find ourselves together with evil rulers like Herod, receiving God's judgment of eternal damnation. It is much better to suffer and die now than to face that!

Q. 32. List some important lessons about suffering and death that we can learn from the story of John the Baptist.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) List the four things Jesus demonstrated his authority over in the first day's lesson. b) Why is it important for Christians to understand Jesus' authority over these things? c) What problems have you seen when Christians do not live as if Jesus controls these four things?

2. a) Jesus sees people as sheep without a shepherd. 1) What does this mean? 2) What can we learn about leadership from this statement? b) Jesus also saw the world as a field ready for harvest. 1) What did he mean? 2) What did Jesus tell us to pray for? 3) What can we learn about the focus of the church from this statement? 4) Discuss your church. How well do you think it reflects Jesus' asking his followers to become reapers of the harvest? What can it do better?

3. Read Mt. 10:5-15. 1) List the different instructions that Jesus gave the apostles about their ministry. 2) What do these instructions teach about important attitudes that evangelists and churches should have today?

4. 1) List the different things that Jesus said would happen to his followers. 2) How is this different from what many evangelists promise people when they witness to them? 3) Why do you think it is important for Christians to understand that following Jesus often brings persecution? 4) List different things that Christians can love more than they love Jesus. 5) List different ways Christians can take up their cross to follow Jesus.

LESSON FOURTEEN

FIRST DAY

In the town where Desalegne lived, a healing crusade was held. People from all over the area came and God worked many miracles. Desalegne became very excited at God's ability to perform miracles. So at every opportunity, he went to healing crusades, often traveling many miles to other towns where famous healers were ministering. Over time Desalegne did not think God was working anywhere unless there were miracles. He looked down on those churches which did not make healing a major part of their church service. "God isn't with them. If God was present, there would be miracles every week" he told people.

Is it possible for Christians to emphasize miracles so much that they neglect God's Word or forget the greater miracle of the salvation of a lost soul? This week we will see how during the times of Jesus, people became imbalanced in their focus upon wanting Jesus to be their miracle worker but not the Lord of their lives. Could this be true in our days as well?

Q. 1. a) Describe how God has worked a miracle in someone you know or a situation you saw. b) Describe how people can become like Desalegne, emphasizing more on miracles than studying God's Word.

Q. 2. Read Jn. 6:1-15. a) Why were the crowds following Jesus? b) What did Jesus ask Philip to do? What was his response? c) What did Andrew say? d) What miracle did Jesus do? e) What was the response of the crowd when they experienced this miracle?

JESUS FEEDS 5000 MEN (Jn. 6:1-15, Mt. 14:13-23, Mk. 6:30-46, Lk. 9:10-17)

Jesus had been working in Galilee for almost two years. As he did miracles, his popularity grew and he could not go anywhere without great crowds wanting to see him work miracles. It was about the time of Passover and Jesus was now entering the last year of his earthly ministry.

One day Jesus decided to cross the Sea of Galilee to travel to the eastern side of the lake. [Note: The Sea of Galilee was the Greek name. The Roman name was the "Sea of Tiberias" after a new town called Tiberius which Herod Antipas had build on the southern side of the lake. The Jews called it the "Sea of Gennesaret" (Lk. 5:1)] Jesus had three reasons for wanting to cross the sea. He was concerned for his 12 disciples. They had just returned from a busy preaching ministry throughout the cities of Galilee and were tired. (Mk. 6:30-31) Jesus knew that to continue as effective ministers, his disciples need occasional breaks from ministry. Jesus also had just heard that his cousin and fellow minister, John the Baptist, had died. (Mt. 14:10-13) And Jesus wanted to get away for some personal time with his disciples. It is not clear whether Jesus traveled to the northern part of the lake to a place called Bethsaida Julias (Lk. 9:10) or to the eastern part of the lake. Upon crossing the sea, Jesus climbed a mountain to spend time teaching his disciples.

However, people near Capernaum where Jesus had been ministering, had watched Jesus and the disciples leave by boat, so they walked around the lake until they found Jesus. It would have been over 12 kilometers to where Jesus and the disciples were. At the time for the Passover, there were crowds of people gathering to take the trip to Jerusalem for this most important celebration. Often people from Galilee did not like to travel through Samaria, so they would cross the Jordan River above the Sea of Galilee

and travel on the eastern side of the river until they reached Jericho where they would cross into Judea. So because of these crowds, we are told that over 5000 men had gathered around Jesus. (Mt. 14:21) The actual number of the crowd would have been much larger since no doubt there were women and children in the crowd as well. Some people estimate from 10,000 to 15,000 people would have been in the crowd.

After walking for at least four hours and then listening to Jesus' teaching until evening, the crowd was hungry and tired. They had left without taking food along and when evening came, there was nothing to eat. Jesus saw their need and wanted to feed them. But he also wanted to use this experience as a teaching time for the disciples. All teachers know that for the teacher and student a "test" is important in order to evaluate the level of growth and understanding of the students. This was one of those times when God tests people, not to cause them to do evil, but to give them an opportunity to demonstrate their faith.

Usually Jesus did miracles without help from the disciples. But this time he asked the disciples to help. Jesus asked Philip, one of the 12 disciples, where food could be found for the crowd. Perhaps Jesus asked him because Philip was from the town of Bethsaida Julias (Jn. 1:44) and would have known the local conditions. (This assumes that Jesus had landed at Bethsaida.) Seeing over 5000 men in the crowd in front of him, Philip immediately responded "It is impossible. Even if we had two hundred denarii we could only get them a bite to eat." A common laborer earned one denarii for a day's work, so this was equivalent to about eight months' of earnings and the poor disciples did not have that much money. Andrew overheard what Jesus said. He and other disciples went looking for food, but among all of the people all they could only find was a boy who had 5 small loaves of barley bread. Since this was the lunch which the boy's mother had prepared for him in the morning, the barley loaves would have been small pieces of bread no doubt smaller than the bread we buy for 50 cents. Barley bread was considered the food for the very poor people. And the boy had two small fish. The fish would probably have been salted or pickled so they would not spoil in the hot sun and were only about the size of a person's thumb. These small fish were used to put on top of the bread to give it a little taste. Somehow Andrew was able to convince this small boy to give up his lunch which is unusual since most children want to keep their food for themselves, not give it to strangers. Andrew brought the five loaves and two fish to Jesus and said "This is all we can find, but what good is this when there are so many people?"

Jesus told the 12 disciples to have the people sit in organized groups of 50 and 100 per group. (Mk. 6:39-40) Jesus took the food from Andrew, raised it towards heaven and as was Jewish custom prayed for God's blessing on the food. (Note: Jews often prayed with their hands lifted towards heaven as a sign that they were there to receive a blessing from God. They did not close their eyes as is common to us today.) Jesus then broke the bread and fish and handed the food to his disciples who then distributed it among the crowd. Jesus probably kept breaking the bread until it was obvious that everyone got enough food and could not eat any more. Then he stopped dividing the food and the miracle of the dividing of the bread and fish ended.

The Jews hated to waste things. So Jesus told the disciples to take some of the small baskets they normally carried with them in which they carried food when traveling and put in it the leftover pieces which people had not eaten. It is unlikely they picked the food off the ground, but this was pieces left over which people did not eat. Jewish culture in festivals was to always leave food for those who served, so probably the people had left this for the disciples to eat. Amazingly, there were 12 baskets of food left over, one for each of the disciples.

This miracle was obvious to all and caused a great excitement among the people. Not only was it an amazing miracle when almost from nothing Jesus fed 5000 men, but in Jewish traditions there was a belief that a prophet like Moses would come who would provide them with manna just like Moses did for Israel. (See Deut. 18:15) "This is the Messiah. Let us make him king now!" the crowd started to shout after Jesus did the miracle. This is the height of Jesus' popularity. From now on, things would change until after a year the people would be shouting "Crucify him."

Obviously this miracle was one of the most significant miracles for the Gospel writers. It is the only miracle listed in all four Gospels. So what does this story teach us?

1. Jesus is teaching his followers that as servants they are there to serve people, not themselves. It would have been easy for Jesus or the disciples to ignore the needs of the people saying "It is their fault. We did not ask them to come here." Or "We are here to teach the Gospel, not to take care of peoples' needs." But Jesus did not say this. Jesus says that he came to "serve" not "be served." (Mk. 10:45) Ministry is about serving people. Often it is inconvenient, but we are supposed to put aside our personal needs and desires and help others.

2. Jesus knows our needs and will meet them his way. The disciples were supposed to remember that it seemed impossible for the crowd to get enough to eat and yet Jesus met their needs. Followers of Jesus should never worry about "What will we eat?" The one who takes little and feeds 5000 can take care of our needs with what little we have.

3. Jesus, the Creator, has the power and authority over the created world. He can take things from his creation and multiply it. Nothing is too difficult for him.

Q. 3. Explain why these three lessons are important for Christians to know and apply.
Q. 4. Read Mt. 14:22-36. a) Where did Jesus go after feeding the people? Where did the disciples go?
b) What terrified the disciples? c) What did Peter ask Jesus to do? Describe what happened. d) Why do you think Jesus reprimanded Peter for lack of faith?

JESUS WALKS ON WATER

Many Christians think that miracles of healing are something great but are indifferent to the greatest miracle of salvation. Like Desalegne in the beginning of today's lesson, and like the crowds who witnessed Jesus feed them, many people become attracted to the miracle rather than following Jesus. The Jewish crowd became so excited that the people wanted to crown Jesus as king. They had not repented or want to become part of his heavenly kingdom, but they only wanted Jesus to meet their physical needs. In the midst of many miracles today, aren't we the same? We get excited about the miracles, but why is it that those watching the miracles are not concerned about holy living or taking the Gospel to the unreached parts of Ethiopia? It is easy to want miracles for selfish reasons rather than commit ourselves to total obedience to our Lord.

It seems that the disciples were also caught up in this desire to make Jesus a king. This would have immediately brought the Roman army and Herod against Jesus for they would have seen it as a revolution. It was evening, but Jesus "made" his disciples get into the boat and travel back to Capernaum. In the Greek, this word "made" is a very strong word indicating that the disciples were not happy to leave Jesus,

but were forced to go. Jesus went off to pray by himself on the mountain. Almost always when Jesus went off to pray there was a serious reason. It could be Jesus was arranging things so that he could meet with God at what was the end of a difficult day since John the Baptist had just been killed and it reminded Jesus of his coming death. Often ministers who are busy and have children at home must get up early or even leave their homes so that they can meet with God this way. Or it could be Satan was "tempting" Jesus with another short cut to become king and Jesus wanted God's help in overcoming the temptation. We are not told, but if Jesus, God's Son, the perfect human needed to meet with God, don't you think we need to meet with God in private prayer to get his perspective on situations and his help?

Normally it would have only taken a few hours for the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee. But the winds and then the waves arose, beating against them. Since the wind was in their face, they had to row the boat rather than use the wind and sails to help them travel. They spent hours rowing but were only able to get to the middle of the lake and were becoming very tired. They were also wet and cold. No doubt Jesus, on the mountain in prayer, knew about their struggle. So about 3 AM, Jesus started walking on top of the water directly towards them. (Note: When guarding, the Roman soldiers divided the night into four divisions; from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM, from 9:00 PM to 12:00 PM, from 12:00 PM to 3:00 AM, and from 3:00 AM to 6:00 AM.) It would have been dark and waves blowing, so it is natural for the disciples to be startled and terrified when they saw a form walking on the water towards them. They assumed it was a "ghost" (i.e. the spirit of a person who was dead). Jesus calls out to them not to be afraid. His words "It is I" is the same as "I Am" which means "Yahweh," the special name for God in the Old Testament. (Ex. 3:14) This statement was probably a hidden truth by Jesus, a claim that he was God just like God the Father.

One of Peter's characteristics seems to be making a quick decision without thinking through the implications of that decision, so he asked Jesus for permission to come walking on the water out to meet him. Why did Peter want to walk on the water? The disciples had just finished a tour where they had healed the sick and cast out demons, doing the miracles Jesus had done. So perhaps Peter wanted to participate in this miracle. Or perhaps he was just excited by the amazing sight that he saw. Jesus gave him permission so he got out of the boat and started walking toward Jesus on top of the water. Peter was only half way there when he began to look around him, taking his eyes off Jesus. Peter felt the wind and saw the waves. Immediately he began to "doubt." The word "doubt" here means to be torn in two directions. He wanted to walk towards Jesus, but now he wanted to go back to the boat since he was afraid of the waves and drowning. Any time we find ourselves caught between wanting to trust God for a situation but afraid to obey, we are "doubting" Jesus in a similar way. As he began to sink, Peter cried out for Jesus to help him. Immediately Jesus grabbed him and helped him back into the boat. As they got into the boat, the wind stopped. This time Jesus stilled the storm without any word of command.

Jesus reprimanded Peter for lack of faith. Having just seen Jesus feed 5000 people, Peter had seen enough of Jesus' great power to know Jesus could enable him to walk on water. Plus he had the permission of Jesus to walk and when Jesus gives permission to do something great, he promises to supply the power to accomplish it. Often we are hard on Peter for lack of faith, but notice that none of the other 11 disciples were willing to get out of the boat! Would you have gotten out of the boat in the middle of the storm?

Q. 5. Describe a situation (storm) you have faced. a) Explain how your reaction to that situation could demonstrate lack of faith in Jesus. b) Explain how your reaction to that situation could demonstrate faith in Jesus.

Notice the growth in the disciples' understanding. They bowed in fear to honor Jesus. "You are God's Son" they acknowledged. This is the greatest confession of their understanding of who Jesus was up to this time and the first time they used this full title for Jesus. One of the Jewish names for the Messiah was "Son of God" (Ps. 2) so this was probably their way of acknowledging that Jesus was the Messiah. It is doubtful that at this time they yet realized completely what this name meant. It was only after the resurrection that the disciples would realize that Jesus was fully divine like God the Father.

When they arrived at the western side of the Sea of Galilee at a place called Gennesaret, Jesus continued his ministry of teaching and healing. This was probably Jesus' first time here, so there were many who had heard about Jesus but had not seen his ministry. There were also many who wanted his help. Matthew tells us that there were many who came and touched Jesus' clothes (like the woman who had bled for 12 years- Mt. 9:18-26) and were healed.

What does this story teach us?

1. As God's Son, Jesus can overcome the laws of nature. His power over the created world is seen in how he could walk on water and still the storm.

2. Jesus knows the "storms" that his people struggle with. Those storms might be persecution, or disease, or death. Or there are times we are in new situations and we are filled with uncertainty. We often think that we are alone, but Jesus is there, and he comes to us in the middle of the storm to encourage us. We are not supposed to fear the storm like Peter feared his storm. We should not look at the impossible or threatening situation. Rather, we are to keep our eyes of faith on Jesus, trusting him. He will get us through the storm, giving us amazing power to overcome. Occasionally he helps us overcome the storm with a miracle. But we ultimately overcome because Jesus takes us into his eternal kingdom where there are no storms. True faith in Jesus means that we trust him when the winds and waves of circumstances blow. But even when we fail in our faith, we should remember the grace and forgiveness of Jesus. He will help us when we call out to him for help just like he helped Peter.

3. It is in the storms that we often learn the most about Jesus and what it means to follow him. As we learn from the disciples, every time they have a storm their understanding of Jesus increases. In the first storm (Mt. 8:23-27) they could only ask in amazement "Who is this who calms the storms?" Now they grew in their knowledge and openly acknowledged "Jesus is the Son of God."

Q. 6. a) Describe a storm you have faced in your life. b) How did Jesus encourage you and help you in that storm? c) What did you learn from the storm?

SECOND DAY

Q. 7. Read Jn. 6:22-71. a) Summarize what Jesus taught about himself in this section. b) Describe the different responses the Jews had to Jesus.

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT THE BREAD OF LIFE (Jn. 6:22-71)

The crowd who had enjoyed the feast of bread and fish had seen the disciples leave in a boat and Jesus walk alone into the mountain. They decided to wait for Jesus to come down from the mountain. But

the next morning when Jesus did not appear, they knew that somehow he had left. Most of the crowd walked around the lake again, but some of the crowd got permission to get into the boats and they crossed the lake and came to where Jesus was ministering. Jesus left the plain where he was healing people and entered the synagogue in Capernaum where he began to teach people. (Jn 6:59)

Jesus was discouraged by the attitude of the crowds. He knew that they were only selfishly following him so that Jesus could meet their physical needs. Most people were not willing to repent and fully commit their lives to Jesus. They are like many Christians today who are willing to follow Jesus as long as he does miracles and grants their requests. But when Jesus disappoints them by allowing persecution or they get sick and don't get well when they pray, they turn away from following Jesus.

Q. 8. a) Describe how you have seen Christians who focus upon miracles get disappointed and leave their faith in Jesus when a miracle they expected did not happen. b) What does this demonstrate about the reason that they were Christians?

Jesus' teaching is difficult for us to understand because it is given in a special way the Jews liked sermons (called "midrash sermons") but which we are not familiar with. A midrash sermon takes a story or passage from the Old Testament and looks for underlying teachings that are not obvious, similar to wax and gold literature. Jesus used two things that were on the mind of the Jews at this time to teach the crowds.

a. It was the Passover time. The Passover was the most important religious holiday for the Jews and as many men as possible traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate. The Passover remembered God's deliverance of the Jews from Egypt. And the Jews used that celebration to look forward in anticipation to the coming of the Messiah to bring a new deliverance. The Passover consisted both of a special sacrifice at the Temple, but also a time of communal eating the Passover lamb. Jesus used this time of "eating the Passover Lamb" to symbolically talk about eating him, for he is the true Passover Lamb. (Note: Jesus would die one year later on the day of Passover.)

b. The Jews had a tradition that taught that just as Moses had given manna (which they called the bread of heaven) to the Jews to eat during the wilderness wandering, so also when the Messiah came he would give manna to people once again. When Jesus fed them with bread, the people got excited thinking that perhaps Jesus was now going to feed them with the bread of heaven. Jesus told them that he was the spiritual bread of heaven (the spiritual manna) and it is only through "eating" him that they would be truly satisfied.

Jesus tried to get the crowds beyond selfishly looking at miracles to thinking about spiritual matters. So Jesus challenges the crowd with some very difficult truths:

1. Jesus reprimands the crowd for selfishly thinking only about their physical desires not their spiritual lives (Jn 6:25-27)

Jesus told the crowd that they only followed him because they wanted their stomachs filled. But they never thought about the "sign" which miracles pointed to. A "sign" is a miraculous event which demonstrates a deeper spiritual truth. Jesus' providing food for over 5000 people demonstrated that he was God's messenger bringing God's kingdom, but most people did not think about that. The miracle of feeding the 5000 was a "seal of approval" that he was from God. In ancient times, a "seal" was the most

important evidence that something was real and approved. So no letter was seen as authentic until a seal was put on it. During those days, seals were made out of pottery, metal, or jewels. Letters would have a drop of wax on them and then the seal would be pressed into the wax. Jesus is saying that his miracles are evidences that God has approved him as the one who will meet the spiritual needs of people.

2. Jesus says the "work" people must do to get eternal life is to believe on Jesus (Jn 6:28-29)

Jews thought they could please God by keeping commandments. They earned their way into God's acceptance by obeying not only the commandments of the Old Testament, but also the rules of their religious leaders. So they asked Jesus to give them a list of rules they could keep to earn God's favor. Jesus, however, taught that one cannot earn God's favor. Stopping drinking alcohol or not chewing chatt does not earn his favor. Rather, God has one primary "work"- belief in Jesus Christ whom God the Father had sent. Salvation is not something earned by our actions. Rather it is a gift from God to those who believe on Jesus.

It is important to know what is included in this word "belief," however. We often think that "belief" is primarily acknowledging that something is true. So we tell new believers "believe that Jesus died for your sins." They think "I just have to admit that Jesus died for my sins." For them, belief is only a mental acknowledgment that Jesus died for them. But to the Jews, the word "belief" had a much deeper understanding. Belief included three major things.

First, it included belief that something is true. So Jesus is saying "You must believe that I am the one sent by God as the Messiah, the one bringing in God's kingdom." This would later include the truth that by dying on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of people.

Second, belief incorporated an affirmation that the person would base his life upon the truth. So people who believe that Jesus is the Savior stop trusting their own religion or working to gain salvation and only trust Jesus for the salvation he brings.

Third, belief included living life based upon what we say is true. One writer said that "faith is the whole man rightly related to God by the power of the Spirit of Jesus." So we believe that Jesus is Lord, and then we live our lives in submission and obedience to Jesus. It is only when a person changes how they live based upon what they believe that they have saving faith. Many Christians are willing to say "Jesus died for my sins" in order to escape hell. But they don't live their lives in obedience to Jesus, which shows that they don't really have saving faith.

Q. 9. a) Describe how many Christians think "faith" is only agreeing that Jesus died for their sins.
b) Illustrate from your life how your faith includes all three parts of true faith.

3. The Jews ask for a miraculous sign to prove that Jesus is the Messiah (Jn 6:30-33)

Jesus had done many miracles and people had just seen him feed over 5000 people. And yet that was not enough to prove to them that Jesus was the expected Messiah. "Give us a true sign, a great sign which no one else can do. The bread you gave only came from earth, a cheap barley bread. But bring us something from heaven like Moses did" they demanded. Because Jesus had just fed them, their minds went to their tradition that the Messiah would bring manna down from heaven. The manna was also called "the bread of God." (See Ex. 16:15; Ps. 78:24) The Jews viewed the manna as the greatest work that Moses

did. "Moses gave our forefathers manna. Do that for us or something even greater and we will believe" they intimated. Jesus gave them two answers.

First, he corrected their false understanding about the Old Testament Scriptures. Moses did not give manna to them, but it came from God the Father. They were honoring Moses more than he deserved. Jesus was teaching them and us that we must be accurate in interpreting Scripture. To say Moses did something when actually only God did it was to demean God and to give glory to someone who did not deserve it.

Second, Jesus said that he was the "manna" from God. He told them that God was not giving them physical "manna" to eat. Rather, he had sent Jesus from heaven. It was Jesus who would give life to the world. Jesus is the real and better manna than anything the Israelites had eaten in the desert. Manna, although great, brought no spiritual value to the Jews. But Jesus is the best manna, since he brings spiritual eternal life. (Note: Any physical blessing God gives us is good. Even miracles are good. But they do not bring spiritual life to us. They benefit us for a short time on earth but bring us nothing as far as eternity. Only our relationship with Jesus matters, for it lasts past our time on earth into eternity. Be careful not to become like the Jews who focused upon the visible, earthly things, forgetting the most important thing, eternal life. This is why salvation is always better than any earthly miracle.)

4. The Jews ask for the "bread" so they would not need to work to eat (Jn 6:34-40)

Like the woman at the well (Jn. 4), the Jews had a difficult time understanding Jesus' spiritual application. Their minds focused too much on how to get physical food, not spiritual food. In Is. 55:1-2, God had used a very similar invitation when he asked Israel to leave their life of rebellion and come back into a relationship with him. Jesus told the Jews that they were not to think about manna (bread), but only about him. He was greater than the Law which they had turned to for "food" before. They must come to Jesus, accepting him as their King, repenting, and becoming part of his kingdom by allowing him to rule over their lives. Just like bread (food) and water are the basic necessities of life, Jesus will meet their spiritual hunger and thirst.

Jesus knew that many were not willing to leave the comfort of their lives or doing what they want to do and submit to him. But Jesus was trusting God to cause people to come to him and become his true followers. Salvation is one of the mysteries of the Bible. A coin has two sides. Although we can only see one side at a time, both sides together make up the coin. In the same way salvation has two sides. First, there is the side of salvation seen from God's perspective, what God does to save us. Second, there is the side seen from man's perspective of a person's choice to believe. In this section Jesus looked at salvation and people becoming his followers primarily from the side of God. In our salvation Jesus said that:

a. God the Father is the one who "gives" Jesus his followers. The Bible teaches that before we were saved we were "dead" in our sins (Eph. 2:1). We were spiritually blind and couldn't see the truth. So God, through the Holy Spirit, has to do a miracle in our hearts enabling us to see truth. Long before the world was created, Paul said that we were chosen by God to become his children. (Eph. 1:11) So Jesus did not worry whether or not people believed on him. He left that to God. This is an important truth for evangelists to remember. Often we think that we can argue someone into heaven. Or we get discouraged when people do not believe when we share the Gospel. Jesus teaches that it is the responsibility of the messengers of God to clearly share the Gospel, but it God's responsibility to draw people to salvation.

b. Jesus will accept "all" the Father gives him. Not everyone will believe in Jesus. In fact, the sad truth is that the majority of people will reject Jesus as their Savior. But Jesus promises that he will accept all types of people who come to him as his followers. They might be rich or poor, educated or uneducated, men or women or children, professors or fugas; all are equally accepted by him. Jesus shows no favoritism. As his followers, we too must equally accept all into our churches and honor all as precious children of God without showing any favoritism.

c. Jesus will not lose any whom the Father has given to Jesus. As God's representative, Jesus was submitting himself totally in obedience to God the Father and fulfilling his ministry as a shepherd of God's people. He is the good shepherd who will take care of all of the sheep which God gives him. He will feed them with God's Word. He will protect them from Satan. Church leaders must remember that they are working under the authority of Jesus to take care of his sheep. (1 Pet. 5:2-3) They are to work so that not one of them are lost to the world. In order to do this, ministers must learn total obedience to Jesus and focus upon serving God and others, not their own desires. Few church leaders unselfishly work in the church so that each church member is adequately taught God's Word and protected from false teaching and the attacks of Satan and the lust of the world.

d. Jesus will raise up those whom God the Father has sent to Jesus from physical death to eternal life. Notice how Jesus never promised a good life. He did not say "I will keep you from dying, I will heal you, or I will give you a comfortable life." Rather Jesus pointed to life after death and said "I am the one who will raise up my followers and make them part of my eternal kingdom." Jesus always focused people's attention on life after death, not on temporary pleasures of life.

(Note: Jn. 6:40 shows the other side of salvation, the need for people to personally trust in Jesus. The promise of eternal life is only for those who choose to accept Jesus as their Savior. No one goes to hell because God did not choose him. Rather, all who are in hell are there because of their own choice. They have chosen not to believe in Jesus.)

Q. 10. Review these last four truths. Why are they important for people, especially church leaders and evangelists to know and apply?

5. Jesus is the living bread who gives eternal life to those who "eat" him (Jn 6:41-51)

The Jews were not happy with Jesus' unwillingness to be the type of king who met their physical needs and began to turn against Jesus in anger and frustration. Those in the crowd who had never sought to become a follower of Jesus began to openly accuse Jesus. They complained "How can Jesus say he is from heaven when we know his family. We know that he is the son of Joseph and his mother and children are living in our midst. He is just an ordinary person like us. He can't make such claims." Jesus answered them by saying:

a. "Stop grumbling." Jesus warned the Jews not to become like their ancestors who during the wilderness were known for grumbling against God because they did not trust him or understand his ways. (Ex. 15:24, Ex. 16:2-3, Num. 16-17) To grumble is an act of rebellion against God and his ways. So Jesus was warning the Jews that a spirit of grumbling because they did not understand God's ways made them like the generation which God punished with death.

Q. 11. a) What are some things Christians grumble about today? b) Explain how this is an act of rebellion against God. c) What are things you complain about in your life? Confess this sin of rebellion.

b. Jesus again said that it was God's work to open the hearts of people so that they understood who Jesus was and to cause them to believe Jesus and become his followers. Unlike the Jews who died in the wilderness, Jesus would raise all whom God has given Jesus to everlasting life in God's eternal kingdom. And those who accepted Jesus as God's messenger would have God teach them so that they understand. In Is. 54:13 and Jer. 31:33-34 God foretold a time when the Messiah came that God himself would teach those who submit to God and live in righteousness. Jesus meant that since he has come, that promised time had arrived where God would teach the Jews the truth. But they had to prepare their hearts for God to teach them. God will teach those with open hearts that Jesus is the true Messiah and therefore they will come to Jesus for salvation.

c. Jesus insisted that he alone knows complete truth since he has personally seen God. The Jews had only heard second hand about God through the Scripture. But Jesus claimed to be unique because he had personally seen God the Father and knew truth by seeing it for himself. He was from heaven where God lived. But now he had come down to earth. He is God who has taken on human flesh. This truth is so important to Jesus that he mentions at least six times that he has come down from heaven.

d. Those who personally trust that Jesus is the Messiah and become his followers receive "eternal life." (Note: Jesus uses different words to reflect the same truth. He uses words like "believe," "come," "eat" which all mean to personally relate to Jesus.) Unlike those who ate the manna in the wilderness but still died, those who "eat" Jesus will live forever. It does no good to have food on the table but not eat it. Food only brings "life" to our bodies when we eat it and the food becomes part of us. In the same way, just because Jesus came and die for sins does not guarantee us spiritual blessing. We must "eat" Jesus. We must accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord and live our lives based upon this belief. When we do, Jesus becomes part of our life, living in us and through us, and giving us life. Just as manna sustained the Jews for 40 years in the wilderness, Jesus will sustain the spiritual life of people who believe on him.

6. Jesus tells the crowd that eternal life is only received by eating his flesh and drinking his blood (Jn. 6:52-59)

Paul taught that spiritual truths were "hidden" from those who do not believe. (1 Cor. 2:13-16) Jesus' teaching is an example of how that happens. No matter how clearly Jesus taught the Jews, they could not get past a literal understanding of Jesus' teachings. "How can we eat Jesus' flesh? That is unacceptable" they argued. (Note: In the Old Testament, the Jews were told to never eat blood, so the statement that they were to drink his blood would have shocked these Jews. Jesus would often use shocking statements like this to try to cause people to think more deeply about what he was teaching.) However the Jews were familiar with the expression "eating and drinking" to refer to their relationship to God. In his answer, Jesus turns from the image of eating manna to the image of the Passover celebration. In just a few days, many of these Jews would be in Jerusalem celebrating this important remembrance of how God had delivered the Jews from Egypt. In the Passover celebration, each family would kill a carefully selected lamb. They would put the blood on the door posts and eat the meat.

Jesus is referring to dying on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of others. The blood to the Jews was a symbol of life, and to shed blood was a reference to dying. When eating the Passover lamb, the Jews looked back to deliverance from Egypt, but they also looked forward to when the Messiah would deliver

his people from their enemies. Jesus is saying that symbolically he is the Passover Lamb. His flesh and blood both point to Jesus' coming death on the cross. Salvation is only possible when we acknowledge that Jesus died for our sins on the cross. He is the fulfillment of the Passover celebration. But the Jews must personalize their relationship to him. They must "eat" his flesh and "drink" his blood. These two terms symbolically mean that they must put their faith in him.

Jesus said that his flesh and blood were the only real food and drink. What he meant was that only in relating to Jesus does one receive true life. To eat food and drink water preserves our physical life for some years, but eventually we die. Only those who relate to Jesus have the food which preserves their life for eternity. Jesus also meant that he alone was the true way of relating to God. The Jews taught that the Law was God's true food. But Jesus meant that true food is not found in the Old Testament laws. Rather it is found only in Jesus. No one can reject Jesus and seek to "eat" the Old Testament truths. That will never bring them the eternal life Jesus offered. Those like the Jews and members of other religions might be religious and zealous for God. But unless they relate to Jesus as their Savior and Lord, it won't bring them the salvation they desire.

(Note: Many scholars think that Jesus is hinting about the Lord's Supper which he would initiate the next year. On the day before he died Jesus said "this is my flesh given for you." (Mt. 26:26) He was referring to the fact that he would soon die for the sins of the world. But Jesus meant that when his followers take the Lord's Supper, they should remember Jesus' death, acknowledging that it was for them. One of the sad truths is that many believers treat that special time of taking the Lord's Supper as unimportant. They leave church early rather than staying to celebrate Jesus' death. No Christian can stay strong in his faith if he treats such an important celebration with contempt and does not participate. And Jesus did not say "if you want eat" but gave a command for all of his followers to eat the Lord's Supper. Many believers would not imagine disobeying Jesus by committing adultery, but they disobey Jesus and are not baptized or do not take the Lord's Supper.)

Q. 12. a) Why do you think many Christians do not take the Lord's Supper but leave the service early? b) Explain why it is important for our spiritual health to take the Lord's Supper regularly. c) List ways taking the Lord's Supper has helped you maintain your spiritual health.

Jesus said that all who trust in him and become his followers would be rewarded.

a. They would immediately enjoy the quality of eternal life that only Jesus can give, and that special life would continue after death as they enjoy Jesus' eternal kingdom.

b. They would enter into an intimate relationship with Jesus. Just as God the Father and God the Son relate to each other in intimate fellowship, we enter an intimate relationship with Jesus when we come to Jesus. He lives in us and works through us. Paul expressed this truth by saying that we have been crucified, but now Jesus lives through us. (Gal. 2:20) When we submit to Jesus as our Lord, we no longer seek to fulfill our desires. Rather, we live out Jesus' desires for our lives. Our character changes to become like Jesus'. The work we do is through the power that Jesus gives us.

Many times we treat Christianity as something we do. So we focus upon singing, or witnessing, or giving up certain sins. But the heart of Christianity is a "relationship." Jesus calls us to enter into a close relationship with him and we exchange our human weaknesses with his empowering life. We give up our

wills and accept his will. We give up our selfishness and submit to his rule over us. We work for his glory rather than for our benefit. And it is also a relationship when we can talk to Jesus because he is the closest friend we have.

Q. 13. Examine your relationship with God. Describe how remaining in Jesus is seen in your life.

6. Many followers desert Jesus but the 12 disciples confess their faith in him (Jn. 6:60-71)

The Apostle John shows that there were four types of people listening to Jesus.

First, there were "the Jews" who had never committed themselves to following Jesus and took an active stance against Jesus. They argued with Jesus refusing to believe what he taught.

Second, there were the "distant disciples" who followed Jesus for selfish reasons. They enjoyed Jesus' popularity as a miracle worker and hoped Jesus would be their political deliverer. But when Jesus taught these difficult truths, they began to complain. Jesus warned them not to focus upon the "flesh"- the physical things of life. Rather, Jesus told them to trust the "Spirit." What mattered was the spiritual things of life which the Holy Spirit would teach them. Sadly, those who followed Jesus for selfish reasons left him since he did not fulfill their expectations. Could many of those in our churches be like this group? They are willing to follow Jesus as long as things are not difficult; as long as there is little persecution or few demands to live holy lives in obedience to Jesus. But when Jesus points to the cross and tells them to carry their cross, to give up their desires to be popular or get material wealth, they say "it isn't worth following Jesus" and wander away. How sad Jesus must have been to watch these distant disciples walk away, just like he is saddened today by the unwillingness of many who claim to be "Christian" to live their lives in total submission to him as Lord. Their returning to the world was never a surprise to Jesus. He already knew who were true followers and who weren't. But when this crowd deserted Jesus and returned to the world, they were "betraying" Jesus.

Third, there were the 12 disciples. It is doubtful that they understood any more than the rest of the people what Jesus meant. Only after Jesus' death and resurrection would they understand that Jesus had come as a suffering Messiah who would die on the cross for their sins, not as a political Messiah. But in their hearts they knew that Jesus was teaching God's truth. When Jesus asked the 12 if they too were going to leave him and go back to their homes, they said that they had put their faith in Jesus. Even if they did not fully understand what Jesus was saying, they knew that Jesus was the source of eternal life. The Greek indicates that Peter and the disciples had made a firm decision to believe in Jesus from which they would not turn back. Peter, speaking for the 12 disciples, confessed "You are the Holy One of God." The title of God "Holy One" was a title showing their great respect for Jesus, their confession that he is unique with no one else like him. They were openly testifying that Jesus was the unique Messiah, God's official representative, and they were committed to following Jesus no matter what happened. There are many things in Christianity that we might not understand. And often it seems that we are being defeated by the enemies of Christ as they gain political power and bring persecution. But if we are to be genuine followers of Jesus we must come to the point in our lives when we say "No matter what happens, I believe that only Jesus is the one who brings eternal life. I might die for my faith. I might never get rich or get a good job. But these don't matter. I have come to Jesus, accepting him as my Lord and Savior. There is nowhere else I am going to turn to receive salvation or blessing. Even if I have to wait until after death to receive that blessing, I will still choose to follow only Jesus and submit to him." That is true faith.

Fourth, there are those, like Judas, who know the truth and knowingly turn against Jesus and his followers. Judas had been with Jesus for 3 ½ years and was so respected that he was made the treasurer for the disciples. Although Jesus knew that Judas would later betray him, Jesus gave Judas the full opportunity to follow him. Jesus never treated Judas any differently from the other disciples. But when things became difficult, Judas betrayed Jesus. John is saying that there are always going to be people like Judas in the church. For years they might seem to be followers of Jesus. They are in the choir, or in the ministry, or in the elders' board, or in the congregation. We don't know who they are just like the disciples did not know that Judas was a betrayer. But one day their character is revealed as they turn against Jesus and the church. Like Judas, they are a "devil." They are instruments of Satan who will oppose the work of Jesus. They are often those who turn violently against the church and "slander" it. (The word "devil" means to slander.) It is very hurtful when someone we have thought to be a follower of Jesus reveals his true character during times of difficulty. It is easy to seem to be a follower of Jesus when there are miracles and blessing. But a person's true character is seen during times of difficulty, when it is not popular to be a follower of Jesus. Unfortunately, many who are our friends become a "Judas" at that time. We should expect it. Unlike Jesus we do not have the ability to know who is like Judas in advance. But we are supposed to keep our faith in Jesus, not in others. Others might fall, but let us remain faithful to Jesus "unto death." (Rev. 2:10)

Q. 14. a) Describe how you have seen these four responses to Jesus. b) Explain why it is important for us to remember there are these four types of people.

Like Desalgne and like the crowds wanting to crown Jesus as king because he did miracles for them, today there are many Christians who seek to follow Jesus for selfish reasons. If we are not careful, our desire for miracles can become like "chatt". The more chatt you chew, the more you need to chew in order to be satisfied. The more miracles we see, the more we want to see or else we are disappointed. Instead of miracles being an indication of true discipleship, we must learn to focus upon faithful obedience to Jesus no matter what. Whether he does miracles or not, he is still the Savior and Lord. We must become like the 12 who say "It does not matter if you heal me or others. You alone have the words of eternal life. If I receive physical blessing or not, even if I die for being your follower, I will still believe in you." That is the faith Jesus wants to see in our lives. Yes, Jesus will continue to do miracles, but they should not become the basis of our faith. Instead, like Job, we say "Though he slay me, still I hope in him." (Job 13:15) May God give us that type of faith!

THIRD DAY

Are you a "good" Christian? What would be your evidence of being a good Christian? If you are like most Christians you would use the following things as your standard of being a "good" Christians. You do not drink alcohol or chew chatt. You do not go to cinemas, or wear modern fashionable clothes traditionally considered to be immodest. If you are a man, you don't have long hair or ear rings. Plus you attend all church services, you fast when asked by the church, you loudly shout halleluiah when worshipping, and you speak in tongues. The list of standards of being a "good" Christian could be much longer since each church has its own definition of what it means to be a good Christian. Of course, these things might evidence that we are closely following Jesus. But as we will see today, none of these things by themselves defines that we are "good" Christians. In his confrontation with the Pharisees Jesus taught that it is the "heart" and what happens there that ultimately defines whether or not we are righteous. It is

the thoughts of our minds and attitudes of our hearts where all sin originates. And it is there that we can sin even while doing what most Christians think makes us a "good" Christian. If we are to be true followers of Jesus, we must focus on the condition of our hearts and minds. And when we allow Jesus to rule in our hearts and change our thoughts and attitudes, then our actions will also be honoring to God.

Q. 15. a) List other things many Christians use to define a "good" Christian but which are not directly taught in the Bible. b) Describe some external actions which are easy to change but do not change the attitude of our hearts.

Q. 16. Read Mk. 7:1-23. a) What issue did the Pharisees confront Jesus about? b) Summarize Jesus' response to their accusation in vs 6-13. c) Explain what Jesus meant in vs 14-16.

THE PHARISEES ARGUE WITH JESUS OVER WHAT MAKES A PERSON RITUALLY CLEAN OR UNCLEAN (Mk. 7:1-23, Mt. 15:1-10)

1. The Pharisees are offended when Jesus and his disciples did not follow their ritual washing traditions (Mk 7:1-5)

Although Jesus' ministry was primarily in Galilee, the Jews in Jerusalem 150 kilometers away heard about Jesus' ministry. One day the Jewish officials sent delegates to Galilee to watch Jesus' ministry so that they could inform their leaders in Jerusalem about Jesus. Two groups of delegates are mentioned. First, there are the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a group of Jews who sought to be pure by carefully keeping many man-made rules taught by religious Jewish leaders over the centuries which they believed demonstrated what it means to be a righteous person. Second, there were the "teachers of the law." These were professional scholars who spent all of their lives studying both the Old Testament and the teachings passed down over the generations. Most likely these two groups were assigned the responsibility to evaluate Jesus to see if he was a true prophet or a false prophet. (See Deut. 13:13-14)

Some scholars think the delegates arrived in time to see the feeding of the 5000 people. Perhaps they watched the disciples eat from their baskets of food collected from the feeding of the 5000 and noticed that the disciples did not keep the special regulations established by the religious leaders on how to wash hands before eating. Instead of praising Jesus for his miracles or commenting on his teaching, they got angry at Jesus because the regulations established by conservative Jews were not being followed by Jesus and his disciples. By asking Jesus "Why don't your disciples live according to the traditions?" they were indirectly accusing Jesus. They were saying "Jesus, if you are a true Rabbi and a righteous person, you and your followers would carefully obey the traditions established by the Rabbis of the past. Why aren't you doing this?" Hidden in their question is also the accusation "You aren't a righteous Rabbi or a true prophet. Otherwise you would be as careful in obeying these regulations as we are."

In order to understand this confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees, we must understand what happened between the Old Testament times and when Jesus was living. In the Old Testament, especially in the books of Moses, God had given specific commandments and general principles guiding how his people were to live as the unique people of God living under his covenant established on Mt. Sinai. For over 1000 years, the principles and commandments established by God were believed to be enough of a standard for being righteous with God. But things changed after the Jews returned from captivity in 538 BC. For the first time in their history a group of scholars patterned after Ezra (Ezra 7:6-10) began to study the laws of Moses. They were very concerned that they did nothing to dishonor God. They felt that the commands and principles of the Old Testament were not clearly enough so they began to make up

further regulations to define how to live as God's holy people. For instance, where God said "keep the Sabbath holy, don't work" they began to define what "work" was. So they taught if a person traveled over 1 kilometer then that was work. These scholars are similar to many church leaders who, out of a desire to keep their church pure, seek to define what is good and what is not good for their members. Their motives are good because they want to protect the purity of the church. But their method is dangerous. As they define what clothes women can and can't wear or whether they can wear makeup, or how young men should not wear their hair, or what people can eat or not eat- they end up causing people to focus more on these regulations rather than God's Word and people begin to think they are spiritual because they keep these regulations rather than look into their hearts for "hidden" sins.

For almost 500 years until the coming of Jesus these rules gradually increased in number as they were passed down from generation to generation, with each generation of scholars adding more rules. Eventually, by the time Jesus came to earth, these regulations were viewed as the standard of being righteous. So if a person kept these rules, they were good Jews. But if they did not keep the rules, then it was felt they did not have a good relationship with God. These rules became so important that they were seen as authoritative as God's written word. We saw previously how Jesus clashed with the religious leaders over their interpretation of what "work" on the Sabbath consisted of. They viewed healing on the Sabbath as work, but Jesus saw it as compassion which honors God. (Mt. 12:1-13) Today we will see how Jesus clashed with the religious leaders over the interpretation of how a person becomes ritually unclean.

One of the most important issues which people like the Pharisees focused upon was what made a person ritually unclean. There were hundreds of regulations established to define what a person had to do to keep from being defiled. A ritually unclean person was not supposed to worship God in the Temple and was to keep himself separate from others so that his uncleanness did not pass on to others. The understanding of the Jews came from the combination of two ideas from the Law of Moses.

First, the Law of Moses defined some things as being ritually unclean. For instance, anyone who touched a dead body was unclean, or a woman was unclean during her monthly cycle, or certain food was classified as unclean. (Lev. 5:2-3; Lev. 15, Deut. 14:1-21) In some cases, the law of Moses taught that being ritually unclean could be passed on from person to person by touch. Whereas God used ritual uncleanness to symbolize evil so that people would humble themselves before God and seek to live distinct lives, the Pharisees saw it as a way to become righteous. The religious teachers added hundreds of laws not found in the Old Testament defining how ritual uncleanness was passed on.

For the Jews, ritual impurity is similar to what happens when a person has a cold. We can't see the germs which cause a cough, but a person who has a cold can pass his cough on to another person. In the same way, a person could be "impure" in a hidden way because he had touched something that was classified as impure. That person would pass on the impurity to things or people he touched. So if a Jew touched a Gentile, the "impurity" of the Gentile passed on to them. Or if they ate with a Gentile, the fact that the Gentile might have eaten unclean food turned all of the food in a Gentile's home into something unclean, so anyone eating with Gentiles became unclean. Even when they bought things from the market place, because they might have touched someone or something that might have been ritually unclean, they would have to purify themselves by taking a ritual bath when they got home. (Mk. 7:4) Or because they bought something perhaps some unclean person had touched, they had to purify that item with holy water when they brought it home. This idea of ritual impurity being passed on became a big concern for the Jews. The Jews had a carefully designed system to keep ritual impurity from spreading. There were

many laws defining what to do with specific items in the house when they became impure. (Mk 7:4) They taught that if someone had a dish made out of pottery, as long as someone unclean only touched the outside of the dish, it did not have to be destroyed. But if the person touched the inside of the dish, that dish had to be destroyed. If something or someone ritually unclean touched a flat plate made of wood, it had to be destroyed. But if it was made of iron or if it had a rim, then it could be cleansed through special pure water. This concern over ritual purity was so important that each house had to have special clay containers in their house where "holy water" was kept. That water was used to keep things in the house ritually pure and to remove ritual impurity from something that had become impure.

Second, a major area of maintaining ritual purity was in washing of hands. (Note: It is important to realize that washing was not to get their hands clean. Even if their hands were clean, they could have ritual impurity upon them and had to be ritually cleansed. But not only did they have to wash frequently, but how they held their hands when washing became important. So first they would hold their hands up as a specific amount of water was poured over their finger tips down to their wrists. Then they would hold their hands upside down and water was poured on again.) Probably the idea came from the practice of the priests serving in the Temple having to wash their hands and feet before serving in the Temple. (Ex. 30:17-21; 40:12) The Old Testament Law only specified this one time for ritually washing hands and feet, but the religious leaders in Jesus' days taught that all Jews must maintain their purity by washing their hands in a special way. And not only was this washing to be done before worship, but every time they ate. In fact, if they had roasted grain, they would wash their hands in a certain way. Then if they were given stew they had to wash again in a ritual way. Then if they had coffee and popcorn they had to wash again.

It was this type of oppressive religion filled with thousands of rules that caused Jesus and the religious leaders to clash. Jesus kept the Old Testament laws but he did not keep all of these man-made regulations. Of course most of the common people could not know or keep all of these rules. As a result the religious leaders looked down upon them as not being righteous or acceptable to God. They were classifying Jesus as one of these.

2. Jesus answers the Pharisees' accusation about not following the ritual cleansing laws (Mk. 7:6-13)

When meeting another Christian who believes something that is not in line with God's Word we often hide our thoughts under vague words. But Jesus was concerned with truth and when wrong beliefs impacted people's spiritual lives Jesus openly confronted the false teachings with truth. To refuse to speak out God's Word out of fear of hurting people's feelings means that we fear people more than God. And it means that we are more concerned with smooth relationships than the eternal life of people. In his strong response to the Pharisee's accusation, Jesus gave three major points:

a. The Pharisees had the same attitude as the people during the days of Isaiah. (Mk. 7:6-7) Jesus called their attitude "hypocrisy." The Greek word for hypocrisy refers to someone who "pretends" to be what he isn't, just like an actor in a drama pretends to be someone he isn't. So these Pharisees pretended to be spiritual and in a good relationship with God. But their hearts and attitudes were very different from what they portrayed to people through their focus upon laws. Or they followed external rules like washing their hands in a special way, but in their hearts they were filled with pride, thinking they were better than others; or they hated those who did not live as they did. During the days of Isaiah, many of the Jews appeared to be following God and would worship in the Temple. But their actions were very different from God-honoring people. They fought with each other, the rich oppressed the poor, and they hid idols in their houses. So Isaiah told them that their words and actions might cause them to appear righteous, but their

hearts were far from God. And Isaiah told them that another evidence of their hypocrisy was the fact that they focused more on the "rules taught by men" than upon God's Word. Isaiah said that when this type of attitude exists in God's people, their worship (and religious actions like cleaning their hands carefully) are all meaningless. (Is. 1:10-15)

There is always a temptation for us or our churches to become "Pharisees." We do this when we focus more upon the regulations of our churches (even if they come from good purposes) than upon God's Word; or when we get people to focus upon certain actions rather than cleansing their hearts. Could it be that we have started to worship God with our lips, but our hearts are far from God? No doubt the Pharisees would have been surprised by this accusation. They thought they were "righteous" because they kept hundreds of rules, but in doing so they had forgotten to look at their hearts.

Q. 17. a) Describe ways that Christians can have the same type of attitude as the Pharisees of Jesus' day.
b) List other ways we often show hypocrisy.

b. Jesus tells the Pharisees that in focusing upon their "traditions of men" they were disobeying major commands of God. (Mk. 7:8-13) One of the traps which Satan causes Christians to fall into is to get us to focus more on man-made teachings than upon what God says in the Bible. For instance, there are some Christians who get very upset about people who smoke cigarettes, but they say nothing when Christians gossip, or fight and divide churches. Or elders will expel someone from the choir if the clothes they wear are not appropriate, but say nothing to a fellow elder who beats his wife and children or who verbally abuses another believer. It is this trap of making human regulations more important than clear teachings of God's Word which Jesus accused the Pharisees of committing.

In his answer Jesus is saying "The disciples might be disobeying your regulations passed on by religious teachers over the years. But you disobey God's Word, which is a much worse sin." Jesus gave the religious teachers an illustration of how they did this. The clear teachings of the Old Testament taught the need to honor one's parents and treat them with respect. (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) A Jewish person was responsible to honor his parents throughout his life, even after he is an adult. To "honor" meant that not only to treat them with respect, but to financially help their parents and met their needs until they died. To "curse" parents meant to not only insult them verbally, but to speak in an disrespectful way and to not take care of them. The Jews would view much of what some youth do today in making fun of their less educated parents, or their lack of obedience, or their unwillingness to help them on the farm or not contributing money to help them as a "cursing" of their parents.

Although they were supposed to honor their parents, the Jews had developed a separate tradition called "Corban." Initially the word "corban" in Hebrew meant setting aside something to be given to God. So a farmer who wanted to give his ox to God would make a vow to give that ox to God. He would then take it to the Temple and give it to the priest where it was sacrificed. But the Jews developed many traditions about this act of separating something out to give to God. By Jesus' time, if the word "Corban" was used, the person could still enjoy using that item. But it could not be loaned or given to someone else. At his death it would be given to the Temple. Most likely those who said "Corban" over some of their money received a lot of honor. "Look how he has given such a great gift to God" they would say. But little changed as the person continued to use the money for his own needs. In fact, if a man borrowed money and didn't want to pay the loan back, he could say "Corban" over his money. When the person came to collect his money, the person would say "Sorry, I don't have any money. It belongs to God." He could still use the

money for his own personal needs, abusing the person who had loaned him the money. These man-made laws of Corban became a tool to promote selfishness. There were two situations that Jesus could have referred to in his illustration:

First, suppose a man carelessly said about his money "this is separated to God." Since he had given an "oath," it was impossible for him to change his vow. One day his parents come with a need for money. That person says "I can't give you any money since I have promised it to God." So Jesus was saying that in focusing upon the man-made law of Corban, they ended up not honoring their parents, a clear command of God.

Second, it could be that some children wanted to keep the money for themselves rather than help their parents. But they didn't want to be known for not helping their parents. So by saying "Corban" over their money, they were no longer able to give it to their parents but they could use the money for their own needs.

Jesus explained two important things here.

First, man-made laws often cause us either to break another law or get us to focus upon a less important law so that we no longer do what is most important in the eyes of God. So the Pharisees' traditions were allowing people to neglect the more important law of helping their parents. Jesus is hinting that "love" for God and others is the most important law. We must never allow other "laws" to keep us from showing love to others.

Second, in making man-made laws we often seek to manipulate things for our own benefit. Amazingly, people could use the laws of the Pharisees to no longer have to pay back their loans or give money to their parents. Man-made laws often get us focusing on how little we can do and still not break the law. As a result we never look at the root of evil in our lives and deal with it. For instance, when a young man I was told no good Christian would wear his hair over his ears. So I would try to wear my hair as long as possible without it being over my ears. I sought ways to get around the regulation rather than looking for the spirit behind the regulation and willingly following it. Even worse, we can get so focused upon keeping these rules that provide a clear definition of what we think makes a person a "good" Christian that we never deal with the sins of anger, jealousy, or lying in our lives.

Q. 18. Describe how you have seen these two problems in a church when we focus too much on rules established by the elders or the Christian society.

3. Jesus teaches about what makes a person "clean" and "unclean" (Mk. 7:14-23)

The Jews taught that there were three major ways that a person becomes ritually "unclean." First, they could become unclean because of some personal problem. So if they had a skin disease or a woman having her monthly period, they were "unclean." Second, they can touch something that is unclean and have the "uncleanness" pass on to them. This is the idea behind washing of hands. The Jews were afraid something "unclean" had somehow come in contact with them so by ritual washing they could get rid of their being "unclean." Third, they could eat something unclean, like pig meat or a horse or camel.

Most likely Jesus' statement came because someone asked Jesus a question about what made a person clean or unclean. Jesus wanted to explain to the crowd, and especially his disciples, that none of

the things normally considered making a person "unclean" actually made a person spiritually unclean. Rules of ritual cleansing had nothing to do with whether or not someone was acceptable to God or righteous from a Biblical standpoint. Although Jesus had in mind the Pharisee teaching that someone became unclean because they did not wash their hands in a certain way, the disciples later understood this teaching to also include the unclean foods listed in the Old Testament. (Lev. 11)

This would have been important because as the Gospel spread to the Gentiles, the issue of what a person was allowed to eat became essential. The Gentiles ate many of the unclean animals found in Lev. 11. To tell them that their food was unacceptable would have put a stumbling-block to keep them away from belief in Jesus. But also, if a Gentile Christian who ate pig would sit with a Jewish Christian who ate beef, the Jews thought the "uncleanness" of the Gentile would rub off on the Jew. This fear would keep Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians from ever fellowshiping together in church, eating the Lord's Supper together, or eating meals together. So Jesus broke down this barrier to the Gospel and declared all things "clean." (Note: To the Jews, this would have been a very radical statement by Jesus, for it openly went against rules God had given the Jews in Lev. 11, not just the teachings of the elders. During the Maccabean period thousands of Jews died rather than eat pig meat when the Syrian king tried to force them to adapt to Greek culture. Jesus is saying that such an attitude was no longer needed.)

Jesus taught that true spiritual uncleanness does not find its source from outside of a person, but from inside the person. (See Jer. 17:9-10) The Jews believed that the heart was the place where a person made his decisions, the core part of a person where morality was found. Jesus is saying "things" cannot make a person a sinner. Rather people become sinful because of what is in their "hearts." Any food eaten with ritually unclean hands or food classified as unclean goes into the stomach, through the intestines and then leaves the body when we go to the bathroom. That "unclean" thing never once touches our "hearts."

This is the only list of major sins that Jesus gives. Paul also lists out sins. (Rom. 1:29-31; 1 Cor. 5:10-11; Gal. 5:19-21) Jesus tells his disciples that true spirituality and the root of sinfulness is found in the heart, not in actions. Actions flow out of thoughts and motives. We can try to change a Christian's actions (e.g. get people to not smoke or chew chatt) without ever dealing with their thoughts and motives. So focusing upon external actions and rules and regulations never produces true spirituality. If we want to help people change, we must get them to focus upon their thoughts and motives and beliefs- then they will change their actions. Notice the list of sins which Jesus gives that find their source in a person's heart but which come out in wrong actions.

a. Evil intentions: Some scholars think this is like a title for the rest of the sins originating in a person's heart. Every sin we commit starts with a wrong thought. Jesus taught earlier that adultery or murder starts with an attitude in a person's heart. (Mt. 5:21-30) Sin is a decision to rebel against God or to do something that hurts another person. In Rom. 12:2, Paul says that the source of all change spiritually comes from a change of how we think. Change how people think and you will change how they act. Try to change how people act without first changing how they think always is self-defeating. That wrong thought will just appear in another action. Many church leaders think that they can change a church member by giving him a specific command not to do something. Often Christians will stop that specific thing, but their wrong thinking will still continue and show up in another way. So when my parents told me to wear short hair to be a good Christian, I obeyed but showed my desire to be like the world in the type of music I listened to.

But if church leaders get people to change how they think about being like the world, then godly believers can take a principle taught them and apply it to all areas of their lives, not just a specific rule.

Q. 19. Describe how if we do not change the way that we think (motives, attitudes, beliefs), our wrong thinking will reveal itself in another way even if we no longer obey the rule which our church teaches.

b. Sexual immorality: In the Greek, this term refers to all type of sexual activity outside of those between a husband and his wife. The Bible teaches that the only type of sexual activity allowed by God is between husband and wife. Even sex between two unmarried people, even if they are engaged, is a sin in God's eyes. So also is homosexual activity.

c. Theft: This is the sin of taking something that does not belong to you for your own benefit. It might be something big like taking money from someone's home. But it might also be something small, like taking a pen or paper from work, or not returning all of the change when asked by our church elder to go and buy something from the market place. God does not differentiate between "big" thefts or "small" thefts. Both is stealing and a sin in God's eyes.

d. Murder: This word refers to taking the life of another person in an unlawful manner. [Remember what Jesus taught earlier that angry words and insults have the spirit of murder behind them and are therefore wrong. (Mt. 5:21-26)]

e. Adultery: This is one specific type of sexual sin. It is the sin of a husband or a wife being sexually unfaithful to his or her partner. It is just as wrong for the husband to have sexual relationships outside of marriage as it is for the wife to have sexual relationships outside of marriage. Both partners should be faithful to each other.

f. Covetousness/greed: This is the sin of not being satisfied with what God gives us but having a constant desire for more. It often is a desire to take what does not rightly belong to us or to get something in a way that is not honest. It can be the strong desire for more money, or a better life style, or wanting a position of power, or desiring education, or wanting to get a DV to go to America where we give it priority in our lives over holiness. Often we know if we are "coveting" if we are willing to "cheat" or "lie" in order to get it. So if we tell a lie to get a DV, we are showing we are coveting living in the US. This sin often reveals a major problem in our lives for it shows that we think we can gain happiness in things, not in God. This never works.

g. Malice: In Greek this word refers to doing something that seeks to harm another person or someone who enjoys causing trouble. We see this attitude in an older child who gives trouble to a younger child. Or we see it in church where people of one tribe work to keep people from another tribe out of leadership, or in church leaders who refuses to do something for someone because they are angry at them.

h. Deceit: The Greek word was used of putting something in a mouse trap to catch the mouse. So this action is doing something in order to trick someone to gain some benefit. Any time we do something which seeks to deceive another person reveals the sin of deceit in our heart. We often do this when we don't tell all the facts to a donor (or someone we want money from) so that they give us money. We know if they knew all the facts then they won't give. Or when we put mashed bananas in the butter when selling it in

the market, or sugar in the honey, or the best oranges on the top of the pile and the bad ones on the bottom.

i. Lewdness: The basic idea of this Geek word is a person who casts off restraint and does whatever he wants. The individual dresses in a way that is culturally insensitive and does not care what others think. Or they speak in uncouth ways seeking to shock others. Or they enjoy causing trouble in the church. They rebel against anyone or any cultural view that limits their perceived freedoms. They do not listen to anyone in authority, doing only what they desire.

j. Envy: The Greeks used this word for having an "evil eye" by which they meant someone who was "stingy" and did not give generously to others. It also referred to the sin of looking at the blessings and privileges others have and hating them for it. So if someone gets into the choir and they don't, or if someone gets a good job which they wanted, or if someone has a better house than them or a new DVD player which they can't afford, or if someone from another tribe gets elected into leadership when they think their tribe should have the positions, then inside their hearts they get angry, thinking they deserve the blessings. Usually when we have envy in our heart, it affects our relationship with that person. Rather than rejoicing in the blessing we receive, we either want it for ourselves or we seek to take that blessing away from others in some way. Unfortunately this is a common sin in the church, one of the major ways Satan keeps the church from being unified.

k. Slander: When used for a person's relationship to God, this Greek word refers to doing something that dishonors the name or reputation of God. But when used concerning humans, it refers to saying something about another person which seeks to destroy the reputation of that person or when we call them names. For instance, when meeting someone in town who bothers us we say "jerk." Or we commit this sin when we tell a lie about another person harming their reputation because we are angry with them. Or we can slander in a more hidden way when we gossip with our friends. We commit this sin when talking to others against church leaders where we question their motives in a decision. "They did that because they only support their tribe" we might say.

l. Pride: This is the sin of thinking that we are better than others. We are from a famous church family, so we think we are better than others in the church. Or we are from a certain tribe and think our tribe is better than others. Or we are educated and look down upon someone who is not as educated as we are. Or when we think of ourselves more beautiful than others. Or "I am in the choir, so I am special." Or "I speak in tongues, so I am more spiritual." Pride is one of the most hated sins in the eyes of God. Frequently in the Bible God says "I hate those who are proud. I will lower the proud and raise up the humble." (Is. 2:11-12) When we are proud we forget that everything we have is a free gift from God. It is God who places us in a certain family, or tribe, or gives us the opportunity and ability to get education, or a spiritual gift. It was this sin that caused Satan to fall from being a holy angel serving God to becoming his enemy. (Is. 14:12-15, Ezek. 28:12-17)

m. Folly: This word has a special meaning in the Old Testament. It refers to someone who is morally lazy, for someone who lives his life as if God is not there or will not hold them accountable for their actions. They sometimes say "there is no God." (Ps. 14:1) But usually through how they act, through their disregard of spiritual things, they act as if there is no God who has given standards by which people are to live.

Q. 20. Review this list of sins. For each sin listed by Jesus, describe how Christians often commit that sin in our hearts even when obeying many of the church rules.

Jesus insisted that it was these types of attitudes and sins which start in the evil hearts of people that causes them to become spiritually unclean. How people wash hands or what they eat doesn't bring uncleanness. This truth is important for us to realize. Some people teach that potters are unclean because they touch the unclean dirt. Or they are unclean because they have a "slave" in their family line. Or they are unclean because they eat pig meat, or horse meat, or rats. Some tribes still believe a woman with her monthly period is unclean and she is forced to leave her house and live outside. Jesus is saying that none of this makes a person spiritually unclean in his eyes.

This was important for the Jewish Christians to realize during the days of Mark. Romans ate pig meat which the Jews taught was unclean and their uncleanness would stop the Jews from going to church if Gentiles were present or limit the fellowshiping of Jewish and Gentile believers. Mark says by way of implication "thus he declared all foods clean." (Mk. 7:19) Each culture tells its members what is proper to eat and what is not proper to eat. So some grow up thinking that eating monkey or cats or dogs is proper. But others grow up thinking that only chickens, beef, sheep and goats can be eaten. Or we think only food killed in a "Christian" way is pure. We might not want to eat some of the foods people of other cultures eat because it seems disgusting to us because of our culture. But we must never believe that those foods make a person spiritually unclean so that we do not relate to them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

(Note: We need to be wise in how we address the many things that the Bible does not directly prohibit us from doing. Of course we should not do anything that the Bible clearly teaches against. This is disobedience and rebellion against God. But when the Bible is not clear, then Jesus' teaching on what makes us clean and unclean must be applied. On the one hand, we must never teach that doing or not doing a certain external act has a direct relationship with our being spiritual or not spiritual. So drinking or not drinking alcoholic beverages or eating chatt by themselves do not impact our spirituality. However, there are other reasons for evaluating whether or not we should be doing certain questionable practices. The Bible teaches that we are to do everything in a way that glorifies God. (See 1 Cor. 10:31-33) What matters is not whether or not I have the right to do something. What matters is whether what I do brings honor to Christ. If in doubt about a practice, ask yourself the following questions:

a. If I do these things, does it ruin my reputation with non-Christians? As non-Christians look at how I dress or do something, do they think that I am not a "good" person? Does what I do keep them from choosing to follow Christ? Paul said that he would change how he lived to fit into the cultural expectations of non-Christians so that they would have a better chance to accept Jesus as their Savior. (See 1 Cor. 9:19-23) If my actions in any way causes them to not want to become followers of Jesus, I must not do it. So if the way I dress is offensive to people in my community, out of concern for them, I should not wear those clothes.

b. If I do these things, does it ruin my reputation with Christians? There are some things that perhaps the non-Christian does not see as wrong, but within the Christian community it is viewed as wrong. For instance, if putting on make-up is seen as wrong, then I must not do it. If it ruins my testimony among believers, it limits my ability to serve Jesus and use my spiritual gifts in the church. However, one of the things I can do is to patiently share with believers why such a practice does not impact my spiritual life or testimony so that believers grew in their understanding of the freedoms we enjoy in Christ.

c. If I do these things, does it encourage other Christians who have not made up their minds on the practice to fall into sin by doing it because they do it in the spirit of doubt. Paul taught that anything we do with questions in our mind over whether or not it is right, it is a sin. (1 Cor. 8:9-13, Rom 14:23) So if a young child grows up thinking that listening to dance music is wrong, if they see me listening to dance music, and if they begin to copy me without thinking through what is right and wrong, then I have led them into sin. Jesus strongly warns us that we are not to be the cause of another believer falling into sin. (Mt. 18:6)

d. Does the practice open me up to a temptation which can be used by Satan to lead me into sin? It might not be wrong to go to a cinema and watch movies or videos. But if we are not careful and wise in what we watch, that practice can lead us to impure thoughts and practices which are sinful. Or it might not be wrong to drink alcohol, but if it leads me into the sin of drunkenness, then it becomes harmful to my spiritual life and I should not do it.

e. Does that practice harm my body? Paul taught that our physical bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 6:19-20) This indicates that we should take care of our physical bodies so that the Holy Spirit is able to use us as a pure instrument to serve him for a long time. Although the Bible does not say we should not smoke, it is proven that smoking has harmful affects on our body such as causing cancer. Therefore, out of respect to the Holy Spirit who wants to use our bodies, we should seek to keep it healthy in order to serve him better.

Q. 21. a) List some external things that people in Ethiopia believe is improper and causes a person to become "unclean" in God's eyes. Is there a difference in the attitude of Orthodox believers versus Evangelical believers? If so, explain the difference. b) Review the sins which Jesus listed as coming from the heart. Why are these sins true indications of our spiritual life and not external rules many churches teach their members? c) Describe ways people in church can focus upon external rules without changing wrong attitudes and thoughts which are often in the heart of believers. d) Think about the preaching in your church- to which do most preachers focus upon, the external rules of Christianity or the inner problems of the heart? Explain your answer. e) Choose two practices Christians in your church disagree over as to whether it is right for a Christian to do it. Using the five questions above, explain how you think those practices should be handled by believers.

FOURTH DAY

Q. 22. Read Mt. 15:21-28. a) Where was Jesus when the woman asked him to heal? b) What tribal group did the woman belong to? c) Why did Jesus say it was not right for him to help the woman? d) How did the woman display her faith in Jesus?

JESUS TRAVELS OUTSIDE OF GALILEE: 29 AD

THE FAITH OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN (Mt. 15:21-28, Mk. 7:24-30)

As Jesus entered his final year of earthly ministry, the attitude of many Jews, especially the religious leaders became increasingly hostile. Also with crowds around him all of the time seeking healing, it was difficult for Jesus to get time alone to teach his 12 disciples. So shortly after this confrontation with the

Pharisees, Jesus left the territories where most Jews lived and went into Gentile territory. Some scholars estimate that for most of the next six months Jesus ministered in Gentile territories.

In a way visiting the Gentiles was another type of "uncleanness" which Jesus addressed. The Jews saw the Gentile areas as being "unclean" and they thought God had no plans for the salvation of most Gentiles. They believed that only a few Gentiles who accepted Jewish culture would be saved at the end time. Some scholars think that during Matthew's time Jewish Christians were saying "See, Jesus did not minister among the Gentiles, so we don't have to reach out to them with the Gospel either. Let them become Jews like us through circumcision." So this story was to show Jesus' desire that the Gospel reach out to all people, not only to the Jews. And it showed that Jesus did not believe in the uncleanness of any people just because they belonged to the wrong tribe or social group. Jesus' ministry to the Gentiles was a lesson to the disciples that they too would one day take the Gospel to the Gentiles with Jesus' blessing.

North of Galilee along the Mediterranean Sea was a territory called Phoenicia. But this region was best known by its major cities of Tyre and Sidon. (See the map in Appendix A at the back of the book.) Jesus left Galilee and traveled fifty kilometers to the vicinity of Tyre. Although there were Jews living in the area, the population was predominately Gentile. Jesus was not seeking to attract attention to himself by continuing his healing ministry. Rather, he wanted time to teach his disciples and prepare them for his coming death and their eventual leadership over the church. However people in the areas around Tyre had heard about Jesus. As he was traveling, a Canaanite woman found out that Jesus was in her area. Any Jew who heard the name "Canaanite" would have realized that she was a descendant of the ancient enemies of the Jews and thought that she was the worst kind of Gentile. In the Old Testament, it was the Canaanites who had occupied the Promised Land and against whom the Jews had to fight bitter battles. And it was the Canaanites who had introduced idol worship to the Jews, which also led to their punishment by God. So this lady was one of the "hated" people. During these years, Tyre was considered the enemy of the Jews because during the Babylonian captivity and afterwards, they helped the Babylonians and other Gentile nations to oppress the Jews.

This woman knew that Jesus was the "Son of David." In other words, this woman knew enough about the Jewish beliefs to know that the Jews were expecting a great leader called the Son of David, the Messiah. She probably even knew that the Jews taught that this Son of David would force Gentiles like the Canaanite woman to submit to him. Although most of the Jews did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, this woman had no qualms about believing that this powerful healer was that Messiah. The woman had a demon possessed daughter whom no one could help. In desperation she followed Jesus begging for him to help her. But initially Jesus ignored her. Finally the disciples got tired of the woman following them. Although it could be that the disciples only wanted Jesus to tell the woman to go away, most likely they were asking Jesus to heal the woman's daughter so that she would no longer disturb them. This story shows an amazing difference between Jesus and his disciples. Often we are like the disciples. We help people simply to get rid of them. When a beggar asks us for money, we don't really want to give and we have no compassion for them in our heart, but we give them a coin so that they will leave us. That is not Christian love. Rather, Jesus always healed because of compassion for those who were struggling. So we must be careful that we do not help others simply to get rid of them but have a genuine concern for their needs.

Q. 23. a) Describe how you have given money to someone because that would make them go away and not from compassion. b) Contrast the attitude of why Jesus helped people to why many times Christians help people today.

Why didn't Jesus help the woman immediately as we would expect? There are three possible reasons:

a. Jesus delayed the miracle so that he could test the "faith" of the woman. Would she still persevere in her request or would she quickly give up? The fact that she persevered in her request despite all of Jesus' perceived rebuffs caused Jesus to say "you have great faith."

b. Perhaps Jesus delayed the miracle in order to emphasize the truth which the event would teach the disciples. Often it is when something is delayed that we really notice and think about it. If Jesus had healed immediately, the disciples would not have paid much attention to the miracle since they had already seen many similar miracles. But to suddenly see Jesus refuse to do anything, they would begin to wonder "why" and then better understand Jesus' concern for Gentiles.

c. Jesus was illustrating through his actions that his ministry was focused upon the Jews. Earlier Jesus had told the disciples that they were not to minister in Gentile areas. (Mt. 10:5-6) This was because until the death of Jesus, God had asked Jesus to focus his ministry on the Jews. It was the Jews to whom God had given the ancient covenant and Jesus was honoring God's covenant with Israel and ministering to them. Jesus was also setting the pattern of ministry which the early church would follow, which was to minister to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles.

Eventually, Jesus turned to the woman and told her that he was sent to "the lost sheep of Israel." God's favorite title for his people was "sheep." This clearly shows that although they carefully followed the Old Testament laws, Jesus considered the Jews to be spiritually lost. Being religious does not save anyone. Only having a proper relationship with Jesus would the Jews turn from being "lost sheep" to "true sheep" of God.

When she still begged for Jesus to heal her daughter, Jesus used a parable to again show that his calling was to the Jews. He said that it was not right for him, the Master, to take the food (the blessings promised to Israel) and give them to the dogs. One of the derogatory words Jews used for Gentiles was "dog." But there are two Greek words for dogs. One word was for large dogs that belonged to no one and scavenged for food. They were "unclean" and this name dog was used by Jews to insult the Gentiles. The second word was for small dogs, perhaps even puppies, which people raised in or around their homes. They were often pets loved by children. It was this second name for dog which Jesus used here. So Jesus was saying no father would take his children's food and give it to the small dogs in the house to eat. The food was for the children.

We would have expected the woman to be insulted by Jesus' words. Perhaps she saw in Jesus' face that he was not seeking to insult her but encourage her to keep trusting. Obviously she saw something that encouraged her to keep trusting in Jesus' willingness to heal her daughter. The woman did not debate with Jesus that this was not fair and that she deserved help. Nor did she debate with the fact that Jews were in an honored position with God (children) which the Gentiles (dogs) did not enjoy. But she said "in a home, when the children eat, the dog is allowed to pick up the food which falls onto the ground. And sometimes the children even give some of the food off their plate out of mercy to their pet dog. I might not

have the right to the food, but mercy means that I too can have some of the leftover love from God." This woman showed perseverance and also great insight into the character of God. God's mercy means that he does not only take care of those who are his spiritual children. His mercy is so great that it spills over to all people.

Amazed by her faith, Jesus healed her daughter. Like the Centurion's servant (Lk. 7:1-10), Jesus did not go to her home to heal her daughter. Rather, his spoken word caused the healing to happen in her home. Often faith is found in unexpected places. We would think the Jews were the most likely place for faith, but they found putting faith in Jesus difficult. And we would think it hard for Gentiles to believe Jesus, but this woman had no difficulty calling Jesus "Son of God" and "Lord" and trusting him. Today we often think faith will come from the educated and rich, but not from the poor. Or we think faith will be found among those who have a good reputation, not among the prostitutes. But in reality it is often those who are poor and who are great sinners who understand the Gospel the best. They know that they are sinners and if God helps them, it is only because of his grace. Rather than proudly looking at their abilities, these people deeply understand grace and mercy. This story also teaches us that what really matters to God is faith. Tribal identity, educational level, social status, being male or female- none of these matter in God's eyes. All things are evaluated based upon faith.

Q. 24. Describe how you have seen or heard that despised people are often the most receptive to the Gospel and understand it easier than those considered respectable.

Q. 25. Read Mk. 7:31-37. a) Where was Jesus when he did this miracle? b) Describe the miracle that Jesus performed.

JESUS HEALS THE DEAF AND MUTE MAN (Mk. 7:31-37; Mt. 15:29-31)

After healing the woman's daughter, Jesus traveled 20 kilometers north to the second major city of Phoenicia, which was Sidon. He then traveled south and east. Most likely he traveled through the territory of Herod Philip, through Caesarea Philippi and then to the east of the Sea of Galilee and finally south into the middle of the region called Decapolis. All of these were predominately Gentile territories. Some scholars think that Jesus took between six and eight months on this long journey of over 200 kilometers. We know little about what happened during this time. There are only two stories recorded from Jesus' time in Decapolis, which is east of Galilee.

Jesus healed many people. (Mt. 15:29-31) Matthew tells us that these Gentiles praised God that Jesus did everything well. (They called God the God of Israel to reveal how these Gentiles acknowledge the unique relationship between God and Israel.) Among the many whom Jesus healed was a man who was deaf. His deafness probably made it difficult for him to speak. Jesus must have been known as a healer because some people brought this deaf man to Jesus. There is no indication that Jesus was reluctant to heal him, unlike for the Canaanite woman. But Jesus still did not want to be known as a "miracle man" so he took the man away from the crowd.

This story demonstrates how Jesus did not have one pattern for healing. Some times he spoke a command for people to be healed. Other times he touched them or they touched him. We don't know why Jesus suddenly used symbolic actions with this deaf man. Some scholars believe Jesus was acting out healing for the deaf man. Jesus touched his ears to symbolize he had opened the man's ears so he could hear. He then spit on his fingers and touched the man's tongue to indicate that the man's difficulty of

speech was now taken away. Jesus looked up into heaven and said "Be opened"- commanding for the ears to now hear. This was a clear sign that the healing power came from God.

The man was instantly healed. Jesus then commanded him not to tell about the miracle to others. Of course it would be known by others that something great had happened because everyone would hear the deaf and dumb man speaking. But Jesus was asking the man and his friends to keep the miracle quiet. Jesus did not want to be known as a "miracle worker" perhaps for two reasons. First, Jesus wanted people to come to listen to him teach so that they could know how to get ready for God's kingdom. To him this was more important than any miracle. How different Jesus' emphasis was from those today who say "I am a healer. Come to me to be healed." There were so-called healers during the days of Jesus and the early church who did this, but Jesus and the apostles did not want to follow their pattern of seeking glory because of miraculous powers. Second, there was only about six months left before Jesus was crucified and he wanted to focus upon teaching his disciples rather than ministering to crowds. The more people knew him as a miracle worker, the larger the crowd and the less time Jesus had to teach his disciples.

Q. 26. Contrast Jesus' attitude towards miracles with the way many people today view those who do miracles.

Q. 27. Read Mt. 15:32-39. a) What did Jesus ask the disciples to do? b) How many loaves did the disciples have? c) How much food was left over? d) How many people were fed?

JESUS FEEDS 4000 MEN (Mt. 15:32-39, Mk. 8:1-9)

As Jesus was doing miracles in the region of Decapolis, many Gentiles gathered around him to listen to him teach and watch his miracles. It seems that Jesus was in a remote area and people had stayed with him for three days. By now they had run out of the food which they brought with them. Knowing that they were hungry, Jesus turned to the disciples and said "I am concerned about these people. They don't have food to eat and if they travel the many miles back to their homes, some might not reach it since they are weak." Jesus did not directly tell them what to do. But Jesus was hinting to his disciples "We have this crises of no food. What do you think we should do?" to test the faith of the disciples. He also could have been inviting his disciples to join with him in this miracle. They had healed the blind and done other miracles under his authority, so now he invited them to join him in the miracle of feeding 4000 men. Had they learned from what they saw when Jesus fed the 5000 that Jesus can feed the multitude? It was perhaps six months earlier that Jesus had fed the crowd of 5000 men, and yet the disciples still did not have faith in their or Jesus' ability to feed the people. (Perhaps they did not think Jesus would do such a great miracle for the Gentiles who were the majority of those in the crowd.) Instead of saying "We have this amount of food. Let us pray and divide it and give to the people." Or "we have seven loaves of bread, take them and meet the need of the people" they said "There is no place to buy food for this group." In other words they were saying "It is impossible."

Jesus took the seven loaves of bread and the few fish which the disciples found. He told the people to sit down in groups. After praying, he began to divide the loaves and the fish. He kept dividing the food and the disciples kept taking the food to the people until everyone was satisfied. Once again the disciples picked up the bread which Jesus had broken but was left over after the people had enough food. This time there were 7 large baskets of food left over. The Greek word here for basket is different from the smaller basket described in Mk. 6:43. This was a large basket similar to the one Paul was placed in when he was lowered over the walls of Damascus. (Acts 9:25)

Some scholars think the numbers in this story are symbolic. The Jews loved to see hidden teaching in numbers. For them 12 was a symbol of God's people, so the 12 baskets which the disciples got when feeding the crowd of 5000 men symbolized God's provision for his people of Israel (the twelve tribes of Israel.) Scholars debate what is symbolized in the number 7 (7 loaves and 7 baskets). Seven often was a number for perfection and completion, so it could be that this symbolized Jesus perfectly providing for people's needs. Other people think 7 is a symbol for the Gentiles [the Jews believed that there were 70 Gentile nations (7 X 10)]. So Jesus is symbolizing here that he is also the one who will meet the needs of the Gentiles. Not just physical blessing, but spiritual blessing is for the Gentiles as well. It would remind the followers of Jesus that they too must take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Hidden in this story is probably an indication that when the Gospel would reach the Gentiles, the apostles would find acceptance that many Jews did not have.

Just like only men were counted when Jesus fed the 5000, only men were counted here. There were 4000 men, but no doubt with women and children also in the crowds there would have been well over 6000 people being fed by Jesus that day. Having finished this miracle, the disciples walked to the Sea of Galilee and got into a boat. They traveled to the western side of the Sea of Galilee to the vicinity of Magadan. (Mark 8:10 calls this area Dalmanutha.) Scholars do not know where this area is. Most likely it was near Tiberius, the major political center of Herod Antipas. This was the home town of Mary Magdalene who was one of Jesus' followers. We are told that she had seven demons cast out of her. (Lk. 8:2) She was also in the group of women who first witnessed the risen Lord. (Mt. 27:56-61)

Q. 28. a) Why do you think it was difficult for the Apostles to use faith to feed the 4000 men? b) Describe ways that it is also difficult for us today to trust Jesus for new situations requiring us to apply faith in God.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) What important lessons about Jesus do the stories of Jesus feeding the 5000 and walking on water teach us? b) What important lessons do they teach about following Jesus?

2. a) What did Jesus say was the major work that a person is to do? (Jn. 6:25-71) b) What other things do people try to do in order to earn God's favor? c) Discuss how the attitude of the Jews towards Jesus' miracles is similar to the attitude of many Christians today. d) What did Jesus say was more important than physical miracles? What warning should this bring to an over emphasis on miracles or physical blessings today? e) What did Jesus mean when he said that people must "eat" him? f) There were four types of people watching Jesus do his miracles. List them. How are these same types of people seen in the church today?

3. a) List some external man-made regulations that people in Ethiopia believe is improper and causes a person to become "unclean" in God's eyes. Is there a difference in the attitude of Orthodox believers versus Evangelical believers? If so, explain the difference. b) Review the sins which Jesus listed as coming from the heart. Why are these sins true indications of our spiritual life and not external rules many churches teach their members? c) Describe ways people in church can focus upon external rules without changing wrong attitudes and thoughts which are often in the heart of believers. What

does this demonstrate about their spirituality? d) Think about the preaching in your church- to which do most preachers focus upon, the external rules of Christianity or the inner problems of the heart? Explain your answer. How would preaching and teaching believers change if it were to focus more on the sins of the heart rather than external actions? e) Discuss two practices Christians in your church disagree over as to whether it is right for a Christian to do it. Using the five questions found in the third day's lesson, explain how you think those practices should be handled by believers.

4. a) How did the Canaanite woman demonstrate her faith in Jesus? b) How have you seen people we usually do not think will understand the Gospel understand it better than those whom we think should understand the Gospel? c) What lessons can we learn from the story of Jesus feeding the 4000 men?

LESSON FIFTEEN

FIRST DAY

"Come join my revolution movement. I won't promise you that it will be an easy fight. In fact, most times people in the community will hate you, turning you over to the government to be imprisoned. Even your families will hate you and think that you are traitors. And many, if not most of you will die in the battle. I also am going to die- so I won't be any different than you. But I can promise you three things. First, I promise you that the battle is worth it, for it will deliver people from a cruel oppressive government. Second, I promise you that eventually this revolution will win. Third, I promise you that if you join in my revolution, one day in the distant future, when my kingdom rule starts, you will be rewarded."

If you were given this type of invitation, would you join this movement? I am guessing few of us would. We prefer temporary comfort now over some eventual blessing. But this is the type of invitation Jesus gave his disciples and what he gives us today. Jesus never told his followers that they would enjoy quick blessing or an easy life. Rather, he told them that they would face persecution and even death. How different Jesus' words were to the way we often explain what following Jesus means!

- Q. 1. a) Contrast how Jesus approached inviting people to join his spiritual revolutionary movement and how we tend to present what it means to become a follower of Jesus. b) What differences do you think it would make in the church if we presented our invitation to nonbelievers more like Jesus did?
- Q. 2. Read Mt. 16:1-12. a) What did the religious leaders ask Jesus to do? b) What was Jesus' response? c) What warning did Jesus give the disciples about the religious leaders?

THE SIGN PROVING THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH (Mt. 16:1-4, Mk. 8:10-12)

Having fed four thousand men in a miraculous way, Jesus returned to the region of Galilee. In less than a year Jesus would die for our sins on the cross. Opposition towards Jesus, primarily from the Jewish religious leaders, was increasing. It did not take long for the religious leaders in Jerusalem to hear that Jesus was back in Galilee. So they sent another delegation to question and evaluate Jesus. This delegation consisted of two greatly different religious groups, Pharisees and Sadducees, who historically were bitter enemies.

The Pharisees were conservative Jews who sought to return Israel to a pure religion of following the teachings of the whole Old Testament. They were so zealous for religious purity that they emphasized the traditions of the rabbis and were often working against the priests in authority in Jerusalem whom they thought were corrupt. The Pharisees hated Jesus primarily because he did not practice religion like they thought was right.

The Sadducees only acknowledged the first five books of the Old Testament and did not follow the traditions of the religious teachers. They were the rich political party who worked closely with the Romans and King Herod and were deeply involved in politics. The Sadducees saw Jesus as a threat to their political power. They were afraid that if Jesus led a popular rebellion against Rome or King Herod, Rome would punish all of Judea and the Sadducees would lose their position of honor and privilege.

For hundreds of years these two groups had bitterly fought against each other. But because both saw Jesus as a threat to their beliefs, they joined together to work against Jesus. This anger would grow over the coming year until both groups determined to kill Jesus. Both Pharisees and Sadducees were part of the Sanhedrin, the High Court which would put Jesus on trial. They did not care whether they dealt justly with Jesus but only wanted to protect their ideas. Throughout history, church leaders have often fallen into the same pattern, bringing persecution upon those whom God wanted to use to bring revival. Church history is a sad story of how religious leaders joined with political leaders to persecute faithful followers of Jesus who did not do things in the way the majority religion wanted. If this was true during the days of Jesus and throughout church history, shouldn't we also expect persecution today?

Q. 3. a) Describe situations in Ethiopian history where religious leaders worked with political leaders to persecute those who only sought to follow God. b) Describe situations in our church today where church leaders are often the first to resist the ministry of someone God has chosen to bring change to his people.

These religious leaders asked Jesus for a "*sign*" to prove that he was the Messiah. They said "If you are the real Messiah, do something so amazing that we will know for sure that you are the Messiah. How about giving us manna from heaven? Or you could part the Jordan River so that we can walk on dry land." (The Jews had traditions that when the Messiah came he would do even greater miracles than Moses.) Matthew says they came to "test" Jesus. They had already made up their minds that Jesus was not the Messiah. They were only trying to put Jesus in an awkward position so he would lose his popularity with people. Jesus refused to use his power to astonish people. He had already done hundreds of miracles which all indicated that he was the one God had sent. He reprimanded these Pharisees for not being able to understand the spiritual signs around them.

During the days of Jesus the farmers had a saying "If the sunset is red in the evening, then the weather tomorrow will be sunny. But if the sunrise is red in the morning, then there is a storm coming." Jesus told these religious leaders that if untaught farmers could predict the weather by simple signs like a red sky, why was it that these trained religious leaders could not see the miracles of Jesus as sign's that God's kingdom had come in the person of Jesus? One of the things followers of Jesus must learn to do is to see the "signs" of Jesus at work in their midst and join him. Are there indications of people coming to Christ in a new area? Then the church must rush to join God's Spirit and reap a harvest of souls. Are there signs that a resistant people are now open to the Gospel? The church must be ready to work hard to meet this opening which God has brought. Unfortunately too often a church is so used to doing the same things that it loses its ability to see the signs of God at work in their midst.

Jesus also said that only those who are "*wicked*" keep looking for a sign. For the religious leaders and the Jews during the days of Jesus to continue to ask for great miracles indicated that there was a resistance to God in their hearts. Those who are people of faith are satisfied with simple indications (like a red sky) that God is at work. In our days, we must be very careful that we do not become like the Jewish leaders who demanded that Jesus do great miracles. Even if there are not things which seem spectacular to us, there are often signs that God is working. We should be happy with those simple signs; to demand anything more is lack of faith.

Jesus told the Jews that he would only give them one "*sign*" that should convince all that he is the true Messiah. That is the "*sign of Jonah*." Jesus is talking about his death and resurrection. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead is one of the greatest historical events. It is also the greatest evidence that not only did

God accept the sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross, but proved to all that he is God's Son. This alone is a big enough sign for all people, and especially all followers of Jesus, to put their faith in Jesus and follow him as their Lord and Savior. The basis of why we believe in Jesus must always be because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, not because we think he will do miracles to meet our needs or will bless us with material blessings.

Q. 4. a) Describe how many Christians can develop a similar attitude as the religious leaders during Jesus' days. b) List some evidences of God working in Ethiopia. What could your church do to join God's work? c) If a church is not experiencing physical miracles, what other evidences can there be of God working in its midst? d) Do you think most people base their faith upon the fact of Jesus' death and resurrection or the earthly blessings or miracles they seek from Jesus? Explain your answer.

JESUS WARNS THE DISCIPLES ABOUT THE TEACHINGS OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS (Mt. 16:5-12, Mk. 8:13-21)

Jesus decided to leave Galilee. He traveled by boat to the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee and 40 kilometers north deeper into the territory of Herod Philip. As he was crossing the Sea, Jesus warned his disciples against the "*yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees*." In this context the word "yeast" is a symbol of the evil teachings and their impact. Just like a small amount of yeast moves through the dough impacting everything, the Jews believed that sin also might seem small, but influence everything it touched. Jesus is warning the disciples against the teachings and practices of the Pharisees and Sadducees which might appear to be spiritual and popular, but were actually evil in God's eyes. This warning seems to be emphasizing that the disciples are not to be swayed by the views of the religious leaders that the Messiah was going to be a mighty warrior and miracle worker who would defeat their enemies. They were not supposed to focus on great miraculous signs, but put their faith in Jesus.

While Jesus was seeking to teach them about spiritual truths, however, the disciples were worried about what they would eat. They had forgotten to buy food before they set out on their journey and only had one small loaf of bread which would not feed all of the 12 disciples. Their discussion about this oversight angered Jesus. "You of little faith" he said to the disciples. They were at fault for two things. First, they were so focused upon earthly existence that they gave little thought to spiritual things. Their thinking about bread meant that they did not even seriously listen to Jesus' telling them about the dangerous teaching of the religious leaders. Second, they were not able to apply the teachings of the miracles to their own life. Jesus had previously told them that they should never worry about food or clothing because God would take care of them. (Mt. 6:25) Then with just a little food he had fed first the 5000 men and then the 4000 men with food left over. If Jesus can do that, surely he could take care of 12 men with one loaf of bread. The disciples were like most of us. We see God do a miracle and take care of other peoples' needs. But then when we get into trouble, lose our jobs, or don't have enough money for our rent- we immediately begin to worry, which is sin. Any time we worry about something, we are telling God that we do not trust him to take care of us.

Q. 5. a) Give an illustration from your own life where you forgot to trust Jesus to take care of your needs but worried instead. How did this demonstrate lack of faith on your part? b) Read Mk. 8:22-26. What miracle did Jesus perform?

JESUS HEALS A BLIND MAN (Mk. 8:22-26)

The boat in which Jesus and his disciples traveled landed at a small town called Bethsaida. This was the home town of Philip, Peter and Andrew and was located on the eastern side of the Jordan River in the northern part of the Sea of Galilee. Not long after he got there, people brought a blind man and asked Jesus to heal him. Probably not wanting to attract attention to himself, Jesus took the man away from the crowds before he healed him.

Jesus put spit on the man's eyes. (Note: Spit was a type of medicine used by ancient people. The other common medicine was oil. Could it be that Jesus used spit (and told his disciples to use oil- see James 5:14) to encourage people to use medicine? God has given medical wisdom to people. So it is not lack of faith to take medicine. But as believers, we need to be careful that we do not put our faith in the wisdom of man or medicine, but in our great healer God.) What happened next was very unusual. This is the only miracle which did not happen instantaneously for Jesus. He asked the blind man if he could see. The man was able to recognize shapes, so he told Jesus that the people (like the disciples) whom he saw looked like trees. In other words, his vision was very blurry. Jesus touched the man's eyes again and instantly the man's vision became normal.

Why did Jesus heal in a two stage process? This story is not teaching that sometimes God's healing is only partial. Some scholars see in this story an object lesson for the disciples. Spiritually, they were like the blind man before he met Jesus. They used to be spiritually blind. (And the religious leaders, although very educated, were still blind.) But over the two years which they spent with Jesus, their spiritual eyes were opened. But their spiritual vision was still blurry, especially their understanding of who Jesus is. It would take another touch from Jesus, especially seeing Jesus rise from the dead, before their spiritual eyes would be fully opened. This should remind us that people around us are in various stages in gaining their spiritual sight. Most are still blind because they have not met Jesus. But there are others, like new believers, who have chosen to follow Jesus. But their spiritual eyes still see truth in a blurry way. So we should not get angry with them for not being as mature as we are. It is only over time, as people learn God's Word, that their spiritual eyes can more clearly see spiritual truths.

Jesus did not want people to become attracted to his healing powers, so once again he told the man not to tell anyone about the miracle. And he told him to go to his home and not back into the city where he would have made Jesus' stay inconvenient by causing a crowd to gather by telling others about Jesus' miracle. Jesus then left the area and travel 40 kilometers to the north to where he was less known.

Q. 6. Read Mt. 16:13-20. 1) List the different ideas people had about who Jesus was. 2) What did Peter confess about Jesus? 3) What promises did Jesus give to Peter? What do you think Jesus meant by these promises?

PETER CONFESSES THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD (Mt. 16:13-20, Mk. 8:27-30, Lk. 9:18-20)

The most important question a person can ask himself and then answer is "Who is Jesus?" This question and its answer determines whether or not someone receives eternal life. Answer this question wrongly, as most people in the world do when they say he was a good man, a good teacher, or a prophet, and you end up in hell. Answer this question correctly and you get eternal life.

Jesus and the disciples arrived at the region of Caesarea Philippi, which was the capital city of Herod Philip's territory of Gaulanitis. It was time for Jesus to test the disciples. They had been with Jesus for more than two years and had often allowed the popular understanding of people concerning the Messiah to influence their belief in who Jesus was. But now it was time for them to take a clear stand so Jesus asked his disciples "*who do people think I am?*" The disciples readily shared that most people believed Jesus was a very great person, one of the prophets expected just before the Messiah came. There were various possibilities.

First, some thought Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead. This was what Herod Antipas believed. (Mt. 14:1-2) Some Jews, listening to Jesus' teaching, thought it sounded like John the Baptist so they assumed they were the same person.

Second, others said Jesus was Elijah. In other words, they were saying that Jesus was the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6. Many Jews believed that Elijah (or an Elijah-like prophet) would return from heaven and in great power prepare people for the coming Messiah. He would destroy those who refused to repent and prepare those who were willing to repent for the Messiah. Even today, Jews leave an empty chair at their table for the coming Elijah when celebrating Passover.

Third, others people thought Jesus was Jeremiah. Perhaps Jesus' message reminded them of Jeremiah because Jesus sorrowfully called the nation to repent just like Jeremiah had. Some Jews also taught that Jeremiah would return at the end times just before the Messiah came. They believed that Jeremiah had hidden the ark of the covenant before the Babylonians destroyed the Temple. Only Jeremiah knew where it was, so he would return and find the ark of the covenant in preparation for restored pure worship during the times of the Messiah.

Finally, others though Jesus was a "prophet." The Jews believed that there had been no inspired prophet for the 400 years since the prophet Malachi. They taught that just before the Messiah, God would once again send prophets to Israel to prepare them for the Messiah. So they thought Jesus was one of these prophets.

Although the Jews believed that Jesus was great, in each case they thought he was not the Messiah but a human sent by God to prepare for the Messiah's coming. It is not good enough to think Jesus is a good man or even a mighty prophet who will return as some religions teach. Salvation only comes when our understanding of Jesus is accurate according to God's Word.

It isn't what others think that is important. Faith is a personal matter so Jesus asked the disciples what they believed. Most likely the disciples had been discussing this question often over the previous year. John had started to clarify their thinking about Jesus calling him "the Lamb of God." Their understanding of who Jesus was had grown as they watched him calm the storm (Lk. 8:25) and then walk on water (Mt. 14:32-33). But now for the first time the disciples clearly expressed what they believed about Jesus. Peter, no doubt acting as the spokesperson and representative of the 12 disciples, openly said "*You are the Christ*" (which means "Messiah" or "the anointed one.") And you are the "*Son of the living God*." Scholars debate what exactly Peter meant by "Son of God." Clearly after the resurrection of Jesus the disciples understood this to mean that Jesus was divine, just like God the Father. But before the resurrection, Peter was probably using this title to refer to the prediction of the coming son of David who had a special relationship with God and so was called God's son. (See 2 Sam. 7:12-14; Ps. 2:7) So this

would have been another title for the Davidic Messiah. We will see that even though the disciples were now convinced that Jesus was much greater than all ancient prophets and was the Messiah promised by the prophets in the Old Testament, they still misunderstood what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. Until Jesus died on the cross, like all of the other Jews, they expected the Messiah to be a conquering king. At this time, none of the Jews understood that the Messiah would die for sins.

Peter had declared who Jesus is. But now Jesus declared who Peter is, calling him "the rock." Matthew 16:17-19 are some of the most strongly debated verses in the New Testament. On the one side of Christianity are the Catholic Christians who use these verses to support their beliefs that the pope is the recipient of Peter's special authority. They believe that Peter is a unique person in God's plans and teach that in these verses Jesus is giving Peter special power to be the spiritual leader of Christianity. And included in that authority is the right to forgive sins or withhold forgiveness. They also believe that this authority of the pope is "inherited," passing to each pope starting from the days of Peter until today. The teachings of giving last rites to someone just before they die or the need to confess sins to a priest find their justification in their understanding of this verse. On the other side of Christianity are the Protestants who insist that only God has the right to forgive sins. Whatever authority this verse might give Peter, there is no indication that Peter's authority passed on to others. Following are the major points Jesus made about Peter:

1. Jesus tells Peter that his (and the other disciples') knowledge that Jesus was the Messiah was not the result of "*the flesh*," or a human decision. (The word "flesh" here refers to people, not to the sin nature in man.) Rather, their understanding was the work of God the Father opening their spiritual eyes. So neither Peter nor the disciples should be proud of what they knew. In the same way, no one should ever be proud that he is better than those around him who do not know Jesus as their Savior. It is God who has opened our spiritual eyes and brought us to faith in Jesus. As Paul warned, let those who boast, boast only in God. (1 Cor. 1:31)

2. Jesus said "*Upon this rock I will build my church*." (Mt. 16:18) Who is the rock? Peter's Jewish name which his parents gave him was Simon. But somehow (from Jesus or others) Peter had received a nickname called "Peter" in Greek or Cephas (Jn. 1:42; 1 Cor. 1:12) in Aramaic, both of which mean rock. So Jesus' teaching consists of a play of words using Peter's nickname which means "the rock." The symbol "rock" was common to the Jews. God was called a "rock" (Deut. 32:4) since he is the one who protects and provides salvation for his people. Abraham was also called "the rock" since the nation of Israel was based upon him. So to call Peter a "rock" was a great compliment to Peter. But what is the "rock" which is to become the foundation of the church? Throughout history, various positions have been held:

- a. The "rock" is Jesus. In the Greek there is a slight change in how the first word for rock (petros) and the second word for rock (petra) are written. So some Christians think that Jesus is saying "Peter you are a small rock. But I am the major foundation stone. I am the foundation of the church." It is clear in the New Testament that Jesus is the foundation of the church, but it is unlikely that Jesus meant that here. Most scholars think that Jesus spoke Aramaic to Peter and there is only one word for rock (Cephas) in Aramaic.

- b. The "rock" is the confession which Peter gave that Jesus is the Messiah. Those who hold this view say that Jesus is saying "Peter, your confession is the rock upon which my new kingdom will be founded. It is only those who believe that I am the Messiah, God's Son, the Savior of the world, who are

saved. And it is only those who believe this who are part of the church." The New Testament does show that a person must believe Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son, and the Savior in order to be saved. But again, it is unlikely that this is what Jesus meant.

c. The rock refers to Peter himself. The Catholics believe that Jesus is giving Peter and all of the popes of the church a special authoritative role in the church. This is very unlikely, however. As we study how Peter was treated in the book of Acts, we see God use Peter greatly. But we also see other believers, like Paul, were willing to question his actions. (Acts 11:1-3, 18; Gal. 2:11-16) And Peter's words were not allowed by themselves to determine what people believed. Rather, the other apostles and church leaders also had to confirm what Peter said. (Acts 15:6-21)

d. The rock refers both to Peter and the apostles whom he was representing. It also represents the authority of the church. This is the most likely meaning. In the book of Acts we see the following truths. First, we see Peter having the major leadership role among the apostles. It was Peter who was the major spokesman. He preached the first major sermon (Acts 2:14-41), performed the first major healing (Acts 3:1-10), was the one who evaluated the Samaritan believers (Acts 8:14-17), was used by God to introduce the first Gentiles as equal members in the church (Acts 10), and was a major spokesman in determining how Gentiles should be integrated into the church (Acts 15). But the New Testament also shows that the Apostles played a special role in the history of the church. They are the "foundation" upon which the church was built. (Eph. 2:20) And when the New Jerusalem, God's eternal kingdom, comes, these Apostles (not only Peter) are said to be the foundation stones for the city. (Rev. 21:14) This is most likely what Jesus meant. He was indicating that Peter would enjoy a unique role as leader of the early church. And the apostles would be a unique body of leaders who were the authoritative representatives of Jesus, guarding the accuracy of God's truth and determining the major doctrines of Christianity. Since their days there have never been church leaders with this level of authority.

3. What is the "*church*?" (Mt. 16:18) This is the first time in the New Testament that the word "church" is used to represent the people of God. When we hear this word, we immediately think about the church building in which Christians meet to worship. Or perhaps we think about a denomination which we are part of. But this is not how the New Testament uses the word "church." In the Greek, the word "church" refers to "those who have been called out." So at its basic understanding, it refers to a group of people who have in some way been separated from others. The word was used by the Greeks for an assembly of people like when we have a kebele meeting. Although there were many people in the kebele, those who are members "separate themselves out" for the meeting. When applied to Christians, the word basically refers to the community of followers of Jesus, those separated by their belief from the rest of the world. Jesus was telling Peter and the apostles that he was about to start a new people, those who are his "kingdom" made up of those who follow him as Lord and Savior. No longer is being part of the community of Jews as children of Abraham the most important community. Rather, it is the community of followers of Jesus who enjoy God's blessing of salvation and eternal life. Jesus was starting a new people of God made up of people from all tribes. And his followers would all be "saints," or those who are separated out from others of the world serving Jesus their master in holiness.

In the New Testament, the word "church" has three major meanings.

First, it can be used for a specific gathering of believers who meet in any building. (In the New Testament times, there were no church buildings. Rather, people met in large homes. [Philemon 2])

Second, it could refer to all believers in Jesus who live in a certain city, even though they would meet in different homes for worship.

Finally, it can refer to all followers of Jesus throughout the world. The New Testament never speaks of a building as being a church. And it never hints that there are many different "churches" or denominations who compete against each other. Such an idea would be very strange to the early church.

There are two truths that we must remember from this:

First, what matters to God is not the church building in which his followers worship. It can be elaborate like some Orthodox churches or a simple grass hut. The size of our church or how elaborate it is makes no difference to God. What matters to Jesus is the community of his followers who meet there. He longs for them to be one, growing in their faith. He would prefer us to spend our resources more on helping people hear about Jesus and joining Jesus' community of followers or helping believers grow in their faith in God, or helping the poor in the community. We must be careful that we do not focus so much on our church structures that we neglect the "real" church.

Second, although we might belong to different denominations (which are simply like being members of different families), we must never let this separate us. In heaven there will not be any denominations. Rather, there will be only one family made up of the true followers of Jesus. As long as a church believes the basic truths taught in the Word and seeks to follow Jesus, then they are our brothers and sisters. So there should never be competition among different communities of followers of Jesus or a proud feeling that one is better than the other.

Q. 7. a) What would change in how believers use their money if they focused more on the community of believers rather than a building? b) If in the eyes of God there is only "one" church made up of true followers of Jesus, how should that change our view of denominations?

4. What is the "*gates of Hades*?" (Mt. 16:18) Jesus told his disciples that "the gates of Hades" will not overcome the church. What is clear in this promise is that there is nothing that will ever totally destroy the community of believers. They might seem to be small and insignificant. And soon Jesus would die and many would no doubt think that the "church" would now die. But no, God's total power stands behind his community of believers. Within a generation, this small community would grow until it expanded across the vast Roman empire. Today it spreads across every nation on earth. This does not mean, however, that specific congregations are guaranteed to remain forever. Church history provides many examples of specific congregations which died. They usually did not die because they were overcome from the outside by political persecution or because another religion overcame them. Rather, they were overcome when those in the community did not maintain a pure faith in Jesus and ceased to follow him exclusively as their king. Through compromise and allowing their doctrine to become corrupted, many congregations have died out.

But what does "the gates of Hades" refer to? The Jews used this phrase to refer to death. Hades was the region where the spirits of the dead were kept until the day of resurrection. So most likely by using this phrase Jesus was saying that "death" would never destroy his church- not the death of Jesus, or the apostles, or persecution throughout history. Indirectly this would mean that Satan, the one who seeks to cause the death of people and the community of believers would never be able to succeed in his plans. It

also means that no enemy of the church, be it political or religious, would also ever overcome the community of believers and extinguish it from the earth. During a period of great persecution where thousands of Christians died, an ancient church leader said "the blood of the saints is the seed of the church." Church history shows that in the very process of dying for their faith, God uses the testimony of his faithful martyrs to grow the church.

5. What does it mean to have "*the keys of the kingdom*?" (Mt. 16:19) (See Is. 22:22 for where the image of keys probably came from.) In ancient days, one of the major signs of a person's authority was to be given keys. So an owner of the house would give his chief steward the keys to his house to indicate that that steward had the authority to oversee all matters of the house similar to how Joseph served over the house of Potiphar. Soon the phrase "keys" was used symbolically for someone with authority. So the head of a government was said to have the keys of the nation. Or religious experts were believed to hold the keys of knowledge. (Lk. 11:52)

Jesus meant that Peter and the disciples would play an important role as stewards in God's kingdom. God's house or God's kingdom belongs to God and not to any person or denomination. (Remember, the word "kingdom" refers to the reign of Jesus. It is not primarily talking about heaven. Jesus is saying that those who are his followers are coming under his reign. That reign impacts our temporary lives here on earth. But it results in becoming part of God's eternal kingdom where Jesus will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.) One of the roles of keys is to let people in or keep people out of a house or building. The apostles will be given the authority to introduce people to Jesus and help them come under the reign of Jesus. (Note: It could be that if the "keys" refer primarily to Peter, that Jesus was indicating his unique role in church history. Peter was the one who preached the first sermon to the Jews and 3000 believed. He was the one who verified that Samaritan believers were also equally part of God's people. And he is the one who was used by God to lead the first Gentile into faith in Jesus.) God would use Peter and the Apostles' teaching to open the doors of heaven to believers.

Jesus said that the authority ("keys") given to Peter and the apostles would be one of "*loosing*" or "*binding*." This idea has also caused great discussion among Christians. Some, like Catholics, teach that this is the authority given to Peter, and through Peter to all priests in the church, to forgive people's sins (this is what is meant by loosing) or to refuse to forgive people's sins (this is what is meant by binding). So Catholics have "confession" and members go to the priest and confess their sins and the priest will pronounce that they have been forgiven. Or when close to death, a priest is quickly called so that the priest can pronounce that the person is forgiven for all sins he might have committed.

But the Bible never shows a human having the authority to forgive sins or determine who may go to heaven and who may not go to heaven. The idea of loosing and binding was familiar to the Jews. A Rabbi was said to have the authority to loose all those who accepted his teachings. And people who were "loosed" were to obey the rules of the community. The rabbis could also bind those who refused the truth, pronouncing God's judgment on them. And "binding" was bringing discipline upon those who refused to obey. Often the word "loose" meant to say something was permitted and to "bind" was to say that something is prohibited. Some scholars think Jesus is picturing the disciples as the new "scribes." They were to correctly interpret the Law and the will of God for people, similar to what Jesus taught in Mt. 5-7. And Peter is the "chief scribe." This verse teaches the following:

a) The authority to bind and loose is the authority to proclaim truth and announce that those who accept the truth are loosed and are part of God's eternal kingdom. And it is the authority to state that if a person rejects the truth, they will not become part of God's eternal kingdom but receive his punishment. Or it could be that this indicated the role of the apostles, of whom Peter was chief, to determine what was permitted in the church (e.g. to come into the church without circumcision) and what was not permitted (e.g. eating meat sacrificed to idols). Some Christians think the authority is to carry out church discipline upon those who in a spirit of rebellion reject Jesus' teachings.

As long as Peter and the Apostles stood within the teachings of Jesus, they spoke as ambassadors with Jesus' authority. They were like "stewards" who let people into God's kingdom. But the keys they used were the keys of preaching the Gospel. So they opened the door to heaven when they carefully preached how faith in Jesus brought salvation. Those who accepted their message, they could say with authority that Jesus had forgiven them of all sins. But they shut the door to God's kingdom (bound people) when people refused to believe their message about Jesus as the way of salvation. To these the believers would proclaim with authority that those refusing to believe aren't part of God's kingdom and would not enter into the eternal kingdom. The authority did not lie in the power of the person. Rather, it lay in the truthfulness and accurateness of the message that they had received from Jesus and the results which came as people chose to either believe or not believe the message.

Today we have a similar authority. As long as we accurately proclaim the message of salvation, we have the authority (keys) to tell people that they are going to heaven if their faith is authentic. This authority finds its source in Jesus, the author of our faith. (Heb. 12:2) It was passed on to the apostles who accurately interpreted Jesus' teachings and is found in their epistles. In the New Testament we have the "truth" which is the basis of our authority. But our authority is only true as long as we proclaim the teachings of the New Testament. Our personal words and thoughts do not have the power to bind or loose. There are many evangelists who have lost their authority because they do not clearly understand what is the Gospel message. They mix up the Gospel with the traditions of their church or their personal understandings. As a result the message they pass on to others might seem to loose people from their imprisonment to sin and Satan, but only maintains their bonds. Each one of us must carefully understand what is the Gospel which frees people from their sin and brings them eternal life and what is the Gospel which if refused brings eternal condemnation. If we are telling people to believe on Jesus so that they will never get sick or in order to receive material blessings, then we are preaching a Gospel that has no authority behind it, for it is not the Gospel of Jesus and the apostles.

Q. 8. a) Describe how you have seen people who do not know the Gospel distort it when sharing with non-Christians. b) Make a list of all truths that are found in the Gospel message that a non-Christian must understand and truly believe in order to be loosed from their sins.

b) The Greek is unclear as to when the loosing and binding in heaven and earth takes place. (Heaven is used to refer to God's role in granting forgiveness and salvation. Earth is used to refer to the ministry of the Apostles and believers on earth in proclaiming salvation and forgiveness.) The verse could be translated "those you announce on earth to have been delivered from Satan's kingdom and are now part of God's kingdom because of their faith in Jesus have already been loosed in heaven because God has seen their faith and forgiven them." And the other half of Jesus statement would mean "those who refuse to accept your message of salvation through faith in Jesus on earth and therefore refuse to enter Jesus' kingdom, they have already been bound (rejected) in heaven as not being part of God's family." So

believers can announce forgiveness because God has already declared people forgiven because of their faith. Or they can announce that there is no forgiveness after rejecting Jesus, because by individuals' lack of faith God has not forgiven them in heaven. However, it could be that the verse refers to the future and Jesus is saying "when a person, through the preaching of the Gospel, trusts in Jesus on earth, they will be accepted (loosed) into God's eternal kingdom; but if they continue to refuse the message of the Gospel, they will be refused (bound) into God's eternal kingdom."

The Bible is clear about two things. First, no one is ever forgiven a sin just because someone says that they are forgiven. Rather, forgiveness is always God's prerogative. And that forgiveness is only after a person repents of their sins and believes on Jesus Christ. To say "I forgive your sins" when someone is about to die does not bring any forgiveness unless there is first faith and repentance. Second, the authority to announce the forgiveness of sins did not lie only in the hands of Peter. All of the disciples (Jn. 20:23) and also the church (Mt. 18:18) are said to have this same role.

This passage hints at the major role which Peter would have in the early church. Peter would be used to proclaim the Gospel with authority and introduce people into the kingdom of God. On the day of Pentecost, he could proclaim with authority that the Jews must repent and believe in Jesus in order to become part of Jesus kingdom. He would also proclaim "there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby you can be saved." (Acts 4:12)

So what is the authority we have as followers of Jesus? When we get up on Sunday and someone makes a decision to follow Christ as a disciple, what can we say and what can't we say? First, clearly we do not have the ability to know whether a person's faith is genuine or not. So we have no authority to tell a person "your sins are forgiven" just because they have gone through the motions of believing. There are many Judas-like people in the church, pretending to believe on Jesus when in fact their faith was never real. There are many who get caught up in the excitement or want to be healed who say "I will believe" when they do not have the type of faith the Bible says brings salvation. Only God knows if their faith is genuine. Since we can't know if an individual has genuine faith, we can't pronounce forgiveness. But we do have the full authority of Jesus, based upon God's Word, to tell someone who makes a profession of faith "if you truly believe in Jesus, allowing him to be your Savior and King, then with 100% certainty I can tell you that you are now part of his family and will enjoy eternity with him." And we can say to someone who refuses to believe on Jesus with 100% certainty "if you refuse to believe on Jesus, then you are bound, you are not in God's eternal kingdom." As long as we proclaim the truth of God's Word accurately then we have the right to "loose" and "bind" through our proclamation.

Q. 9. a) Contrast this understanding of this passage with what many church leaders believe. What is similar and what is different? b) What do you believe and why?

Then Jesus warned the disciples to not tell anyone that he was the Messiah. Why did Jesus stop their witness? There were two major reasons. First, openly proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah would bring a quick reaction from the political leaders who punished anyone claiming to be a king and was causing a rebellion against King Herod and Rome. Jesus knew he was going to die, but it was to be according to the timing of God, not hurried along by foolish words from his disciples. Second, the understanding the disciples had of Jesus' messiahship was defective. If the disciples proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, they would have taught people that he had come to destroy enemies and start David's earthly kingdom. Until the death and resurrection of Jesus, their understanding would not have contained the idea that the

Messiah would die for sins. So Jesus wanted them to wait until after the resurrection. Then he tells the disciples to openly proclaim that he is the Messiah who died for sins.

SECOND DAY

Q. 10. Read Mt. 16:21-28. a) What prediction did Jesus make about himself? b) What was Peter's response? c) What did Jesus say to Peter?

Peter, speaking on behalf of the other apostles, used the correct words when telling Jesus that the disciples believed that Jesus was "the Christ" and "the Son of the living God." For all of the Jews living during the days of Jesus, including the disciples, these two titles meant a great and powerful warrior, a political leader who would overcome all of the enemies of the Jews and rule with great power and glory from Jerusalem. But Jesus had come as the suffering messiah, something that no Jew expected during those days.

JESUS' FIRST PREDICTION OF HIS COMING DEATH AND RESURRECTION (Mt. 16:21-28, Mk. 8:31-32, Lk. 9:21-22)

About six months before his death, Jesus began to openly warn his disciples that he was soon to die. Although Jesus had previously hinted at his death by referring to the "sign of Jonah" (Mt. 12:39-40), Jesus began to clearly predict his coming death. In each of the Gospels, this prediction of Jesus' coming death introduces the final stage of Jesus' earthly life. Jesus now set his face towards Jerusalem, knowingly traveling to where he would die. Jesus was not surprised by his persecution and death. He knew that it was the culmination of God's plan for his earthly life.

The Apostles were excitedly thinking about the great kingdom Jesus, the Messiah would soon bring. They began debating over which position of political power each one would enjoy in that kingdom. (Mt. 18:1-9) But Jesus said that he was a suffering Messiah. From a human perspective, the death of a king is the end of his kingdom. But for Jesus, his death was the beginning of his kingdom.

Imagine their shock when Jesus told the disciples "I am going to die." Although Jesus did tell them that he would raise from the dead, they never seem to understand this truth. Jesus' words went totally against the disciples' understanding of the role of the Messiah. He would be the suffering Messiah, the Lamb of God, not the "Lion," the conquering king. The Messiah they knew about would cause the death of others, not die himself. Notice the following:

a. Jesus "*must*" go to Jerusalem. The word "must" indicates that Jesus was going to Jerusalem in obedience to God. It was not an accident that Jesus died. He was not overpowered by the mighty Roman empire or by the Jewish leaders. Standing behind Jesus' choice to go to Jerusalem was the plan of God for him to die. We should never think that Jesus' death was an unfortunate accident. God was in control of Jesus' death. In the same way, the death of a Christian is never an accident. God is in complete control. This should bring us confidence and assurance as we too obey God by faithfully serving Jesus and taking the Gospel into dangerous areas. Obedience means that we too "must" go trusting God's control over our lives.

b. The "*elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law*" would be responsible to kill Jesus. These three words types of people refer to the formal court of the Jews, which was called the Sanhedrin. The elders were the important heads of rich families who held great influence in the nation. The chief priests were the leading priests (most of them Sadducees) who ruled over the religious and most of the political life of the Jews. The teachers of the law were the scribes (including many Pharisees) who defined what was Biblical and what wasn't. It is interesting that the Gospel story places little blame upon the Romans for the death of Jesus. Rather, Jesus emphasized that it was the leaders of Israel who knowingly crucified Jesus.

c. Jesus would raise from the dead. Jesus knew that he would die on the cross, but he also knew that he would rise from the dead on the third day.

Peter took Jesus aside and strongly "*rebuked*" Jesus. This was culturally inappropriate- a disciple never rebuked his teacher and master. But Peter was so shocked by Jesus saying he would die that he strongly said "*This will never happen to you.*" Peter must have been stunned by the strong words Jesus responded to him. "*Get behind me Satan.*" Imagine being called "Satan" by your best friend! Jesus knew that although it was Peter who was talking, Peter was being used by Satan as a stumbling-block. Luke 4:13 tells us that Satan left Jesus until a more opportune time when he would tempt him again. In the words of Peter, Satan was tempting Jesus once again. What Peter said and what Satan tempted Jesus with in Matthew 4:8 was the same message. "You can be a king controlling your kingdom without having to die on the cross. You can receive glory without suffering." So Peter had become like "Satan" to Jesus by tempting him to sin against the will of God. Humanly speaking, Jesus did not want to die the most cruel death on the cross. Nor did he want to have all of the sins of the world placed upon him and face God's judgment. And yet he chose to do not what he wanted, but what God wanted. It is one thing to be personally tempted by Satan. But it is much worse to have a close friend give us advice which takes us away from God's plan for our lives! Often we think that suffering is the result of sin and is not the will of God. "If you only had enough faith or got rid of that hidden sin in your life, you would be blessed" we hear. "God would not want you to suffer like that and not have children. Take another wife and have children from her" say our relatives as they become tools of Satan to tempt us. Like Peter, we forget that suffering is one of God's frequently used tools to fulfill his plan in the life of his people. To flee from suffering is often to follow the path of Satan.

Jesus sharp command "*Get behind me*" could be a command to Satan to leave Jesus, to stop tempting him. (Note: Even Jesus did not command Satan to go to "hell" or to be forever "cut off" so as to no longer tempt Jesus. Jesus knew that in God's plan, Satan would continue to tempt him until the cross. And he knew that the "tying up" of Satan will only take place at the end of time. It is unbiblical to ever command in prayer that Satan and demons be forever tied up!) Or it could be a command to Peter to return to his position as disciple. When reprimanding Jesus, Peter was trying to be the Master by telling Jesus what should happen to him. Jesus tells him to become a disciple again. Peter was to obey Jesus' desires, not force Jesus to do what he wants. Any time we tell God what should or should not happen, or any time we "command" Jesus to do something for us (e.g. "heal him") we are taking over Jesus' place as Lord. As followers of Jesus we must only do what he wants.

Jesus told Peter that he was now looking at things from a human perspective, not God's. A human perspective looks at things from "what can I do to benefit myself?" A divine perspective looks at situations from "how can I best serve God and others?" Peter, like all of us, had to learn that God's way of ministry is first the cross and then the honor. Satan continues to use our family and friends today to cause us to leave

the path God has for us. "Don't return to Ethiopia after finishing your degree. Live here in this land of blessing and enjoy life instead" say our friends. Could it be that Satan is speaking through them to get us out of the way of the cross- the way of serving our nation? "Leave your rural ministry. Go to a large city where there are educational opportunities for your wife and your children. You can serve God there as well" advise our family. But what if this takes us away from the "cross" of serving our churches who do not have any trained person? Be careful of the "stumbling-block" of the advice of others who only think according to the standard of the world and not according to God's path!

Q. 11. a) Describe how you have seen family and friends give advice that is good according to the world's standard, but which ends up taking people away from a life of service to others. b) List names of some who have chosen the way of the "cross" rather than the way of sacrificial living. c) Why do you think there are so few people who do this?

Q. 12. Read Mt. 16:24-27. a) What did Jesus say that those who follow him must do? What did he mean by this? b) What did Jesus mean by gaining and losing one's life?

JESUS TEACHES THE DISCIPLES ABOUT THE WAY OF THE CROSS (Mt. 16:24-27, Mk. 8: 34-38, Lk. 9:23-27)

"Come follow Jesus so that you will be blessed? It is easy- just believe that Jesus died for your sins and they are forgiven. And then you will be healed when you are sick, you will be protected from all bad things, and you will be blessed with material prosperity." This is what some Christians say to people when they try to get them to become Christians. But Jesus did the opposite. He told his followers that in just a few months he would die. And then he told them that if they really wanted to be his disciples, they too had a "cross" which they must carry. Jesus did not offer the disciples physical blessing, healing, or any other thing which the world teaches is a sign of being blessed by God. He offered them a life of self-denial, a life of the way of the cross. The only promises he gave them was that at the end, they would gain what was truly important: eternal life and deliverance from God's judgment.

Jesus knew that in just a few months he would die on a cross. He not only wanted to prepare his disciples for his death, but he wanted his disciples to understand that being his followers meant that they too must accept the way of the cross. In obedience to God, Jesus had to deny himself a life that was comfortable and he had a cross to bear for the sins of mankind. Like him, followers of Jesus must deny themselves what is convenient for them and carry their own cross in obedience to Jesus.

a. The challenge to those who choose to follow Jesus. (Mt. 16:24) To become a Christian is defined by Jesus as becoming his followers. And to be a follower of Jesus means that we must follow Jesus' way of the cross. Otherwise, we should not claim to be followers of Jesus. What can we learn from Jesus' challenge to his disciples?

1) Whether to follow Jesus is a choice which each person must make. Jesus said "*if anyone wants to come after me.*" He meant that before all of us is a choice- to follow Jesus with him directing all that happens in our lives, or we can choose to direct our own lives. God does not force us to choose one or the other. He allows us the choice. But God determines the ultimate result of where our choice will lead us. Jesus does not allow us the choice of claiming to be his followers and receive forgiveness from God and still live as we want to live. When a person believes on Jesus, they are to come to Jesus with a willingness to follow him wherever Jesus might take them. That road could be through persecution and difficulty, or

through blessing. It is Jesus who determines the road. Our responsibility is to follow his leading and obey him.

2) Following Jesus demands denying ourselves. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, in each human heart is the desire to do what we want. So inside of each of us is the desire to get material blessing, a comfortable life, the honor of others, etc. We all go through life seeking to meet our desires first rather than doing what God wants or seeking to serve others. Jesus said that the first thing his followers must learn is to put aside our personal desires. We must first of all desire to do only what God wants. And we must also seek to serve others. We could say that growth in the Christian life is learning how to deny ourselves, learning how to seek to do what our Master Jesus wants and giving of our lives to help others. True Christianity is taking ourselves off the throne of our lives and putting Jesus on the throne. We no longer control what we do, but we let Jesus control our lives by doing what he wants. (Note: Before Jesus died on the cross, he first denied himself. In the Garden of Gethsemane his prayer of not having to face the cross was given in the spirit of "not my will, but your will be done." So Jesus was denying himself and gave up his personal desire in order to let God rule over his life.) Jesus did not mean that we deny ourselves in order to become his followers. Rather, Jesus is saying that when we make the choice to follow him, we will evidence that we are his followers by living a life where we deny ourselves and do what Jesus wants.

3) Following Jesus means that we each take up our cross. Luke adds the word "daily" to show that Jesus is not meaning a literal cross, but a symbolic cross. And Luke shows that this cross is needed every day of our lives. (Lk. 9:23) Because this verse is so familiar to us its shocking words make little impact upon us. Suppose your teacher said to you "you will not ever be a true follower of Jesus unless you hang yourself and die." Imagine how shocked you would be! That is what Jesus was trying to do to his followers. Each disciple listening to Jesus knew that the cross had only one use, to kill rebels. Dying on the cross was the most painful death which the Romans used. It was so painful that Roman citizens would not mention the name "cross" and no Roman citizen could ever be crucified. The cross was used to publicly punish rebels against the Roman Empire. Probably when the disciples were young children, they had watched thousands of their fellow Galileans, perhaps even their relatives, be crucified. In 6 AD, because people in Galilee sought to rebel against Herod and Rome, over 2000 Galileans were crucified along every road in Galilee so that the Jews would learn to never rebel against Rome. Jesus' disciples would have felt appalled at the idea that they too would face a cross. So what did Jesus mean by the cross?

First, there was a literal cross of physical death which many of Jesus' disciples would face. Jesus was saying to the disciples "If you follow me, there is a good chance you will be killed as well. But be ready to die for me, just as I am dying for you." At least three of the disciples followed Jesus' example and died by hanging on a cross. Most likely 10 of the disciples listening to him died as martyrs. When Matthew was writing this Gospel, many Christians were being killed by local Roman officials for following Jesus. Jesus was warning his disciples and us that following Jesus would often result in physical death. Church historians say that more people have died for following Jesus in the last century than in all of the previous centuries of church history. Could Jesus ask us to take up the cross of persecution and death for his sake? Are we ready for that?

Second, there was a symbolic cross. Often Christians point to a problem they are facing (e.g. cancer) and say "this is my cross." This is not what Jesus meant. Rather, the cross symbolized the persecution that awaited the followers of Jesus. It also represented the need to kill our "flesh," or our sinful, selfish desires, so that we will live in total obedience to Jesus. We must submit ourselves to the

rule of Christ in our lives. Paul would later write "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20) Jesus is warning his disciples that if they want to be his followers, they must get rid of any thought that they have the right to do what is best for themselves, to live for their own glory or pleasure, without concern for what Jesus wanted. Rather, we must kill that natural desire in each one of us, replacing it with the firm commitment to obey totally Jesus.

Q. 13. Examine your own life. a) List ways that you are denying yourself because you are a follower of Jesus. b) List ways you have "killed" yourself in order to do what Jesus wants. c) Contrast how Jesus taught his disciples versus what many preachers preach about becoming a Christian. What differences would there be in Christianity if we emphasized more what Jesus taught?

b. The reasons why they should choose the way of the cross. (Mt. 16:25-27) Why would anyone choose the difficult path of the cross rather than the easier path of following what they want and what their friends and family enjoy? Jesus told his disciples that all things are to be measured by "eternity," not by what happens in the earthly life. Jesus told his disciples that there were four things that they must remember if they are going to choose the way of the cross.

1) If a person "*saves his life*" he will "*lose it*." By this Jesus meant that if we choose the easier road of doing what we want, living for worldly benefits, and following the way of life of our friends and family who do not follow the way of Jesus, it might seem that we are "saving our life" by enjoying a successful, comfortable life free from persecution. But we lose our life in two ways.

First, we lose a life of true meaning now. To live selfishly might get us many material benefits, but inside of us is an emptiness. There is no purpose of life. True meaning in life is always found when we live for God and for others, not when we live for ourselves.

Second, we lose in eternity. We will not live forever in heaven where there are eternal, not temporary, blessings. So even if a person becomes a millionaire, if he does not gain eternal life, he has made a foolish choice.

2) If a person "*loses his life*" he will "*find it*." People in the world see the true Christian life as a loss. They say to someone who wants to become an evangelist "why waste your life with little pay?" At its heart, Christianity is the way of giving up our lives for God and for others. But when we deny our selfish desires, crucifying our tendency to live for self, Jesus said that we will find true life. We find it in two ways. First, when we live for God and others and not for self, suddenly life becomes filled with meaning. Often the people who sacrifice the most are those with the deepest sense of fulfillment in life. Very few rich and popular people who live for themselves are happy. Second, when eternity arrives, they will enjoy God's eternal blessings in heaven.

3) It is impossible to "*pay*" enough to gain the blessed inner life which Jesus gives, either now on earth or in heaven. The word "*exchange*" was used by merchants to refer to giving something (money, goods) to purchase something else. So Jesus is asking "what can we give to buy this eternal life that Jesus offers? How much can a person pay to gain true happiness? Will a million birr buy it? How about after wasting our life and then we die? How much could we give to God to enjoy eternal life and not go to hell?" The answer of course is that we can't buy the inner blessed life now or eternal life in heaven later. Once we die there is no way to redeem our life and change things. So Jesus says the only wise course is to give

up our personal desires now and live for Jesus. To live for money, or education, or a good house, or a comfortable life now and miss out on the eternal life that Jesus offers is great foolishness. And yet sadly millions choose this foolish road. Fearing the way of the cross, they end up losing everything that matters.

4) Jesus will one day reward every person based upon the choices and actions of his life on earth. (See Ps. 62:12) Jesus often uses the title "*Son of Man*" when talking about himself, probably to remind people of the Son of Man in Dan. 7:13-14. Although Jesus knew that the cross awaited him in Jerusalem, he also knew that after the cross was victory over death. And Jesus knew that there would come a day when he returns to the earth "*with his Father's glory*." (This expression hints at the truth that Jesus is God, having the same type of glory as God the Father has.) So Jesus tells his followers that they must never forget that there is a day of accountability. The Jews taught that God would use angels to gather the people of the world for judgment. Now Jesus says that God has given him the authority to reward and punish. The angels will help him, gathering all people from the days of Adam and Eve until the last person to live. All will stand before Jesus to have their lives evaluated. Some will have chosen wisely, giving up their selfish desires to serve Jesus, even if it means the way of the cross. To them there awaits a generous reward. But most will have chosen foolishly. Their hearts were upon the things of earth, things which satisfied their selfish desires. If Christians, they will not receive the rewards God seeks to give them. (1 Cor. 3:12-15) If unbelievers, they will receive eternal punishment from Jesus. In Rev. 20:15 we are told that they will be cast into hell to join Satan and the demons where they will be punished for all eternity. "Choose wisely. Your choices now will determine what happens to you for eternity" says Jesus.

Q. 14. a) List ways self denial and the life of total obedience to Jesus brings true satisfaction now. b) How is the way of the cross the best way when seen from the perspective of eternity? c) List ways that your life, the choices you make, the time you spend, and the things you do would change if you remembered that there is a day of accountability when Jesus will reward or punish you for them.

We must be very careful that we do not entice people to follow Jesus in a way that encourages their selfishness. Many of the sermons being preached today teach that we do not need to deny ourselves. They encourage people to be selfish, seeking the blessings of this life. But the way of the Master is the way of denial and the cross. We might not face physical persecution or death for our faith. But to be a follower of Jesus will always demand denying ourselves in order to follow Jesus. It means that the major concern for all believers is Jesus and his kingdom. (Mt. 6:33)

JESUS PREDICTS A DAY WHEN SOME OF THE DISCIPLES WOULD SEE HIS GLORY (Mt. 16:28, Mk. 9:1, Lk. 9:27)

The disciples were anticipating the Messiah bringing in a glorious kingdom. That is what Peter meant when he said that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus first corrected their thinking that rather than glory, his way for himself and his followers is the way of the cross. But Jesus tells his disciples that before some of them died, they would see his divine glory. Later the Apostle Peter would testify that he had seen Jesus' glory. (2 Pet. 1:16-18)

But scholars wonder to what event Jesus was referring when talking about his glory. There are five major ideas:

First, some scholars think the "glory" which Jesus was referring to was his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension which would soon take place in Jerusalem. All of the Gospel writers insist that the death and resurrection of Jesus is the place of glory for Jesus. (Jn. 12:23) As Paul would say, because of this event, Jesus would be given a name that is above all other names and all would bow their knees in honor to Jesus. (Phil. 2:9-11) But it would seem that Jesus is indicating that most of the disciples would have died before they saw his glory. So it is unlikely that Jesus was referring to his death, resurrection and ascension which would take place in less than a year's time.

Second, other scholars believe Jesus is pointing to the end times. He is predicting that from the time that Jesus begins the final judgments upon the world (known as the seven years of tribulation in Rev. 6-19) until Jesus starts his eternal kingdom where his true glory is displayed will be within one generation. So Jews who believe on Jesus during the Great Tribulation should take comfort that they only had to wait for one generation for the end to come and their Messiah rule as they desired. This view is unlikely.

Third, others scholars think the glory refers to the judgment which Jesus would bring upon Israel in 70 AD. Rather than the glory of blessing, they believe Jesus is referring to the glory of punishment. Some early Christians saw the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD as God's judgment for the Jews refusal to believe on Jesus. In the 40 years between when Jesus gave this prophecy to when it was fulfilled, many of the disciples like James and Peter died for their faith.

Fourth, other scholars think that Jesus is referring to the glory of Jesus seen in the spread of Christianity following the day of Pentecost. Jesus is encouraging his followers that even though he and they might face the cross, death would not put an end to the kingdom Jesus came to start. Rather, the church would experience spectacular growth. Before most of the disciples would die, the church would spread throughout the whole of the Roman empire. Without ever fighting one battle, there would be thousands of followers of Jesus from Jerusalem to Rome and beyond. Never has history witnessed such a rapid spread of any other religion.

Fifth, some scholars believe that Jesus is referring to the events in Matthew 17:1-5 when Jesus is changed on the mountain and his glory is seen by Peter, James, and John. Each of the first three Gospels tell the story of Jesus meeting with Elijah and Moses immediately after this prophecy, so scholars believe this indicates that Jesus is referring to this event. Jesus said "some" because he would not show this glory to all of the disciples, only to the three. This is the likely interpretation of this statement by Jesus.

THIRD DAY

Q. 15. Read Lk. 9:28-36. a) What happened to Jesus when he was praying on the mountain? b) Who met with Jesus? c) What were they discussing? d) What did Peter offer to do? e) What did God the Father say about Jesus?

JESUS MEETS WITH MOSES AND ELIJAH ON THE MOUNTAIN (Lk. 9:28-36, Mt. 17:1-13, Mk. 9:2-13)

A week passed as Jesus spent time with the disciples in the territory of Herod Philip north of Galilee. One day Jesus took his three closest disciples, Peter, James, and John, to the top of a mountain. We are not told what mountain Jesus and the three disciples climbed, but most likely it was Mt. Hermon, which

was 18 kilometers north of Caesarea Philippi where Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus knew that the three would become the key leaders of the early church, so he wanted them to see his glory as the Son of God. Just a week earlier the disciples had said that people thought Jesus was like Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. And the disciples had testified that Jesus was the Messiah. But this story clearly shows that Jesus is much greater than they had imagined. He had the glory of God himself.

Luke tells us that Jesus spent time on the mountain praying. Every time Jesus went to pray alone with God, there seems to have been something important on his mind. Having told his disciples that he was soon to die, most likely Jesus was talking to God about his coming death. In response to his prayer, perhaps to encourage Jesus, God sent Moses and Elijah to appear to Jesus.

Many scholars think that the purpose of this story is to show us that Jesus is a second Moses. Like the original Moses, Jesus met with God on the mountain. Like Moses, Jesus' face shone. And like Moses, Jesus would deliver people from their bondage. But although they are similar, this story shows that Jesus was much greater than Moses.

Notice the following things from this story:

1. Jesus' appearance changes to shine forth glory. Throughout the Old Testament, God's presence was often seen in a cloud of glory. (Ex. 24:15-16) Now Jesus, God's Son, reveals his glorious presence to three of his disciples. When Moses met with God, the glory of God shone on his face. Moses then put a veil on his face so that the Jews would not see his glory fade. (Ex. 34:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:13) What happened to Jesus was different. Luke tells us that first Jesus' face started shining, and then his clothes became extremely white. Note that there was no external glory (no cloud of glory like in the Old Testament) to cause Jesus to change this way. Rather, it is as if the flesh of Jesus which was hiding Jesus' divinity was temporarily taken away and his divine nature could be seen. Jesus' glory shone from the inside out. (The Greek word for "transfigured" means to change from the inside out into a totally different form. So the poor carpenter from Galilee became the divine Christ with the glory he had before he came to earth.)

2. Jesus meets with Moses and Elijah. After Jesus changed, suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared on top of the mountain and began to talk to Jesus. The fact that their appearance was in "glorious splendor" reveals that they have come from heaven to earth in a special body much like angels when they appeared to humans. (Lk. 24:4)

Jesus, Moses and Elijah only talked about one matter, the coming "*departure*" of Jesus. The word "departure" actually means "exodus" and it could be a hint that just like Moses was used by God to lead the nation of Israel out of their bondage, Jesus was about to lead those captive to sin out of their bondage. The word "departure" could refer to the death of Jesus or it could be that it referred to the death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. It is interesting that they did not talk about his miracles or his teachings, but about his death. This not only indicated that the time for Jesus' death was near, but that it was the major event which heaven was waiting for. Jesus had already shown that he was aware of his coming death, so Moses and Elijah did not come to reveal to him what was going to happen. Rather, they came to encourage Jesus to complete the purpose of God. "Jesus, all of the Old Testament, both the books of Moses (symbolized by Moses) and the prophets (symbolized by Elijah) are pointing towards your death. Obey God and fulfill the Old Testament prophecies" they could have been saying.

Scholars debate why it was Moses and Elijah who came to meet with Jesus and not some other Old Testament people like Isaiah. There are different ideas.

a. Some scholars think that Moses and Elijah represent the two major divisions of the Old Testament. Moses represented the five books of Moses and Elijah the rest of the Old Testament which was often called "the Prophets" by the Jews. By this, God was indicating that the whole of the Old Testament points towards Jesus. After his resurrection, we are told that Jesus specifically used the whole Old Testament to show his disciples how it prophesied that Jesus would die and raise from the dead. (Lk. 24:27)

b. Other scholars think God was using the Jewish understanding. Both Moses and Elijah were closely related to the coming of the Messiah. (Mal. 4:4-6) Moses was a great prophet, a type of Christ. He was perhaps chosen because he was the leader of the first exodus and Jesus was now starting a new type of exodus. Elijah could have been chosen because he was to be the one most closely associated with the coming of the Messiah. Both were similar to Jesus in several ways. In Jewish teaching, neither Moses nor Elijah experienced death. Some Jews believed that because Moses' body was never found and he was not buried that he never really died but was taken to heaven. And Elijah was taken to heaven without dying. Because of this some Jews believed that Moses and Elijah would both return from heaven to earth when the Messiah came. This story demonstrates the fulfillment of this prophecy. And both were the only two men to meet with God on Mt. Sinai.

c. Both Moses and Elijah were greatly revered by the Jews and were believed to be the greatest Old Testament saints. Perhaps God choose them to return to earth to show the disciples that although the Old Testament leaders were great, Jesus is greater and only he was to be worshipped. Moses and Elijah discussed Jesus' ministry, not their own works. And it is only about Jesus that God the Father testifies as being his unique Son to whom the disciples are to listen and obey.

3. Peter asked Jesus to build three shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Amazingly the disciples missed much of what was happening since they were overcome with sleep. Luke is not simply saying that they were very tired. Rather, this probably is a symbolic story to show how the disciples were not spiritually aware of what God was doing. They were spiritually asleep to understanding the truths about Jesus. Only after Jesus ascended to heaven would the disciples "wake up" spiritually and realize the glory of Jesus as God's divine Son.

It seems that just as Moses and Elijah were leaving, the disciples became fully awake. They wanted to keep the meeting going longer so Peter, the spokesman, asked Jesus if the disciples could build three small shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah much like the Jews built shelters when celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. (Note: The Feast of Tabernacles was just a few weeks away.) Peter made three mistakes when he said this.

First, he made the mistake of treating Jesus, Elijah, and Moses as equals. This was not true so God the Father intervened and told the disciples that Jesus was unique. Only Jesus was classified as God's Son, not Moses or Elijah. Although great servants of God, Moses and Elijah are only humans and are to never be treated as equal to Jesus. Christians today can make the same mistake when they focus upon some great saint (Mary, Paul, famous healer) more than upon Jesus. We are to worship God and honor only God. We must never let others become the focus of our attention and praise.

Second, Peter was seeking to delay Jesus from his mission of dying on the cross. In this he was working against the plan of God.

Third, Peter thought he could stay on the mountain in worship, enjoying the experience, rather than return to the world of ministry and struggles. God does take us up to the mountain of special times of worship personally and in the church, but these are always temporary experiences. We are called not to try to maintain these experiences, but to return to the difficult world of ministry for Jesus. There are many Christians who so enjoy worship that they go from meeting to meeting, but they never get involved in serving Jesus. They struggle with relationships with non-Christians in their community or at work. So they try to separate themselves from them and live only with other Christians, fellowship with other Christians, and focus upon worship. But God has called each believer to get involved in the fallen world; to reach out to the lost, to help the hurting, to bring peace to those fighting, and to share the Gospel with the lost.

Q. 16. a) Describe ways Christians seek to extend their time "up on the mountain top" with God and do not want to leave the mountain to minister. b) List ways that you are seeking to meet with God on the mountain. c) List ways you are leaving your mountain to return to the world of ministry and difficulty.

4. God the Father testifies about Jesus. In the Old Testament, when God descended to meet with people, he often came in "clouds." (Ex. 19:9, 13:21, 16:10) Just like God descended in a cloud to speak with Moses, so also he descended in a cloud to speak to the disciples. This is the second time that God the Father testified about Jesus, the first being at Jesus' baptism (Lk. 3:22). God the Father told the disciples two major truths. First, Jesus was not just another human prophet on the level of Moses and Elijah. Jesus was his chosen "Son." A week before Jesus had asked the disciples "Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am?" Now God the Father answers the question openly saying that Jesus is his special Son. Only after Jesus' resurrection and ascension would the disciples understand that this meant that Jesus was equal in character to God the Father. Second, God told the disciples to "*listen to him*." (See the prophecy about Jesus in Deut. 18:15) God the Father was telling the disciples that they were supposed to listen to the teachings of Jesus since Jesus was God's official spokesman. The words which Jesus spoke were equally authoritative as what God gave to Moses on the mountain or spoke through the prophets like Isaiah.

When the cloud of God's glory lifted, the disciples saw Jesus alone on the mountain. They joined Jesus and began to travel down the mountain to where the rest of the disciples were waiting. The experience was so confusing that the three disciples did not even tell the other disciples about it until after the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus also told them not to tell anyone until he was raised from the dead. (Mt. 17:9) Only after that would they have a clear understanding of what they saw and what type of Messiah Jesus would be.

Q. 17. Read Mt. 17:9-13. a) What question did the disciples ask Jesus? b) Who was Jesus referring to when he said Elijah had already come?

PETER, JAMES AND JOHN ASK JESUS ABOUT ELIJAH (Mt. 17:9-13, Mk. 9:11-12)

Having seen Elijah on the mountain caused confusion in the minds of the disciples. If Elijah had appeared on the mountain and then returned to heaven, who was the "Elijah" who was to come before the coming of the Messiah? Because of what was prophesied in Malachi 4:5-6 the popular understanding of the Jews as taught by the religious leaders was that Elijah would come from heaven back to the earth to

prepare things for the Messiah. The popular understanding was that Elijah would do all of the preparations for the Messiah before he came. He would teach and bring a reformation where many Jews would return to the path of obeying God. And he would punish those who refused to obey God. If Jesus was the Messiah, where was Elijah?

Jesus tells the disciples that John the Baptist was the "Elijah" predicted in the Old Testament. Unlike the literal return of Elijah as expected by the Jews, an Elijah-like prophet had come. But rather than turn the hearts of the majority of the Jews back to God, John the Baptist was imprisoned and killed. Because he did not come in power as expected by the Jews, they did not recognize him as Elijah. The same thing would happen to Jesus the Messiah. Because he did not come in power as the conquering king, he too was not recognized as being the Messiah and would suffer at the hands of the Jews. Both John the Baptist (the symbolic Elijah) and Jesus would not be received by the Old Testament covenant people but both would suffer and die. Rather than come in power and glory, both Elijah (John the Baptist) and the Messiah would come in humility and experience injustice. But this would not defeat the plans of God. After the cross would come the glory of the resurrection and ascension and the start of the church.

FOURTH DAY

Getamesay had been greatly used by God to win many people to Christ. God had even used him to heal people. Soon Getamesay began to believe that he personally had the power to preach and heal and was a great person. He forgot that God only used him because of grace and because Getamesay had humbly depended upon God. Soon Getamesay's fruitfulness in serving God disappeared, and he became a source of division among his denomination.

Q. 18. a) Describe ways that you have seen similar things happen to church ministers as happened to Getamesay. b) Why is it easy for church ministers to begin to depend upon their own abilities after they have been successful in ministry?

Q. 19. Read Mk. 9:14-29. a) What were the disciples unable to do? b) What miracle did Jesus do? c) Why were the disciples unsuccessful?

JESUS DELIVERS A DEMON POSSESSED BOY (Mk. 9:14-29, Mt. 17:14-21, Lk. 9:37-43)

While Jesus and the three disciples were on the mountain, at the foot of the mountain, a spiritual battle was taking place. A man had a demon possessed son. The demon caused the son to have seizures and be deaf and mute. The father had come to the disciples asking for his son to be delivered from the evil spirit and healed. Previously the disciples had been able to cast out demons in Jesus name with little problem. (Mk. 6:6-13) So they assumed that this time they could do the same thing. But when they tried to cast out this demon, the demon did not leave the boy.

A large crowd had gathered to watch the miracle. In the crowd were some teachers of the law who were against Jesus. When the miracle did not take place, they probably mocked the disciples. "Where is your power now? See, Jesus is not the Messiah. Otherwise you would be able to cast out this demon" they no doubt said. This caused an argument to start between the disciples and the religious teachers. (It is the same today when believers do not live up to the truths Jesus taught, the people don't just question us, they question whether or not Jesus is who he says he is. Our actions affect the reputation of Jesus.) Some scholars think they were arguing over "how" to cast out spirits. The Jews had specific rituals that one went

through deliver from evil spirits. But the disciples only used Jesus' name. This difference in approach could have caused an argument.

When Jesus arrived, he immediately saw that there was an argument going on. He asked his disciples what the argument was about, but they were too embarrassed to answer him. Instead, the father of the demon possessed boy told Jesus that his disciples could not deliver his child. Why couldn't the disciples drive out the demon? This story indicates three reasons:

a. The people were filled with unbelief. (Mk. 9:19) In frustration, Jesus accused the people, including the disciples, for being an "*unbelieving generation*." On the part of the disciples, perhaps they had not met such a serious case of demon possession before and they doubted their ability to heal. In Matthew 17:19-20, Jesus tells the disciples that God is great and nothing is impossible with him. When he sees even a small amount of faith (small like a mustard seed), God chooses to work. We must always remember that the power to heal does not come from us and our faith. Rather it comes from God who is all powerful. Jesus is teaching his disciples that God greatly honors the trust of his children in his ability and willingness to help, and their lack of trust in Jesus limited his willingness to heal. But unbelief was also in the crowd, and when there is active unbelief, God rarely works.

Or the disciples might have shown their lack of faith (a confident dependence upon God to work on their behalf) by becoming too casual in their ministry. They assumed since they had cast out demons and healed in the past that they could do it anytime they wanted without preparing themselves to walk in dependence upon God and not in their own strength. One of the major difficulties church ministers face is to start depending upon their education or their past success. But every time we preach or teach or minister, we must renew our dependence upon God. Only then is it a ministry based upon "faith" and not human effort.

Q. 20. a) Describe a time that you ministered without a sense of dependence upon God because you had been successful in the past. b) What are things you can do to make sure that you minister in faith rather than in your own power?

b. The father of the child did not believe that Jesus could heal his son. (Mk. 9:21) The man told Jesus that since his son was a small child, the demon had caused the child to have epileptic-type seizures and often sought to kill the child by throwing him into the fire or into water to drown him. The fact that the boy had been demon possessed since his childhood demonstrated two things. First, all other attempts by the Jews to deliver the boy had failed. Their power was weak compared to Jesus' authority over the spirit world. Second, Jews believed that the longer a person was demon possessed or sick, the more difficult healing was. But even long-term illness must submit to the power of Jesus. Jesus commanded that the evil spirit leave the boy. In one final attack which left the boy almost dead, the evil spirit left him. Jesus told the spirit to never enter the boy again, perhaps because many Jewish exorcism were temporarily effective but the demon returned after a short time. Jesus was tying up the "strong man," (Mt. 12:29) overcoming Satan's authority over people. Again we see Jesus refusing to use such situations to amaze people. He quickly healed the boy before the crowds could gather. (Mk. 9:25)

When the father said "*if you can do anything*" it revealed that he was doubtful that Jesus had the power to heal. It could be that because the disciples could not heal his son, the father was now questioning whether Jesus could also heal such a severe case of demon possession. Plus the man must have tried

many others who claimed to have the power to drive out demons, but they failed. It is hard to have faith when we have been disappointed often.

Jesus taught the man and the disciples who were listening that faith in God's ability to heal is the basis upon which God works. There is nothing that God cannot do, so his followers should come to him with full assurance that God can work in impossible situations. Faith comes out of a confidence in the character of God (e.g., God is loving and wants to do what is best for us, he is wise and knows what is best, and he is all powerful so can accomplish what he seeks to do.) and the promises of God. When God specifically tells us that he will do something, no matter how impossible it seems, in faith we are to claim that promise and believe that he will do it. But when there is no specific promise of healing or deliverance, then we believe God has the power to do it. But we show our submission to God by saying "if this is your will." God's ways are often different from what we expect, allowing suffering to teach important lessons. (See 2 Cor. 12:8-10 for how God refused to heal Paul for a greater reason.)

The man chose to believe that Jesus had the power and the willingness to heal. But the man was also honest. "Jesus, if there is any sign of unbelief in my heart, please help me overcome it and trust you" he begged. With great power, Jesus healed the demon possessed boy.

c. There are some difficult things which God only performs when his people demonstrate their dependence upon him by prayer and fasting. (Mk. 9:29) (Note: The fact that Jesus did not have to fast and pray to cast out the evil spirit indicates that Jesus was more powerful than the disciples and had authority in himself to tell evil spirits to leave.) It is not that prayer and fasting give us extra power when we didn't have it before. Rather, prayer and fasting are key tools to prepare our hearts to depend totally on God for the miracle. As we pray and fast, our hearts change from thinking we can do something to acknowledging that only God can do something. To clearly show all people that it is God who works, God sometimes waits for us to humble ourselves before him in this way.

Q. 21. a) What important lessons about faith does this story teach us? b) Describe situations when believers tend to work without "faith." c) Illustrate from your life how God waited to work until you showed genuine dependence upon him in prayer and fasting.

Q. 22. Read Mk. 9:30-32. a) Why did Jesus not want people to know that he was in Galilee? b) What prediction did Jesus give?

JESUS PREDICTS HIS COMING DEATH FOR THE SECOND TIME (Mk. 9:30-32, Mt. 17:22-23, Lk. 9:44-45)

Jesus returned to Galilee from the Gentile regions north of Galilee. Jesus no longer focused upon public teaching and healing. Rather, he wanted to teach his disciples and prepare them for his coming death. So for the second time Jesus tells the disciples that he was going to be killed and then raise from death on the third day. But Jesus adds new information. He says he is going to be "betrayed." Although Jesus could be saying that his own people, the Jews, would hand him over for death, most likely this is a hint that one of the 12 disciples would betray him. Just before his death, Jesus would indicate that it was Judas Iscariot who would betray him. (Jn. 13:21-30) Nothing that happened to Jesus was an accident. Even down to the smallest details, like being betrayed, was determined by God and known by Jesus. But the disciples did not understand what Jesus meant since it did not fit into how they understood the coming of the Messiah.

Q. 23. Read Mt. 17:24-27. a) What question did the tax collectors ask Peter? b) What do you think Jesus meant by his question to Peter?

MONEY FOR TEMPLE TAX FROM A FISH (Mt. 17:24-27)

Jesus and the disciples arrived back Capernaum, the city which had been their base of ministry for most of the previous two years. Not long after they arrived in the city, tax collectors responsible to collect taxes for the support of the Temple in Jerusalem approached Peter and asked if Jesus was going to pay his Temple tax.

The ministry of the Temple was very expensive to keep going. Every day there were at least two sheep which were sacrificed. On special days like the Feast of the Tabernacle, there were over 70 animals sacrificed. There was oil needed both for sacrifices and for the lights in the Temple. The clothes for the priest had to be replaced as did curtains in the Temple. And the Temple building had to be maintained. Where would this money come from? In Ex. 30:13, God told the Israelites that all male Jews over 20 years of age had to pay $\frac{1}{2}$ of a shekel per year for the upkeep of the tabernacle. The Jews had converted the shekel into the more common Greek money called the "drachma" and the $\frac{1}{2}$ shekel was equivalent to two drachma which was equal to two days work for a common day laborer. During the days of Jesus, the religious leaders had set aside the month of March as the time for all people to pay the Temple taxes. On the fifteenth of March, in every town and village, booths were set up and each Jewish man was supposed to pay his temple tax. If the Jews did not pay this tax by the end of the month, they were supposed to pay it in Jerusalem directly to the priests. If the priests knew of a Jew who had not paid the tax, they could seize their crops to pay what was owed to the Temple.

Jesus had not been in Galilee during the month of March so he was not able to pay the Temple tax and was now six months overdue. Some tax collectors realized this, and perhaps to cause trouble for Jesus, they asked Peter, the recognized leader of the disciples, what Jesus would do about taxes. Peter brought their question to Jesus.

Jesus turned Peter's question into a learning experience. There are two possible practices behind Jesus' question. First, in ancient days, a conquering nation would often demand that those in the nations which had been conquered pay taxes. But those who were members of the ruling nation ("*sons of the kingdom*") were exempt from taxation. Second, most likely Jesus was referring to the king and his family. Neither the king of a nation nor his children paid taxes. It was the other subjects of the kingdom who paid taxes.

What Jesus meant is clear. God is the King of the nation of Israel. Jesus is his Son. And the disciples are God's adopted children. So by right Jesus and the disciples did not have to pay the Temple tax. It could be that behind Jesus' answer was an awareness that it would not be long until with the death of Jesus on the cross, Temple worship was no longer needed. (See Heb. 8:13) So followers of Jesus by right should not have to continue to support a system that God had replaced with the Church.

But Jesus told Peter that they should go ahead and pay the Temple tax. Why? Perhaps it was not necessary to offend the Jews. If Jesus did not pay taxes, then he would be misunderstood as being against the Jews and the religion of the Jews as established by God in the Old Testament. It would take many years

for the church to figure out its relationship with Judaism, and Jesus did not want to cause confusion by addressing things that did not matter yet.

Jesus told Peter to go to the Sea of Galilee and fish with a line. He told Peter that in the mouth of the first fish he caught would be a coin which was large enough to pay the taxes for both Peter and Jesus. What can we learn from this unusual story?

a. This story provides a picture of how poor Jesus and the disciples were. They did not even have enough money to pay the equivalent of two days work. Even Peter who used to have a good job as a fisherman was now living in poverty. We assume that God's blessing means that he will bless us with prosperity. But not so with Jesus. He fully obeyed God, but was extremely poor. This story did show Peter, however, how God would meet their needs. God provided the exact amount of money needed, not more than they needed.

b. Jesus is establishing an important principle for his followers. He is saying that there are many things that we have the right to do or not do. However, what matters is not our rights. Rather, what matters is how our actions impact others. If our actions cause unnecessary offense, then we must not do them. (See 1 Cor. 8-9 for how Paul applied this truth to his life and to the Christians.) Perhaps Matthew included this story because Jewish Christians were struggling with whether or not to pay taxes to the Temple and Rome. After Rome destroyed the Temple in 70 AD, the emperor demanded that the Jews give their yearly Temple tax directly to Rome. This was not popular. But Jesus was teaching them that we might not believe we have to pay taxes, but we must pay them so as to not cause unnecessary offense. It would do the cause of the Gospel no good to be known as those who do not support the Temple or the Roman empire by refusing to pay taxes.

This is an important lesson for Christians to apply today. There are many Christians who do not obey the laws of the nation. So when told to not take coffee or charcoal to Addis, they sneak coffee and charcoal to their friends in Addis. Or when told by the government to pay 15% VAT they ask for a receipt that does not pay this tax. Jesus is saying that this is wrong. We are causing a stumbling-block to others. "If so-and-so does not pay his tax why should I" they say and the spirit of disobedience to the government grows. Even worse, these actions ruin the testimony of the followers of Jesus. "You Christians do not support the government. You steal and lie just like all others" say government officials when we are caught. In Rom. 13:1-7 Paul said that Christians are to obey completely the government regulations which do not go against God's laws. To disobey the government regulations is not just rebellion against the government, but rebellion against God who has given the government the right to make those laws. For instance we might have rights to dress in a certain way since there is no specific command against it. But love for God and concern for our testimony among other believers or unbelievers will often cause us to not do what we believe we have the "right" to do. For the Christian, love for God and others is more important than our personal rights.

Q. 24. a) List some examples of "rights" that Christians have (in how we dress, what we eat, how we worship) which we might not do rather than offend others and ruin the testimony of the person or the church. b) List some examples of how Christians refuse to obey the regulations of the government. Describe how this brings a bad testimony to the Gospel.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. Read Mt. 16:13-20. a) List the different answers the disciples gave for who people thought Jesus to be. b) Who did Peter say Jesus is? c) Discuss the following: 1) Who is the rock? 2) What does Hades refer to? 3) What promise does Jesus give about a church and what does this mean? 4) What does it mean to have keys of the kingdom and power to bind and loose sins?

2. Read Mt. 16:21-27. a) What prediction did Jesus make about himself? b) What did Jesus mean when he told the disciples that they had to take up their crosses and follow him? List ways this verse can be applied in our lives today. c) Why is it important for us to keep eternity and the coming judgment in mind when making daily choices? How has this made a difference in your lives?

3. a) What did Jesus' appearance with Moses and Elijah teach about Jesus and his glory? b) What did the words of God the Father reveal about Jesus in comparison to Moses and Elijah? c) List examples of ways Christians can honor humans more than they honor Jesus.

4. a) Why couldn't the disciples release the boy from the demon? b) What warning should this bring to us about assuming that we can do things in our own strength? c) What is the major purpose of prayer and fasting when seeking to do something for God?

5. a) What did Jesus teach Peter about paying taxes? b) What do these verses teach us about obeying the commands of the government? c) List different examples of how Christians disobey specific instructions of the government. Are they right to disobey? If not, why not? d) What are other "rights" Christians have which they should lay aside for the sake of their testimony for the Gospel?

LESSON SIXTEEN

FIRST DAY

Have you ever watched the character of people change when they get into leadership? A person who was gracious and patient and who enjoyed helping others suddenly becomes proud, demanding the best seats, wanting to be honored, ordering people around as if they know nothing and are supposed to meet his needs. Have you noticed how many of the problems in our churches originate among the leaders? Division, false teachings, loss of evangelistic vision- these problems usually originate among church leaders.

Q. 1. a) List three examples of problems you have seen in a church which originated from leaders. b) Why do you think people change when they become leaders? c) What understanding of leadership causes them to change how they act?

We studied last week how Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was. Peter confidently answered "You are the Messiah." This statement provided a turning point in Jesus' relationship with the disciples. From now on, rather than ministering primarily to the crowds by teaching and working miracles, Jesus begins to focus upon teaching these 12 men who would become the leaders of the new people of God, the church. Today we will look at several truths Jesus taught the disciples about relationships among his followers.

Q. 2. Read Mk. 9:33-37. a) What were the disciples arguing about? b) Who did Jesus say was classified the "greatest" in his kingdom? What do you think he meant by this? c) What is the relationship between a child and greatness in Jesus' kingdom?

THE APOSTLES ARGUE OVER WHICH OF THEM IS GREATEST (Mk. 9:33-37, Mt. 18:1-5, Lk. 9:46-48)

The first relationship issue which Jesus taught the disciples was the relationship between the leaders of the church and the members of the church. One of the most important things followers of Jesus must learn is what it means to be a leader in the church. If we are not careful, we will think of leadership the way the world understands leadership, and we will lead in the same manner that people in the world lead. But Jesus told his followers that leadership in the church is very different from how the world understands leadership.

Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum where Jesus had spent much of his time during the previous two years of ministry. Just a few weeks earlier they had confidently acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah. In spite of Jesus twice saying that he would soon die, the apostles still were thinking that Jesus was coming as a conquering king. They were sure that in just a short time Jesus would start a great kingdom. Every conquering king rewards those who helped him become victorious. Since they were the closest friends of Jesus, they expected to be rewarded with the best positions in Jesus' new government. But who would get which position? Who would become prime minister? Who would get authority over what country? The disciples got into an argument over this. Over the next six months until Jesus died, this

would be a frequent topic of discussion among the disciples. Even on the night that Jesus was betrayed, they were arguing about this. (Lk. 22:24-30)

Order of ranking was very important to the Jews. When they went to weddings, the host was very careful to seat people according to their rank in society. A person got his ranking by a) being born into the right family, b) being older in age, c) being rich, or d) being a respected religious teacher. As a result, people were always trying to understand if they were more important than someone else. If people were above them socially, then they showed respect to them. But if people were below them socially, especially if they were at the bottom of what the society considered respectable, then the upper class people would despised them.

Because the apostles did not think Jesus heard their discussion, they were saying things that they would never had said in front of Jesus. Many times we too think God does not hear what we are saying as we complain against church leaders, or reveal our selfish desires, or speak things we would never speak in the presence of God. But Jesus always knows what we are thinking and saying. Imagine their embarrassment when Jesus confronted them with their selfish ambitions of wanting to have special positions of authority in his kingdom! Most of us would not say or do many things if we really believed Jesus was watching us and listening to us.

Once when he was alone with his disciples, Jesus taught them about leadership in his kingdom. The fact that Jesus "*sat down*" to teach is an indication of how serious this matter. Whenever Jewish teachers wanted to emphasize a teaching, they would sit down causing their disciples to stop all discussion and listen carefully to what is being taught. Jesus told them two major truths:

1. Greatness in the church is revealed by the level of service of God and others. (Mk. 9:35) Leadership in the world sees advancement as someone rising to the top. So people seek to change from uneducated to educated, from lower level jobs to higher level jobs. And it is the hidden desire of everyone to be at the top where we are able to order people around, get the best pay, have special favors like a good house, per diem, and a good car to use. But Jesus taught his disciples that in his kingdom, he measures greatness in the opposite way. The "*first*" are those who seek to be in positions of authority and power, controlling others so that they serve them. The "*last*" are those who are always in the position of serving others; people like slaves or servants. Or they were people seen as having little value; like women, children, potters, farmers, or the poor. Jesus says that the one who willingly lowers himself to the position of being last so that he can serve others might be despised according to the perspective of the world. But in the eyes of Jesus, he is the greatest person. So Jesus sees the greatest person as being one who selflessly gives of his time, energy, and money to help others rather than himself.

2. Serving the most insignificant person is the same as serving Jesus or God. (Mk. 9:36-37) Seeking to illustrate his teaching, Jesus called a small child who was probably in the house and held him lovingly in his arms. In Aramaic, the language which Jesus spoke, the word "child" and "servant" are the same, so Jesus was making a play of words here. Both servants working in a house and small children were considered of little value. No adult would spend time talking to children or asking children for their opinions. Rather, the children were ordered around by the adults, just like the owners of the house commanded the servants to do things for them. Jesus is not so much talking about small children here. Rather, he uses the word "*little children*" to speak of the most insignificant members of the congregation; the uneducated, the poor, the women, and of course the children. To "*welcome*" and "*receive*" them does

not simply mean to provide hospitality for them, but to treat them as honorable, valuable, and as equals. It means to be concerned about their needs, to show them kindness, and to see them as equally valuable in God's family.

Jesus is teaching that leaders must never think that it is best to focus their attention upon the important people in the community like the educated, rich, or those of the right tribe and overlook the poor or uneducated. Rather, they are to accept those viewed by society as unimportant as being valuable and therefore serve them. By "*welcoming them in Jesus' name*" it means to treat them with the same respect that Jesus would give them.

No leader is to help another person because he wants that person to do something in return for them. Rather, they serve freely, giving of their time and effort even if they see no personal benefit. Small children can not offer any benefits to their parents. No one helps a baby with the expectation of that baby helping him. Jesus also taught that in his kingdom leaders should not be concerned about growth in leadership positions or status. Rather, the only desire in our hearts is to be of the greatest service to others.

Jesus says that it is when a person humbles himself to serve willingly even the lowliest of people that they are actually serving ("*receiving*") Jesus and God the Father. (Note: Jesus was classified as one of the lower class of people. So if we despise or neglect those whom the world considers part of the lower society, then we would have rejected Jesus.) As long as we are helping others because we want to receive a benefit or we are leading from a position of power over others rather than seeking to serve them, then we are serving ourselves and not Jesus. And to despise or abuse another believer whom we might consider unimportant is as if we are despising Jesus. But it is when we lower ourselves in humble service that we truly serve Jesus. We demonstrate that we are like Jesus and his true disciples when we serve others, especially the despised. That is what Jesus did; he came from heaven to serve us and die for us on the cross! (Mt. 20:28)

Some scholars wonder whether the disciples' success in teaching, healing, and casting out demons had made them proud. They were boasting in their ministry success. But Jesus was saying that being successful in ministry; preaching great sermons, healing people, casting out demons, none of these make a person great. Only when we minister with the attitude of serving others does God call us great.

Q. 3. a) List specific ways that the world thinks about leadership is different than what Jesus taught about leadership. b) Give examples of which understanding of leadership is most common in the church. c) Describe how having a world's understanding of leadership is at the basis of many of the problems in the church. d) What are some specific ways that church leaders lead would change if they followed Jesus' teaching on leadership?

Q. 4. Read Mt. 18:6-10. a) What warning does Jesus give about causing another person to sin? b) What did Jesus mean when he told people to cut off a hand or foot if it causes a person to stumble?

FOLLOWERS OF JESUS MUST BE CAREFUL TO NEVER CAUSE OTHER CHRISTIANS TO FALL INTO SIN (Mt. 18:6-10, Mk. 9:42-50)

In the church, it is not only important for leaders to have the proper attitude towards serving others, but all believers must be mindful of other Christians. Jesus warned Christians against doing anything that can cause a fellow believer to sin. The title "*little children*" was often used by religious teachers to refer to

their students. So Jesus is primarily referring here to fellow followers of Jesus. (1 Jn. 2:1) It could be he was referring to new believers or believers not strong in their faith. Immature Christians can be easily swayed by false doctrine, imbalanced teachings, or non-Christian actions by others. As they mature, they are better able to know what is right and wrong. (Heb. 5:13-14) Jesus was warning believers that we should not only be concerned about our own spiritual walk. We must be careful that our actions do not cause another believer to stumble in their faith.

It is not clear what type of sin Jesus is referring to. Some think it refers to any sinful action or teaching, but other scholars think Jesus had in mind a sin which caused the person to abandon her following Jesus as a disciple. We can cause an immature believer to fall into sin in various ways.

First, we can teach something that is not accurate or balanced. New believers look to more mature believers and seek to pattern their lives after them. So if a mature believer teaches an imbalanced truth (e.g. God will always bless them with material wealth if they believe, God will always heal them from all diseases, a true Christian will always speak in tongues or shake with great emotion), new believers will immediately think these half truths are right. As a result, they do not realize that following Jesus means carrying a cross of self denial, or the Holy Spirit seeks to give us the fruit of the Spirit so that our character changes. Many new believers abandon their faith because they are disappointed when they are not physically blessed, or they get sick and are not healed. A half truth was a tool of Satan to encourage them to leave their faith.

Second, through our actions, we can be used by Satan to cause the person to fall into sin. Suppose a new Christian sees a mature Christian divorce his wife or take a second wife or lie about an appointment. He thinks he can do the same thing since the mature Christian did it.

Q. 5. a) Make a list of teachings that are imbalanced in the church which can cause a new Christian to no longer follow Jesus or have wrong ideas about following Jesus. b) Make a list of sinful things many Christians do which encourages new Christians to also commit these sins. c) List ways sinful actions by church leaders has encouraged ordinary members of a church to also sin.

Temptation and sin is the sad reality of living in the world. Since Adam and Eve sinned, every human has a sin nature which no matter how hard he tries, will not be fully overcome. So all people will sin. The "*world*," or the system of the world which goes against what Jesus desires; and the "*flesh*," that inner part of humans which cause them to rebel against God and his ways, cause humans to sin. But that does not mean we are not accountable for our sins. Jesus says we are not only being held accountable by God for the sins we commit but the impact of those sins upon others. Jesus said that anyone who carelessly does something which causes a person to stumble into sin, that person will receive a severe punishment from God.

When Jesus wanted to emphasize a truth, he often used shocking language to wake his followers up to the seriousness of the teaching. In the Jewish culture there were two types of grinding stones used to grind grain.

First, there was a smaller grinding stone found in a personal home. It consisted of two small stones with the top stone having a small handle to turn the top stone to grind the grain. This grinding stone was used for small amounts of grain only.

Second, there was a large grinding stone in certain areas which was turned by donkeys or oxen. When farmers wanted to grind a large amount of grain, they would use this type of grinding stone. Jesus said that anyone who is so careless in his teachings and actions that he leads another believer away from a pure relationship with God, it would be better for him to kill himself immediately. He should take a large stone and go out to the middle of the Sea of Galilee, tie the stone around his neck, and throw himself into the middle of the lake and drown. (Note: Culturally, the Jews saw death by drowning as one of the worst types of death. Although the Romans and Greeks would often drown criminals, the Jews did not usually practice this. However, in 6 AD, when the Jews in Galilee rebelled against Herod and the Romans, they took the political leaders into the middle of the Sea of Galilee and drowned them. The image of Jesus here could hint at that action, to show that Jesus took it very seriously when one believer knowingly caused another believer to sin and drift away from his relationship with God, especially causing them to abandon their faith. The horror of being drowned is nothing compared to the eternal punishment that will await us if we knowingly, or through indifference, cause a person to fall away from following Jesus in purity.)

Jesus had earlier taught that a believer should take his desire to stay pure so seriously that he would do anything (symbolized by plucking out his eye or cutting off his hand or foot) to get rid of the thing which caused him to sin. (See the teaching on Mt. 5:29-30) Jesus repeats the truth here. (Some scholars think the eyes symbolize the hidden things of the heart, the wrong desires and attitudes. The feet refer to walking in a way that is not in obedience to Jesus and the hands refer to doing things that God tells us not to do.) But rather than emphasize only personal sin, Jesus is referring to sin in the community of followers of Jesus. Anything that is harmful to the spiritual life of believers must be severely dealt with. It must be quickly cut out of the body of Christ. This passage could mean that Jesus is saying that church leaders are to take seriously their responsibility to protect the purity of the church. If there is someone whose gossiping destroys the harmony of the church, they are to discipline that person, expelling him from fellowship if he refuses to repent and change. If there is someone who proudly teaches wrong truths, that problem is to be cut out. For church leaders, and for a church, to knowingly allow things which cause believers to stumble and not follow Jesus in pure faith will bring them great punishment. It is better to be inconvenienced, to lose relationships with our relatives and friends who are being used by Satan in harming other believers, or to not do things which might not hurt our faith but could hurt a new believer's faith, than to be held responsible by God for the sins of another believer. An indifferent attitude towards others ("*to look down upon*" means to despise others) often reveals that we are not truly followers of Jesus and therefore we can be thrown into hell at the end times. But by getting rid of all things which cause us and others to wander away from obedience to Jesus brings us the reward of eternal life.

Why is this truth important to Jesus? Jesus teaches that all believers are important in the eyes of God. They might seem insignificant to us, but each one is valuable to God. To treat a "little child" (poor, uneducated, woman) with disrespect or allow our actions to influence them to sin, is to treat with disrespect someone God honors and loves. Paul also warns that a small un-confessed sin will soon destroy the whole church. (1 Cor. 5:6-7)

Jesus said that the angels of the little children are in heaven in God's presence. This statement could have three meanings.

First, some Christians believe that this verse teaches that each person has his own angel who is assigned by God to take care of him. The Jews taught that God assigned angels over everything, even over a tree, a river, or a city. So this has been taken by Christians to mean that God assigns each person his

own angel. However, it says these angels are in heaven in the presence of God ("*seeing the face of God.*") So this view is most likely not accurate.

Second, it could be that Jesus is only saying that even the least significant people in the eyes of humans is important to God. He sends angels to minister to them and watch over them when they need it just like he would any one of his children. The Bible does teach that God uses his angels to protect his people and to minister to them. (Ps. 91:11; Heb. 1:14) The angels are in heaven in the presence of God, but are sent to earth to help all of God's children, not just those whom we often think are important.

Third, the word "angel" could refer to the "spirits" of the dead believers. Here Jesus could be saying "these believers who seem insignificant are so important to me that they will one day be in my presence enjoying me for eternity. That privilege is not only for you who think you are important, but for those you consider insignificant. So be sure to treat all believers with care because they will spend eternity with you in heaven."

Q. 6. a) What does this truth teach us about the need for each of us to be concerned about the spiritual life of another person? b) Describe ways we are often indifferent to the things we do which harm another believer's faith. c) Examine your church's attitude towards children in your church. Do you think they are treated with the dignity and concern which Jesus indicates here? Explain your answer. What changes would need to take place if children were to be considered important as "the least of these?" d) What are other types of people who are often considered to not be valuable and given little attention in the church? What do you think Jesus would teach about how believers, especially church leaders, are to treat them?

Q. 7. Read Mt. 18:15-20. a) What is a person to do if he knows of someone who has sinned against them and not confessed that sin? b) List the steps a church needs to take before there is discipline.

WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE IS AN UNREPENTANT SINNER AMONG THE BELIEVERS (Mt. 18:15-20)

In his final recorded prayer, Jesus asked God the Father to maintain the unity among his followers. (Jn. 17:20-21) Unity and harmony among believers is one of God's greatest desires. As we saw above, Jesus warned his followers not to do anything against another follower of Jesus which would cause their faith to weaken. But Jesus knows that sin is inevitable and that un-confessed sin would break down the unity and harmony of believers. In this section Jesus tells his followers to do everything possible to restore broken relationships and help each believer stay pure. Rather than shrug our shoulders with indifference, or gossip about the problem with others, or allow broken relationships to continue in the church, all followers of Jesus are to do all we can to repair the relationship and help people repent from their sin. (See Gal. 6:1 for the spirit that must be behind our actions.)

Jesus gives specific steps an individual or a church should take when there is an unrepentant sinner in the church. Before we study this section, we should remember the following truths:

1. Jesus is not dealing with a small matter which has hurt our feelings. He is not saying we are to make a major issue out of someone laughing at us or doing something we do not think is fair. We must learn to quietly forgive the person and not allow these things to bother us. Many Christians are so sensitive to the actions of others that they are constantly being offended by something. Maturity means that we learn to

overlook the hurts others unknowingly cause. Rather Jesus is talking major things that bring division in the church and disrepute to the cause of Christ.

2. Jesus is primarily dealing with ways to address the sins of those who are unrepentant in their sins. We should not use this passage to guide us on how to handle someone who has fallen into sin but quickly repented. Nor can we use this passage to pick out certain sins we think are wrong; like adultery, taking a second wife, or drink, and punish them. It should be used in any case where there is an unrepentant sinner. Paul even taught that those who refused to work to earn a living were to be punished in this way. (See 2 Thes. 3:6-15) All sin is open to church discipline if an individual proudly and with a spirit of rebellion continues to commit that sin without any sense of shame or desire for repentance.

3. The purpose of church discipline is not to punish but to bring a person to repentance. It is how a person is looking for the one sheep who has wandered away. (See Mt. 18:12-14) All church discipline is to seek to restore a person back into relationship with God. (See Luke 17:3-4; 2 Thes. 3:14-15; James 5:19-20; Lev. 19:17 for other verses expressing the motive behind church discipline.) Church discipline finds its basis in love. Out of love for the sinner and the damage he is doing to his spiritual life, we discipline them, hoping that they will repent and be restored to God. And out of love for God, we desire that his reputation not be spoiled by those who claim to be followers of Jesus but live unrepentant lives. Finally, out of love for the church, we desire that unrepentant sinners be disciplined so that sin does not spread to others in the church. And we don't want the reputation of the church to be ruined by those who refuse to repent.

In 1 Cor. 5 Paul demanded that the church discipline the man who was committing adultery with his father's wife. But in 2 Cor. 2:5-11 he told the Christians to quickly restore the disciplined person back into fellowship with the church when he repented. There is never any hint in the New Testament of a set time of punishment for certain sins. Any such attitude finds its pattern from the world which punishes people with prison when they do wrong, not from how the Gospel of grace functions. In church discipline, when refusing someone from taking the Lord's Supper or being involved in ministry, we might establish a short time for the individual to demonstrate that his repentance is genuine and not just a way to fool the church. But the main reason someone is not allowed quickly back into ministry is because the qualification is for anyone in ministry to be "above reproach." (1 Tim. 3:2) Until others see the individual as being a person above reproach, they cannot minister, and we can't set a time limit to this.

4. The context of church discipline works only where there is a close fellowship in the church. The New Testament views the church members as a family. Just as loving parents discipline their children when they openly disobey so that the children do not grow up as rebels, so also every loving church will discipline its members so that they become obedient children of God, living in a way that does not harm the family name and is ultimately best for the child. The tool for church discipline in the New Testament times was not primarily withholding the Lord's Supper or ministry. Rather, it was withholding fellowship with the person.

Each local church consisted of a small number of people all living in close relationship. The churches were house churches similar to our home Bible studies. So Christians were told to not treat the unrepentant individual as if they were part of the family of believers. There was to be no warm greeting or not eating together. Just like it is extremely painful to be expelled from our family, it was to be painful to be expelled from the community of believers. It is much more difficult applying church discipline now. Our churches are filled with hundreds of believers who do not feel they are part of one spiritual family but are

strangers to each other. So church discipline does not bring the pain it was meant to cause. There are also many church denominations so it is possible for the person to go to another church when disciplined. But during the early church, if you were expelled from fellowship in one church, there were no other options. This means that in our world today each church must look for new ways to discipline unrepentant members. We must look for ways to cause the separation from fellowship to hurt so that the unrepentant sinner will want to return to the church and be restored in fellowship. Above all this means that each church must look for ways to create close knit communities of love where all believers feel they are part of a loving family.

5. The context of this passage is when one believer has been clearly wronged by another believer. But this passage can also be applied to when any believer sins and refuses to repent.

6. Lev. 19:17 teaches that when a believer sees another believer fall into sin and does nothing, they are participating in the sin and in the spiritual fall of the person. As a result, they too are open to God's discipline. The Bible teaches that it is the responsibility of all believers to help the body of Christ stay pure and people grow in their faith. Unrepentant sin destroys the growth of the person and can impact the purity of the church.

There are five steps that all church discipline of an unrepentant sinner must go through. Only those who have gone through all five steps should be put under church discipline.

STEP 1. Individual level: Jesus said that all of us will sin; it is inevitable. Once we have sinned, it is our responsibility to repent of that sin. By repenting, we admit that we have sinned and we ask God forgiveness for our sin. And we also willingly go and ask the one we have sinned against for forgiveness. We are not to wait until we are caught in sin before we repent. Rather, we are to so hate sin that as soon as we commit it, we seek to restore our relationship with God and others. If the person willingly and openly confesses their sin, there is no need for the matter to go any further. There is no Biblical precedent of such a person being put under discipline. But if an individual refuses to confess his sins and remains unrepentant, then step 2 takes place.

STEP 2. One individual personally confronts the unrepentant sinner. Jesus assumed that it would be the responsibility of the one who had been sinned against, but it could be the responsibility of one of the elders. (Note: Several of the best manuscripts do not include the phrase "*against you*." If this was not in the original writing, this would mean that Jesus is not talking about the one who has been hurt by the sin, but any believer who sees another believer in unrepentant sin.) Behind Jesus' instruction is the attitude that unrepentant sin in the family of God is everyone's responsibility. Rather than wait for the individual to repent or say "it is not my business," Jesus is teaching that we should seek out sinners and help them to repent. Mt. 18:12-14 teaches us that each "lost" sinful sheep is to be sought and restored. (See James 5:19-20) Rather than waiting for the one who sinned to repent, if we see that they are not going to confess, Jesus says it is up to us to go confront them. We are not to tell others- that is gossip. We are not to complain to the elders. Nor are we supposed to write a letter. Rather, we are to personally share with the person what they have done. But it is important to realize "why" we are doing this. We are not wanting to express our anger at the person or get even for what he has done to us. Rather, we are going in humility and love, seeking their restoration to us as our brother or sister and above all their restoration to Jesus. The word "*rebuke*" does not mean to accuse or reprimand, but to bring it to the person's attention. By gently sharing what they have done, we hope that they will see their sin and confess it. (For the sinner to "*listen*" means

to take the necessary steps to gain forgiveness and reconciliation.) Jesus said that if there is repentance, then the family spirit of unity is restored. If confession takes place, then the matter is not mentioned to anyone else.

When talking to a person about their sin, remember the following. First, never confront the person when you are angry in your heart. You are only qualified to go when you honestly desire their repentance not their punishment or embarrassment. Second, make sure you are absolutely sure that the sin has been committed. Don't accept the word of someone else or a rumor you hear. It is a sin to falsely accuse someone. The matter must be something that is clear to you and provable. Third, by keeping the matter a secret, it makes it easier for that person to get over the natural fear of being shamed when confessing sin. Do all you can to take away this embarrassment. Your desire is not to humiliate, but to reconcile. But if the person is still unrepentant, Jesus says take step three.

STEP 3: Take two or three witnesses: Jesus quotes Deut. 19:15. At this stage, the matter has become like a court case where you are gathering irrefutable evidence in order to bring a matter to resolution. These witnesses have two responsibilities. First, they are there to help you be impartial and to carefully study the matter to make sure that the sin committed is verifiable. The Old Testament was very careful in teaching that unless a sin is provable a person was not to be punished. There had to be two or three witnesses. Later it is these witnesses who will testify against the person in the church, so they must have a clear grasp of the facts. Second, they are to verify that you have done all you can to try to get the person to change and be restored to you.

It is very important that these people are chosen carefully. They must be viewed by the other person as being totally impartial. You are not bringing your friends to support you against the other person. Rather, you are bringing an impartial party to help restore relationships with God and you. They also should be known for their godliness and wisdom. Everyone must know that their life is above reproach and that they are honestly seeking God's glory in the situation. No one should be able to accuse them of favoring you because they are from your tribe or family.

Jesus could be saying that the two or three witnesses are assigned by the church to oversee the matter. In Jewish culture, when a matter came to court, often several elders were asked to oversee the issue. They would examine the evidence and seek to bring resolution without bringing the matter to the whole court for judgment. If through the ministry of these witnesses there is repentance, the matter ends there. But if there is still a refusal to repent, then step four is taken.

STEP 4. The matter is brought before the whole church. The primary desire by the church is for the unrepentant sinner to repent and gain forgiveness and reconciliation. But if the person still refuses, then he is to be treated as a "*pagan or a tax collector*." Jesus is using the Jewish understanding of maintaining the purity of a community for his instructions. The word "pagan" here is used not so much as one who is a non-Jew, but one who is a pagan and still continues his idol worship and therefore has made no attempt to know the true God. The Jews would not let this type of person participate in worship with other Jews. The tax collector was viewed as a traitor to the people of God since he supported the Romans in their oppression of the Jews. He was not allowed to participate in the community of the Jews. And no Jew could fellowship closely with ritually unclean Gentiles and tax collectors (such as eating in their homes) because they also would become ritually impure. So Jesus is illustrating that all signs of the individual being part of the fellowship of those who follow Jesus is to be cut off.

The Bible is clear that we are to love all people, even sinners like pagans and tax collectors. So we are never to be harsh, angry, vindictive, or hateful to them. Rather, with tears in our eyes, we are to withhold the deep love we are supposed to feel for other followers of Jesus. For the early church this meant not offering them the "kiss of fellowship," or eating the weekly fellowship meal which included the Lord's Supper, or inviting them into their homes for meals. It is important that we remember that the purpose of this is to cause them to be saddened by losing the fellowship they once enjoyed so that they will repent and seek forgiveness. Every opportunity we have, we should plead with the person to humble himself and repent.

Q. 8. Read 1 Cor. 6:1-8. Summarize why Paul says the church is to decide over matters within the church and not take matters to secular courts.

The language used in Matthew 18:15-20 is the language of the Jewish court. Behind this teaching is the practice of the Jewish synagogue. A synagogue was not only a place where Jews went to worship. But it also functioned as a "court" where the elders addressed issues of the members of the synagogue and passed down decisions. The synagogue also had the authority to expel a Jew from fellowship with other Jews when they blatantly rebelled against God's laws. When expelled from the community of Jews, they were treated as if they were Gentiles. Some Jews taught that when a synagogue followed just procedures to evaluate a matter and pronounce judgment, they were actually passing on the judgment of God. It was not just a human decision, but God's judgment.

Both Jesus and Paul indicate that one of the roles of the church is to function as a "court" to resolve matters which develop in the church. In 1 Cor. 5:9-13 Paul tells believers that we are not to function as judges over non-Christians, but the church has the authority to judge unrepentant believers. Paul says that one day Christians will be in a position of judging even angels. So we should exercise this authority now within the church. No believer is to take their relational issues to secular courts for them to decide. Rather, the church leaders, chosen for their wisdom and impartiality, are to examine all matters and pronounce judgment. Jesus is saying when it comes to spiritual matters, he has assigned the church to be the court. As in any court, the church must be careful to be impartial and seek the truth. We must never listen to rumors, but establish the facts through verifiable witnesses. Unlike a secular court, however, the goal is not to punish, but to help members of the church resolve matters that cause relational problems or to disciple those who refuse to submit to the authority of Jesus over their lives. The body of Christ must be always seeking the repentance of the individual concerned, and when the person shows his repentance, to warmly welcome the person into fellowship in the church. We must guard against any spirit of punishing the individual by assigning him a set time of punishment. We must be a community where we lovingly and graciously forgive each other.

Jesus then taught that when the church carefully establishes the truthfulness of the rebellious attitude of a person who has given adequate time to repent, if the individual resists the decisions of the body of Christ, two things are true:

1. God supports the decisions of the Church. (Mt. 18:18) Previously Jesus used this truth to refer to the authority of the church to pronounce salvation when someone truly believes or pronounce judgment when a person does not believe. (Mt. 16:19) Here Jesus is saying that when the church follows the way that God has established and examines an issue and forgives the person based upon his repentance, then God in heaven supports their decisions. The person is "*bound*." But when the church pronounces

discipline upon the person based upon his unwillingness to repent, then God in heaven supports their decision to "loose" the person. (Note: Jewish Rabbis were said to "loose" someone when they pronounced that a person living outside of the Old Testament laws were going to be judged by God or "bind" someone when they said that people were to be rewarded by God for obedience to God's Word.)

2. Through their prayers, God will provide the help and wisdom necessary in how to address the unrepentant sinner. (Mt. 18:19-20) This is one of the most misquoted and misinterpreted passages in the New Testament. The context of this great promise deals with church discipline. It is not a direct promise that if we have something we seriously want from God, we can gather a few other Christians together to pray and God is obligated to help. Jesus is saying that when a church seeks to graciously discipline someone, if they ask for his wisdom, God will give it to them. We must also understand this verse within the teachings of the New Testament on prayer. Our experience shows that even though we have prayed for something (like healing of a friend) with other believers, there are times that healing does not take place. So clearly this is not a promise which has no conditions. The Bible never teaches that we can tell God what he must do. It is not a verse to be used to manipulate God to do something. The Bible always shows prayer to be within the context of humility when we humans ask the great God and Lord to help us. We leave the answer to God whom we love and trust to do what is right and best. Even Jesus said "not my will but yours be done" when he pled with God not to die on the cross.

The Bible does teach that there is great value when God's people gather together to pray. Our prayers are not supposed to be selfish requests seeking our personal glory or God's blessing upon our plans. Rather, our prayers should be focused together upon matters that seek the glory of God, spreading the kingdom of God. What this verse is teaching is that when the church gathers to discipline the unrepentant sinner, we must come in the spirit of prayer. (The two or three could refer back to the two or three witnesses who had earlier gone to the unrepentant sinner and sought his repentance and who could have been asked to oversee the process of seeking repentance or assigning church discipline. In Jewish law, the first persons to begin the punishment assigned by the court were the witnesses. So Jesus might be saying that when it came time to pronounce either forgiveness or punishment, the witnesses are to pray. And their prayer of forgiveness or punishment will be heard by God.)

We all know that these times of church discipline have the potential to divide the church. And it is hard to know the balance between loving forgiveness of the individual and discipline seeking to help the person return to the walk of obedience to God. Jesus is reassuring his disciples that in this difficult, painful process they can ask God for what to do and God will help them. As long as they are seeking the glory of Jesus and pray in the spirit of submission to Jesus' rule ("in my name"), they function as his representatives. And Jesus is there with them in the process. So it is not a matter of human wisdom providing discipline, but God commits himself to helping the church in providing discipline. And God says that the decisions that come out of this type of process are his decisions. So no party in the church should disagree with the judgment because the one being disciplined is their family member. To refuse to accept the decision of the church is to refuse to accept the decisions of God. All believers are to abide by the decisions of the church. And all believers are to work together to seek the repentance of the individual.

Q. 9. a) Review these steps of church discipline. Which steps do we often not apply when working on church discipline? b) Compare the purpose of church discipline explained above to how church discipline is usually viewed in your church. What understandings would need to change for church discipline to be more biblical?

SECOND DAY

Q. 10. Read Mt. 18:21-35. a) What question did Peter ask Jesus? b) What was Jesus' response? c) Summarize in your own words the lessons of the parable which Jesus taught.

A BELIEVER MUST ALWAYS FORGIVE OTHERS WHO SIN AGAINST THEM (Mt. 18:21-35)

Jesus had been dealing with issues relating to the community of his followers. He reminded the disciples that leadership in the community is different from the world's understanding of leadership. Rather than seeking glory and honor, leadership is defined by service and giving our lives for the benefit of others.

Jesus focused on how to maintain unity among his followers by looking at relationships from different perspectives.

First, Jesus tells each of his followers that we must be very careful not to do anything that will spiritually harm another believer. (Mt. 18:5-9) To cause another believer to fall into sin or away from following Jesus would bring severe judgment.

Second, Jesus teaches believers that we should seek out sinful believers and restore them to following Jesus with purity. (Mt. 18:10-14) To restore a believer or lead an unbeliever into faith is a great service for Jesus.

Third, Jesus outlines the process of disciplining members who refuse to submit to God and repent of their sins. (Mt. 18:15-20) His followers are not to be indifferent to the sins of those claiming to follow Jesus. Rather, we must personally, and then as a church, do all that we can to restore people to obedience to Jesus and unity with others. If necessary, we must discipline rebellious followers by expelling them temporarily from the community until they repent. When we do this, God and Jesus support our decisions.

Fourth, Jesus looks at sin from the perspective of the one being hurt by the actions of another believer and the need to forgive. (Mt. 18:21-35) Jesus' teaching starts with a question from Peter. "How many times do I have to forgive someone when they sin against me?" he asked. The Jews taught that a person only had to forgive another person three times for the same sin. On the fourth occasion, they no longer had to forgive. Peter knew that Jesus had emphasized the need to forgive others. (Mt. 6:14-15) So he thought he was being generous when he said seven times, over twice what the religious teachers taught. Jesus said that his disciples were to forgive each other unlimited times. We are not to keep track of the number of times a person sins against us. (Note: In the Greek, it is not clear whether Jesus said 70 times 7 or 77 times. Jesus was using the Jewish symbolic use of numbers for his answer. Seven means complete. So Jesus is telling Peter and the disciples that they must forgive each other an infinite number of times.)

Jesus used a parable to emphasize why it is important for his followers to always forgive those who sin against them. Jewish religious leaders often told parables where God the Father is pictured as the king and the Jews are servants of God. In this parable, the king represents either God or Jesus and the servants represent followers of Jesus.

1. SERVANT #1: This servant represents all followers of Jesus in their relationship to God. Jesus said that this servant owed the king 10,000 talents. (Note: It is difficult to determine how much this is in today's money. The talent was the largest denomination of money in the Roman empire. Estimates range from over 100 million birr to over one billion birr.) Because the amount of money was so much, most likely the servant was the head of a province. The primary desire of the Roman emperor was to get taxes from the provinces in the Roman Empire. So he demanded that the leader of each province pay him a set amount of tax. During the times of King Herod the Great, the regions of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee had to pay 600 talents per year, so 10,000 talents would be the amount of money Herod would have had to pay in taxes for over fifteen years. The Roman government did not care how that leader got his money or how much extra he took for his own needs. But he was held responsible for the amount of tax allocated to him. So it seems that this governor did not pay taxes for many years, accumulating a debt that was impossible for him to pay to the emperor.

Finally the king called this governor to settle financial accounts. When the man could not pay him the money, the king sought to get something back from what was owed him. The cultural way to do this was to sell the person and all of the members of his family into slavery and the king would confiscate all of his property. Clearly this would not pay off much of the debt, but some money was better than nothing. (The best slaves were sold for about 200 to 500 denarii, equivalent to the amount of money paid for 200 to 500 days of work.)

The governor fell down in front of the king begging for mercy and promising to somehow repay the money. Clearly it was impossible for the man to ever repay such a debt. But then the emperor did something unheard of. He forgave the 10,000 talents debt and let the man go free.

This story represents the relationship between God and each one of us. All of us have sinned thousands of times against God. Clearly we can never pay off the debt of sin which we owe God. We can't work hard enough or do enough good deeds to make it right, although many people try. The debt is just too big. But because Jesus paid our debt on the cross, when we ask him for forgiveness, no matter how great our sins, God always forgives us. God is a God of mercy and grace. It is because of this that we can experience forgiveness and salvation.

Q. 11. a) Make a list of sins you have committed against God this past week. b) If you were to keep track of every sin you committed from the time you were born until today, how is it similar to a debt of millions of birr which we can't pay off? c) What does this truth teach us about God's grace and mercy as the basis of our salvation?

2. SERVANT #2: This servant represents a believer who sins against another believer. The servant was probably one of the people living in the territory of the governor who had not paid his taxes. This man owed a debt of 200 denarii. Since a common laborer earned 1 denarii per day, this was a debt equal to 200 days work. In comparison to the debt which the first servant owed the king, it was a very small debt. But angrily, the first servant demanded the second servant pay back immediately all of his debt. This second servant used the very same words which the first servant had used in begging for mercy, promising to pay the debt back. His ability to pay back the debt was more likely. But the first servant did not show any mercy. In ancient times, when a person owed money, he was thrown into a prison and physically punished by the prison guards. The idea was that seeing the terrible condition of their friend and relative, others would quickly come to help pay off the debt.

Jesus never denies that we will sin against each other. But he is teaching here that in comparison to the thousands of sins which we commit against God, the sins people commit against us are very few in number.

Other servants told the king what the first servant had done. This greatly angered the king. He called the first servant back and told the man that having received mercy from him, the servant should have shown mercy to others. Because he did not show mercy, he was no longer forgiven of his debt and would now have to pay off his debt in full. This of course was impossible. The king had him thrown into jail. Because his debt was so great, it would be impossible for any of his friends and relatives to help him get out, and so for the rest of his life he would face the punishment of the jailer in prison.

This story teaches the following truths:

1. Forgiveness is only possible when we repent and confess our indebtedness and sins. The story is based upon the idea that the servant will confess his sins to the king (God) or to the fellow servant (another believer), asking for mercy. If there is no confession and repentance, then the process of forgiveness and reconciliation does not start. True forgiveness starts with each of us admitting that we have sinned (we have a 10,000 talent debt against God and a 200 denarii debt against others) and asking for mercy. Repentance is also not just saying we are sorry, but it is the genuine attempt to change our actions so we do not hurt others by continuing sinning. (Note: If a person does not go through the process of asking forgiveness, then it is assumed the process established in Mt. 18:15-20 of seeking out a brother to bring him to repentance will be attempted. Even though a person does not confess their sins against us, we can deal with the hurt and anger in our own lives. We can have the same spirit Jesus (Lk. 23:34) and Stephen (Acts 7:59-60) had when they asked God to forgive others for their sins. This type of forgiving is a releasing of the anger and hurt in our hearts, turning the matter over to God to deal with the individual as he sees best. But without repentance on the part of the sinner, there can not be any forgiveness on God's part. And without confession of the sin, there cannot be true reconciliation between us and God or between each other.)

2. We can never work off our debt against God. It is beyond our ability. Forgiveness and salvation is always based on the mercy and grace of God. It is foolish for anyone to think that by giving to the poor, going to church, or any other action will somehow cancel our debt and make God accept us. We can never repay the sin debt we owe God so we must beg for his mercy. The Gospel is based upon us asking God for mercy, not upon becoming good enough to pay off the debts we owe God.

3. One of the best things to help us learn to forgive others is to remember the truth that God has forgiven us a much greater sin debt than the other person has committed against us. The hurts which others have caused us when they do something against us is very small compared to the hurt we cause God when we sin against him every day. So no matter what they do; if they gossip against us and ruin our testimony, steal money from us, or commit adultery, this is nothing compared to the sins we sin against God. And since we know God forgives us the millions of sins we commit, we can forgive those who hurt us deeply as well.

4. We are to remember that God is both a God of mercy and a God of judgment. Many times we forget that God will punish rebels. We think he is a loving God who will somehow accept anyone even if they do not believe on Jesus or repent of their sins. This is not the God which the Bible reveals. He is also a fearful

God who punishes severely those who refuse his mercy, those who do not repent. And that fearful punishment will fall upon those who refuse to forgive others.

5. A sign that we are true followers of Jesus is that we act like him, showing mercy and love to others even when they hurt us by sinning against us. The New Testament teaches that for us to be forgiven by God, we must forgive those who sin against us. God forgives us to the level that we forgive others. If we refuse to forgive another person who sins against us or another tribe for things they have done to us in the past, then God does not forgive us when we ask him for mercy. (See Mt. 6:14-15) It is when we show mercy that we receive mercy. (James 2:13)

This is a very fearful truth. Our churches are filled with people who will not speak to each other because of some hurt they have received. And some denominations never forgive another denomination for what they have done against them. One of the problems we face in Africa is that tribes remember the hurt caused by another tribe hundreds of years ago. Forgiveness by God is only possible when we grant forgiveness to each other for these hurts.

(Note: Forgiveness means that we are treated by God and we treat each other as if we have not sinned. We do not harbor anger against them, gossip against them, or refuse to show love and acceptance to them. Forgiveness is not so much what we say with our mouths or whether or not we fall down in front of them and ask for forgiveness. It is the release of any attempt to get revenge against them or treat them differently because they have hurt us.)

Q. 12. a) List some examples of destroyed relationships which have not been repaired by forgiveness. b) What does this story teach us about God's attitude towards our sins if we have not forgiven those who have sinned against us?

Q. 13. Read Mk. 9:38-41. a) What did John want Jesus to do? b) What do you think this story teaches us about following Jesus?

THE DISCIPLES SEEK TO STOP THE MINISTRY OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT DISCIPLES (Mk. 9:38-41, Lk. 9:49-50)

One of the problems we often face in the church is that, as leaders, we become protective of our authority, our ministry, or our denomination. We think that only we have the right to do something and only people we authorize should preach, or hold a Bible study, or sing. And we often think that only our denomination is right and good and that God will only use us. The disciples struggled with this attitude as well.

One day the 12 disciples saw someone who was either a distant follower of Jesus (like one of the 70 or 120 who followed Jesus) or perhaps someone who heard about Jesus' miracles and began using the name of Jesus to bring deliverance from a demon. Most likely he was one of the more remote followers of Jesus and the apostles were angry since he had not been authorized to minister like the 12 had. Rather than use the style of casting out demons which the religious leaders used, this man had no doubt seen how effective the 12 disciples had been in using the authority they had been given by Jesus (this is what it means "in his name") to cast out demons. So the man copied the disciples and was able to cast out demons.

John asked Jesus to stop the man from casting out demons. They were not happy that ministry was now spreading to others. They were protective of the authority they had. (Note: The attitude of the disciples is similar to what Joshua did in Num. 11:26-30 when he asked Moses to stop people who were not part of the 70 from prophesying.) Jesus refused for three reasons:

1. Those who are working in Jesus' name helping others were helping the kingdom of God, not hurting it. It does not matter if they are authorized by the leadership or not. It does not matter if they are from our denomination or not. What matters is "Does what they are doing spread the kingdom of God?" If so, we are to graciously let it happen. The desire of leaders to "control" what others do is not needed in the church. As long as what people are doing does not harm the kingdom of Jesus, we are to permit it and support it.

2. When someone actively works for Jesus such as casting out demons, he won't quickly turn against Jesus and work against him and his kingdom. Whereas many were turning against Jesus at this time, this person would at least be a "friend" of Jesus and his followers.

3. Those who have a spirit of helping others for the sake of Jesus usually demonstrate that they are true followers of Jesus. Even the most basic way of helping in ancient times, giving a cup of cold water to a weary traveler on a hot day, with the attitude of trying to help a follower of Jesus would be honored by God and rewarded.

Rather than seeking to limit the service of others because they have not gone through official channels, we must encourage the followers of Jesus to actively minister for Jesus' honor and glory in any way the Holy Spirit leads them. And we are not to only focus upon the major ministries of prayer, choir, preaching, or teaching. Simple ministries like giving the poor in our community a little food, sweeping out the church, or encouraging someone who is struggling, these are equally valid ministries and will be rewarded by Jesus.

Q. 14. a) Describe how church leaders often are tempted to "control" ministry in the church, letting only those whom they approve to do things. How does this go against what Jesus taught? b) List ministries often not seen as important in the church but which, like a cup of cold water, is honored by God as ministering for him. What can your church do to encourage all believers to be more active in these simple ministries? c) How does this passage teach that there should not be a sense of rivalry between denominations who are seeking to serve Jesus?

Q. 15. Read Jn. 7:1-9. a) Why did Jesus not go to Judea? b) What did Jesus' brothers encourage Jesus to do? c) What did Jesus tell them?

JESUS REFUSES TO GO TO THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES (Jn. 7:1-9)

The closer Jesus got to dying on the cross, the more dangerous things became as the religious leaders became increasingly determined to kill Jesus. The major place of resistance against Jesus was in Judea and especially Jerusalem. As a result Jesus knowingly kept away from there, ministering primarily in Galilee. The month was September, a busy month in the Jewish religious year. Not only was it the month when the Jews celebrated the New Year, but it was when one of the most important religious celebrations called "the Day of Atonement" took place and the high priest entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple and sprinkled blood on the ark of the covenant to bring forgiveness for the nation. Towards the end of

Meskerem or early Tikimpt there was an eight day celebration called the Feast of Tabernacles. Every male Jew within 25 kilometers of Jerusalem was obligated to go to the Temple to celebrate. And male Jews living in more distant places like Galilee would often attend this celebration commemorating God's provision for the Israelites in the wilderness.

The half-brothers of Jesus (children of Joseph and Mary) believed this was a strategic time for Jesus to reveal to all of the Jews that he was the Messiah. Luke tells us that up to this point they had not believed that Jesus was the messiah or chosen to follow him. That would not happen until after Jesus rose from the dead and revealed himself to them. Jesus' brothers could have been encouraging Jesus to be more open in declaring he was the Messiah since even in Galilee many of those who had previously followed Jesus had abandoned him. (Jn. 6:66) So in probably a mocking voice they challenged Jesus to go up to Jerusalem. They were telling Jesus to stop hiding the fact that he was the Messiah and prove it publicly. "Jesus, Galilee is just a backward place. All of these miracles you do prove nothing unless you go to Jerusalem and the people there accept you as Messiah as well. So if you are really the Messiah like you claim to be, go there and prove it in a way that all people will see and therefore follow you" they were saying. Some scholars see this as a temptation similar to what Satan brought to Jesus in Mt. 4:5-7 where he encouraged Jesus to throw himself off the Temple to astonish people and cause them to believe. The brothers of Jesus were saying that if he would only astonish people with miracles, they would believe without Jesus needing to die on the cross. Miracle workers today face the same temptation where they seek to use their miraculous power to astound people and encourage them to believe for physical blessings. But this is not the way of Jesus for he desires belief based upon the way of the cross, not the way of power and miracles.

Jesus told his brothers that unlike them, his timing is determined by God. Humans who have no concern for the way of God can make their own decisions about what they are going to do and when. But those who, like Jesus, seek to honor God, allow God to determine things. Jesus said that God had not told him to go to Jerusalem at this time. It was not the "*right time*." This phrase could refer to two things. First, a similar term "hour" is often used in John to refer to God's ordained time of dying on the cross. (Jn. 12:27) So it could be that Jesus is saying that it was not God's time for Jesus to publicly show himself in Jerusalem and face the cross. Second, this Greek word often means "opportune time." So Jesus could be saying that it was not the right time for him to go and minister in Jerusalem. God would determine that time, not the wishes of the brothers. Jesus was not telling a lie here since in a few days he would go to Jerusalem. What he was saying was that he was not going to join the groups of people marching towards Jerusalem. He was not going to pretend to be the conquering king descending upon Jerusalem to do some great miracle or fight the Romans. He would go in his own time and in a private way.

Q. 16. Read Lk. 9:51-62. a) What did Jesus know was soon to happen? b) Which road did Jesus take to go to Jerusalem? c) What happened in Samaria and what did the disciples want to do? d) What was Jesus' reaction?

THE DISCIPLES WANT TO PUNISH INHOSPITABLE SAMARITANS (Lk. 9:51-55)

Usually people in a village traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate religious holidays would travel together. But Jesus waited in Galilee while the crowds of people left for the feast in Jerusalem. Most Jews in Galilee did not want to travel through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem since there was so much enmity between the Jews and Samaritans. Often those in Samaria would harass and sometimes killed Galileans traveling

to Jerusalem for worship. They travelled the much longer road on the east side of the Jordan River and would cross into Judea at Jericho. (See map in Appendix A at the back of the book.)

Once the crowds had gone, Jesus knew that God's desire was for him to go to Jerusalem, not only for the Feast of Tabernacles, but for his death on the cross. As Luke expressed it, time had come for Jesus to be "*taken up to heaven*." Interestingly, Luke pictures Jesus as walking through Jerusalem back to heaven. The destination of Jesus was not the cross, but his return to heaven. In other words, Jesus' earthly life was almost over. Jesus knew that the cross awaited him, but for him the cross was just a stop on his way to return to the Father. In the same way, death for any believer is never a tragedy, but a part of our earthly journey to spend eternity in heaven with God.

Jesus chose the shorter way through Samaria to Jerusalem. Even so, the journey would have taken him three days. On one of those days Jesus sent some of the disciples ahead to find a place for them to stay for the night. However, because they were on their way to worship at Jerusalem, the Samaritans refused to provide them hospitality. This angered the disciples and James and John wanted to bring God's judgment of fire upon the Samaritans. No doubt in the minds of John was an event in the life of Elijah where fire came down to punish the enemies of God. (2 Ki. 1:10-12) Having seen God use them to do miracles, they now wanted to turn that power into a tool of punishment. It is not clear whether the two were proudly saying "we can bring fire down to heaven upon them" or whether they meant that they would pray to God and ask him to bring fire upon the Samaritans. Jesus "*rebuked*" them. They had totally misunderstood how Jesus did things.

Jesus refuses to use force to punish those who do not accept him. Jesus stands at the door and knocks, asking permission from people. (Rev. 3:20) He does not threaten to break down the door of our lives to force us to believe on him or fellowship with us. Unfortunately there have been times in church history when Christians in politics (e.g. kings) have forced people to become "Christians" or face punishment. This has always been wrong. Great evils have been done in the name of Christ for which we should be ashamed. This is also a reminder for Christians in politics. They are never to use their position of influence to force anyone to become Christian or follow the Christian way of life. The kingdom which Jesus starts is always a kingdom where he lovingly invites people to join and submit to him. Followers of Jesus are to "love their enemies" not punish them. (Mt. 5:43)

Jesus does not give leadership positions and spiritual gifts to destroy others or punish them. Rather, they are given to help others. Church leaders should never use their positions to punish those who have hurt them or disobeyed them. The only power Jesus has given them is the same type of power Jesus used, the power of serving others in humility and love so that they will choose to obey God and the leaders.

Q. 17. a) List situations in the history of Ethiopia where church leaders have used force to make people do what they want. b) What difference does this reveal in attitude towards ministry and authority between Christ and the world?

JESUS CHALLENGES THREE PEOPLE TO BE TRUE DISCIPLES (Lk. 9:57-62, Mt. 8:18-22)

Jesus crossed from the region of Samaria to the region of Judea. On the way he met three people who were considering becoming one of the disciples of Jesus. Again we are struck with the severe challenge Jesus gave to those who wanted to become one of his followers. He had no interest in those who followed

him when convenient. Following Jesus always demands a serious consideration of the costs involved before someone claimed to be his disciple. Unfortunately, in our hurry to get people to become "believers" we rarely give them time to understand first what it means to become a follower of Jesus and the cost of the way of the cross.

1. The man who wanted to follow Jesus without accepting the path of hardship. It seems that as Jesus was walking towards Jerusalem with his disciples they met a man who had heard about Jesus and all of his miracles. He probably thought that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem to be received in honor by the Jews. So he wanted to become one of the disciples of Jesus and reap the benefit of being one of those whom Jesus would honor when he started his kingdom. His was an emotional decision with little awareness of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

Jesus told the man that before he became a believer and decided to follow Jesus, he must know what it will cost him and make sure he is willing to count the cost. Jesus said the person could expect no comforts and conveniences if he chose to follow Jesus. Jesus had chosen the way of poverty. He had no house to call his own. Even animals and birds were better off than he. At least foxes had their own holes and birds their own nests. But Jesus was homeless. "If you are going to follow me, that is what you must expect. Don't come thinking I will bless you with material blessings." Jesus was saying. It could be Jesus was hinting at what had just happened in Samaria where people rejected him and so he received no hospitality. He didn't have a place to spend the night but slept outside on the ground.

How different this is from what we so often present to new Christians! Our gospel promising physical blessing without understanding the cost often produces the type of followers that Jesus did not want. We get followers of Jesus who look for an easy life, not a difficult life. Jesus preferred a few totally committed disciples to many who might say they will follow Jesus, but only do so when it is convenient.

2. The man Jesus called to be a disciple who wanted to bury his father. Unlike the first man who asked to be a disciple, the second person was called by Jesus to become his disciple just like Jesus had called Peter and Matthew two years earlier. It seems that the man was willing but he said "*let me bury my father first.*" Jesus' response seems very callous. "*Let the dead bury the dead. Follow me NOW*" he said. Jesus was warning against postponing following Jesus until a more convenient time. In Jewish culture, one of the most important obligations of a son was to bury his father. Why didn't Jesus let him? There are two perspectives.

First, some scholars think this man was only making an excuse. His father hadn't died and he wasn't even near death. Rather, the man was saying "One day after my family obligations are done, I will become your disciple. It is not convenient now." To this man, Jesus was saying "You must choose now. If you say 'later' it will never happen."

Second, more likely the man's father was either dead or soon to die. Jesus is forcing this man to make a choice. What will he chose his family obligations or the call of the Master? Jesus put this man in an awkward situation where he had to reveal that he was giving Jesus top priority in relationships. In his response Jesus probably meant "Let the spiritually dead (those who have no desire to follow me) bury the physically dead. Now is the time for you to follow me, making me the most important person in your life." Jesus also told the man that he was to join Jesus not only in following him on the way to the cross in Jerusalem, but to join him with the commitment to becoming one of the announcers of the Gospel. Jesus

was not calling "silent" believers. All were to follow him with the commitment to be one of those who shared with others about Jesus' kingdom. We don't know if this man obeyed or not.

3. The third man who wanted to say good-bye to his family. This man was willing to follow Jesus, but wanted to say good-bye to his family. He wanted to be like Elisha whom Elijah allowed to go visit his family before following Elijah. (1 Ki. 19:19-20) But Jesus refused. Again, Jesus meant that following him in obedience was more important than family obligations. Jesus told the man that his followers must never look back at what he was leaving. He was not supposed to look at his family with longing, or to his old job or way of life or the educational opportunities he might have missed. Rather, once he made his choice to follow Jesus (put his hand on the plow) he must totally focus upon following Jesus and obeying him. Only then would he be able to have "straight" ministries just like a person can only make a straight furrow when plowing by looking ahead at where he is going and not back where he has come from. To follow Jesus means that we must always focus upon the present and the future, not the past. We can't change the past. But when we live each day in close fellowship with Jesus, obediently serving him, our lives and our ministry becomes straight. (See Phil. 3:13 for how Paul expressed this truth.) To follow Jesus while wishing we were like others who did not have such a difficult life or wishing we did not have to pay such a steep cost to following Jesus makes discipleship as ineffective as plowing our fields while looking backwards.

The Bible clearly teaches us that we have family obligations that we are to fulfill. (1 Tim. 5:4-8) We are to take care of our parents and our wives and children. Following Jesus does not mean that we abandon them. However, Jesus is emphasizing that there is to be no competition for love and obedience in his followers' hearts. Our primary love and obedience is to Jesus. We must be careful that cultural obligations to our parents or listening to what our wives and children desire does not take us away from the path God has for us. If we want to be "*fit for the kingdom of God*," we must make sure Jesus reigns alone in our hearts as our priority relationship.

Q. 18. a) List three examples from today's world where people choosing to follow Jesus must choose clearly whether or not they will totally give themselves to be followers of Jesus. b) If Jesus were calling people to follow him in Ethiopia, what things do you think he would tell us to put away in order to follow him?

THIRD DAY

JESUS' MINISTRY IN PEREA AND JUDEA: 29-30 AD

Q. 19. Read Jn. 7:10-52. a) Describe the different reactions people had towards Jesus. b) What accusations did people make against Jesus and how did Jesus respond to them?

JESUS TEACHES AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES- PART 1 (Jn. 7:10-8:11)

****Note:** Because these teachings are studied in greater depth in the TEE book on John, we will only summarize the truths.

Jesus arrived at Jerusalem in time to celebrate part of the Feast of the Tabernacles. In the final months of Jesus' earthly life, the Jews' reaction towards Jesus became increasingly hostile. Whereas Jesus

remained more popular in Galilee, there was a greater reluctance to believe on him in Judea and Jerusalem.

1. Background to the Feast of Tabernacles One of the most joyous religious celebrations for the Jews was the Feast of Tabernacles. Occurring in the middle of the first month of the Jewish year, this celebration lasted for a total of eight days. The first seven days was spent in celebration and the last day was a serious time of reflection. Thousands of Jews from many different countries came to celebrate. During this celebration, all Jewish men were required to sleep in small shelters made out of sticks and grass. (The word tabernacle here does not mean a large shelter like for conferences, but a small shelter similar to what homeless people use on the city streets or what nomads use.) There were thousands of these shelters set up in the streets, on top of the flat roof of homes, in the courtyards, and in the fields outside of town. This festival had several purposes.

First, it was a time of thanksgiving for the harvest. September was the month when the olive and fruit harvest took place. (Grain harvest took place later.) So people praised God for providing for their needs.

Second, it was a time of remembrance. The reason people lived in shelters was to remind them of the time when, under the leadership of Moses, their Jewish ancestors lived for 40 years in the wilderness in tents. So it was a thanksgiving for what God had done in the past.

Third, it was a time of prayer for rain. It was now the dry season when water was often scarce. So the Jews prayed for God to send rain both for drinking and for the crops.

Fourth, it was a time of looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. Some Jews believed that the Messiah would reveal himself to his people on the Feast of Tabernacles. Having heard about the miracles that Jesus had done in Galilee, the question that would have been on everyone's mind was "Is Jesus the Messiah?" It was this expectation that encouraged Jesus' half-brothers to tell Jesus to use this opportunity to reveal himself to the Jews in Jerusalem.

2. The reaction of the Jews before Jesus arrived at the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:10-13) Jerusalem was filled with unusual excitement. News about Jesus had spread from Galilee where Jesus spent most of his time. People were sure Jesus would come and their questions about him being the Messiah would be answered. Everyone knew the official opinion of the religious leaders who had taken a formal stance against Jesus and were seeking to kill him. No one wanted to face their anger and possibly be expelled from the synagogue, so people would not openly defend Jesus. But among the ordinary people opinions were divided between those who believed Jesus was a good man and those who saw him as a false prophet who was deceiving people.

3. The confrontation with the Jews (Jn 7:14-19) On the third or fourth day of the celebration Jesus suddenly appeared in the Temple and began to teach openly. The religious leaders were the first to react to Jesus. They despised Jesus because he was not "educated." (Note: The word "*amazed*" was not the amazement of appreciation but of despising.) Almost all Jewish men were taught how to read and write. So these Jews were not talking about Jesus being totally uneducated. Rather, the leaders despised Jesus for being untaught by a rabbi. Unfortunately there are many who have received theological educations who have a similar attitude today. "Unless you have a degree in theology, how can you teach or preach?" they proudly ask. Receiving training in interpreting God's Word with accuracy and teaching with skill is

useful. But it is dangerous if it causes us to be proud like the religious leaders during Jesus' time. Like Jesus, everyone is able to study God's Word and learn how to teach and preach with skill. Except for Paul, none of the Apostles received formal education, but God still used them greatly.

Jesus responded that his authority to teach came from God. And what made his teaching even more powerful was that he had pure motives when teaching; his only concern was to please God, not people. He was not like many religious leaders who taught to gain glory for themselves. Nor did he change what he wanted to say because he wanted to impress people or please them by saying kind things. The Jewish religious leaders responded by boasting that unlike Jesus who disobeyed the Sabbath laws, they obeyed the Law of Moses. But Jesus accused them of actually disobeying the law of Moses. Their accusations of him without witnesses and their desire to kill him without a fair trial all revealed that they did not seek to align their lives to what God's Word taught.

Q. 20. a) Describe ways trained ministers can get proud in the same way the Jewish religious leaders were proud. b) Describe how we can often teach or preach out of a desire to get glory or please people.

4. The confrontation with the crowd (Jn. 7:20-24) The crowd was probably those Jews who were from Galilee and Judea, but not those from Jerusalem. They did not know the plans of the religious leaders, so they were shocked when Jesus accused the religious leaders of wanting to kill him. "You are insane, no one wants to kill you" they said. (To say someone was demon-possessed was another way of saying someone was mentally crazy.)

In response, Jesus took them back to the miracle that caused the confrontation with the religious leaders, the healing of the lame man on the Sabbath. (Jn. 5:1-15) "You are accusing me of disobeying God's laws and seeking to kill me because I healed on the Sabbath. But even you disobey your Sabbath regulations when you circumcise a baby boy on the Sabbath." The Jewish religious leaders recognized that there are times when two of God's laws clashed. One such clash was when a baby boy was to be circumcised on the eighth day but that day was the Sabbath and work was prohibited. The religious leaders said that in such cases one law took precedence over another law, and the law of circumcision took precedence over the law of not working on the Sabbath. Jesus said "If you do that for circumcision, then I am right in doing it for healing a person on the Sabbath. I am only doing what you have agreed is right. So be fair in how you judge me."

5. The confrontation with the crowd from Jerusalem (Jn. 7:25-31) The people of Jerusalem knew about the hatred of the religious leaders towards Jesus. So they were amazed when Jesus was allowed to openly teach without being imprisoned. "Does this mean that the religious leaders have changed their minds and now believe that he is the Messiah?" the people wondered. "We know that he is not the Messiah because we know where he was born" others responded. Some Jews believed that when the Messiah came, he would suddenly appear out of nowhere. No one, not even the Messiah himself, would know in advance that he was the messiah. Rather, Elijah would point to the person and say "you are the Messiah." The people were sure that the Messiah would be from Jerusalem or at least from Judea, not backward Galilee.

In his response Jesus insists that they might think that they know where he is from, but they don't since he has been sent by God. The fact that they do not recognize him as the Messiah is a sign that they

claim to know the God of Abraham, but don't. Like these Jews, it is possible to know facts about God but still not know God personally.

Jesus' accusation so angered the crowd that they tried to capture Jesus and hand him over to the religious leaders for trial. But God prevented them because it was not yet God's time for his Son to die. He would protect his Son for another five months and then allow Jesus to be captured and killed. But in the crowd were those who liked Jesus. The word "faith" here probably does not mean saving faith, but reveals that these people believed that Jesus might be the Messiah.

6. The confrontation with the religious leaders (Jn. 7:32-36) The religious leaders ran out of patience with Jesus, so they sent some of the guards they had hired to control the crowds in the Temple to arrest Jesus. But rather than arrest Jesus, these guards began to listen to him teach. "I am leaving you soon." Jesus told the Jews. This caused the Jews to wonder where he was going to go. Some wondered whether Jesus meant that he was now going to leave the region of Palestine and visit Greek speaking Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire (Greeks). Jesus of course was talking about returning to heaven. He insisted that those listening to him, because of their lack of faith, would never get to be where Jesus would live. Only those who had faith in Jesus were promised to be with Jesus when they died.

7. Jesus claims to be the water of life (Jn. 7:37-44) Several days passed and the seventh day of the Feast arrived. (Scholars debate whether it was the seventh day, the last day of the formal Feast of Tabernacles or the eighth day which was a solemn ceremony.) One of the ceremonies at the Feast of Tabernacles was for the high priest to lead a procession down to the Pool of Siloam on each of the first six days of the celebration. He would take water from the pool and take it back to the Temple and pour it out beside the altar where they sacrificed the animals. People following him would loudly and joyfully sing Ps. 113-118. On the seventh day the priests walked down to the water seven times.

This ceremony symbolized God's provision of water for the Jews in the wilderness. The Old Testament often talked about water and linked it with salvation. (See Is. 12:3, 55:1; Ezek. 36:25; Zech. 14:8) Watching this great celebration, Jesus suddenly shouted "I am the true water of life. Come to me, drink of my salvation which I will give. You won't ever thirst again." Jesus no doubt meant the salvation he was about to bring on the cross. But as the Apostles reflected on this statement later, they thought about the added blessing of the Holy Spirit that Jesus brought them.,

This open statement of being the one who gave true salvation caused even more confusion among the Jews. Was Jesus the great Prophet prophesied by Moses? (Deut. 18:18) Or was he the Messiah? "How can he be the Messiah," some argued, "for he came from Galilee and the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem?" In this statement John was reflecting the ignorance of the people concerning Jesus. We know that he was born in Bethlehem, but none in the crowd had bothered to check. This same indifference to trying to find out the truth about Jesus would continue among the Jews down throughout the years.

8. The division among members of the Sanhedrin (Jn. 7:45-52) Eventually the guards went back to the religious leaders. When asked why they hadn't arrested Jesus, the guards could only say with embarrassment that they had never heard anyone teach like Jesus, not even the great rabbis who were standing in their midst. The Pharisees in the Sanhedrin mocked the guards saying they had been deceived and were no different from the uneducated crowds who were impressed with Jesus. Only Nicodemus stood up for Jesus, saying that the Law of Moses said no one was to be accused without a trial. But they

angrily turned against him. "Not one prophet ever came from Galilee. God only uses people from Judea." they proudly said. John again shows their ignorance of the Old Testament which they claimed to know. Their pride and prejudice in being Jews from Judea hid them from the truth that Jonah was from Galilee.

This is a strong warning to us today. It is easy to let pride blind us from seeing God at work. Pride in our education can blind us to miss seeing God work through less educated people. Pride in our tribal heritage can blind us to God working through a different, despised tribe. God reserves the right to use anyone he wants. He is not limited to working according to our prejudice.

Q. 21. List ways prejudice or pride can blind church leaders to God working in unusual ways.

Q. 22. Read John 8:12-59. a) What statement did Jesus make about himself in vs 12? b) List the different claims Jesus made about who he is in his discussion with the Pharisees.

****NOTE:** Although scholars believe that the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 is an actual event, it is unlikely that it was included in the original writing of the Gospel of John. Most of the best ancient copies of the book of John did not include this story. Probably an ancient scribe had a copy of this story and believed it would be good to include it in the life of Christ and added it here. The original copy of John would have gone from John 7:59 to John 8:12. We will mention this story at the end of our section of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles.

JESUS TEACHES AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES- PART 2 (Jn. 8:12-59)

1. Jesus claims to be the "light of the world" (Jn. 8:12-20) The purpose of the Feast of Tabernacles was to celebrate God's grace upon Israel during their time of wandering in the wilderness. One of the amazing things about the wilderness wandering was that God revealed his presence to the Israelites in a cloud of glory during the day and a pillar of fire at night. (See Ex. 13:21-22) In order to celebrate this great pillar of fire, each evening of the celebration except for the Sabbath, the Jews would light great lights in the Temple in the Court of Women. (See diagram of Temple at the back of book.) With the Temple being on the highest hill in Jerusalem, the lights could be seen for miles around. As these lights were being lit, there was joyous dancing. The lighting of these lights also symbolized to the Jews that they were recommitting themselves to follow God once again.

Jesus and his disciples were no doubt watching these great lights and joyous dancing. Suddenly Jesus shouted out "*I am the light of the world.*" (Jesus could have been referring to Is. 42:6.) Jesus was saying that he fulfilled the role of the pillar of fire in the Old Testament. He was the one who showed people the spiritual path they should take. He was like God, for he had light in himself.

Such a bold proclamation startled the Jews and angered the religious leaders. They believed God was the light of the world, or the Jews as a nation were the light to the Gentiles, or the Messiah was the light of God. Occasionally a great rabbi was referred to as the "light" by his followers. But Jesus did not seem to meet any of these definitions of being the "light of the world." And the Jews knew that Jesus was using this phrase in a unique way. Unlike the rabbis, it was not the teaching of Jesus which was the "light." Rather they understood Jesus to say that he had light in himself, something they believed only God had. The words "*darkness*" was a Jewish way of speaking of living in sin and evil, or stumbling along without knowledge of God and his ways, of the way of destruction. "*Light*" was a symbol of God, his holiness, and the way of fellowship with God in obedience to his commands. Those who choose to follow Jesus as his disciples

would no longer live in a sinful way, but enjoy the continual light of God's presence in their lives. They might occasionally sin, but their lives will not be characterized by continual disobedience to God. (See 1 Jn. 1:6-7)

Hearing Jesus make such a bold statement, the Pharisees and Jesus entered into a strong debate. Their argument went as follows:

a) Pharisees: "It is wrong to make such bold statements about oneself. Only others, two or three witnesses, can make such a claim. So your statements are empty" they said. Jewish law and traditions were very strong in prohibiting someone in standing as his own witness.

b) Jesus: Jesus had previously told the Pharisees that there were four witnesses (Jn. 5:31-47- John the Baptist, God the Father, Scripture, Jesus' miracles). But the Pharisees refused to believe them. Now Jesus insists that his proclamation about himself is valid because he alone understood who he really was. God is forced to testify alone about himself, for no one outside of God knows about God. In the same way Jesus, as God, as the one who alone understood that he had come from heaven, was the only one on earth who could accurately say who he was. Plus Jesus is different from the Pharisees who, when they speak about themselves, seek to bring honor to themselves or to their teachers. And they could only use human standards in their evaluation of Jesus since they were from the earth and knew nothing about heaven. Jesus' testimony and life focused upon honoring God and God the Father also testified about Jesus.

Jesus' response so angered the Pharisees that they wanted to arrest Jesus. But they couldn't because Jesus' "*time had not yet come*." (Jn. 8:20) Jesus was in total control of his destiny. He did not die because religious rulers overcame him. Rather, he controlled the hour of his death and no matter what others wanted, they could not do anything to him until God's time for Jesus' death had arrived. Jesus' death was not a tragic accident of history. Rather, it was a conscious plan of God, and God controlled all events to fulfill his plan. This is not only true for Jesus, but for us as well. No matter what people want to do against us, they can't do anything without the permission of God. The death of a believer because of persecution is not a "tragedy." Rather, it is all controlled according to the plan of God. (See Rom. 8:28).

Q. 23. a) Explain why it is important for us to remember that no one can harm the child of God without it being part of the plan of God. b) How should this understanding change the way that evangelists or any believers react to persecution?

2. Jesus contrasts himself to the Pharisees (Jn. 8:21-30) The heated debate continued in the Court of the Women. Jesus' statements become increasing bold until he formally declares himself to be the great "I AM" God of the Old Testament. Jesus would soon die. He wanted to shock people out of their apathy towards him so that they would believe. Notice the amazing statements he made:

a. "*I am going away...and you will die in your sin*" (Jn. 8:21-25) Jesus warned the Jews that he was about to leave them and go back to heaven where they would not be able to follow him. For Jesus, the cross was his way of returning to God. It was not a disaster where he was defeated. Jesus taught the people that he was from heaven, not from the earth as they were. He was divine. The Jews misunderstood this statement that he was going away to mean that he was going to commit suicide. Previously they had thought he meant he was going to leave Judea and travel to Jews throughout the Roman empire. (Jn. 7:33-35) But now they wondered whether he was going to kill himself. Although the Greeks and Romans saw

nothing wrong in committing suicide, for the Jews this was a great sin, and they believed someone who killed himself would not be able to go to heaven.

But what must have really angered the Jews was Jesus' claim that they would "die in their sin." The phrase "die in your sin" would mean to the Jews that they would face eternal judgment from God with no further opportunity to repent. The Jews thought by being a Jewish descendant of Abraham they were guaranteed salvation. And these Pharisees thought that they were righteous since they kept hundreds of laws. But Jesus accused them of "sin." It is interesting that here Jesus used the singular word "sin" and not "sins." The "sin" that Jesus was referring to here was the sin of unbelief which is the sin which condemns all people to eternity in hell. Later Jesus would also accuse these Pharisees of "sins" (Jn. 8:24) to refer to the evil actions they also committed.

b. "You will not understand until I am lifted up" (Jn. 8:26-30) To be lifted up was a reference to Jesus' death on the cross. It would be the death on the cross that would bring greater understanding into the purposes of God and help the disciples understand who Jesus is. Some initially thought he was the conquering Messiah. But it was only after the death on the cross that they understood that Jesus was the Lamb of God who would die for sins. Those with spiritual ears would then know that Jesus spoke God's words and that his death was not an accident. Rather, God the Father had been with Jesus through the whole event.

3. Jesus explains how someone becomes God's true son (Jn. 8:31-47) Jesus was surrounded by disciples who had chosen to believe in him. Even some in the crowd listening to the argument "*put their faith in him*." This statement seems to mean that they decided that Jesus was a great prophet who was to be listened to. It probably does not refer to saving faith since most of them would soon fall away as resistance of the Jewish leaders increased. To these Jesus explained more fully what it meant to be his follower:

a. Only those who apply Jesus' teaching are his true disciples. It was not enough for people to get excited at his teaching and miracles and claim to believe on him. Saving faith is more than just raising our hand in church and saying that we will "believe." Jesus said that saving faith always includes "obedience." True faith means that not only do we believe that Jesus is the Lord, but we live in obedience to him as our Lord.

b. To those who lived a life of obedience to his teachings, they would be "free." We often think freedom is the absence of laws that we have to obey. But here Jesus said that true freedom always includes obedience. It is when God reigns over our lives and we obey him that we are truly free. To "*know the truth*" means more than just knowing facts about something and believing them to be accurate. Rather, to the Jew truth referred to integrity and being faithful to one's character and word. So Jesus is saying that we will experience a true freedom from sin when we come into a correct relationship with him and live in line with that relationship by changing our character.

Q. 24. a) Describe how you have seen some people make a profession of faith but not submit to Jesus. What does this show about the reality of their faith? b) What do people usually mean when they say they are "free?" c) Why do you think "obeying Jesus" is really what it means to be "free?"

The Jews reacted to Jesus' claim that they had to obey him in order to be free. This inferred that they were slaves. But the Jews were proud that they were not "slaves" of anyone. In Jewish understanding, they believed that as the descendants of Abraham, they had been separated from all others in the world and become God's adopted children. They came under God's control, not the control of others. They were therefore free. The Jews knew that they used to be slaves to Egypt and more recently to other Gentile nations like Babylon or Rome. But they did not think that they were really "slaves" because God was in control of their situation, so it was not really Babylon or Rome who enslaved them. Rather, they were in situations simply because God had chosen to place them there. Or it could be the Jews were thinking that they were never "religiously slaves" because as Abraham's children they were guaranteed salvation no matter what happened. They were forever God's special children. But Jesus refutes this type of thinking, saying the Jews are not saved because they were children of Abraham. They had another father, Satan, who would bring them death. Jesus answered them by teaching the following:

a. True slavery is not just a matter of whether another person controls them. Rather, it is whether a person is controlled by his sin nature. Since the Jews did not walk according to the truth of God's Word or believe in Jesus, they were clearly being controlled by their sin nature and were therefore slaves to sin.

b. A slave can be in God's house temporarily but not be part of the family of faith. In the same way, the Jews might be temporarily in God's special nation of Israel, but still be a slave. They can be like Ishmael, who was the child of a slave and therefore was not part of Abraham's family line of blessing. (Gen. 21:8-21) To be totally free, they must be like Isaac, the spiritual children of Abraham.

c. A person demonstrates whether or not they are a slave or a true child by how they act. The Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus, God's holy Son. This demonstrated that they were not the real spiritual descendants of Abraham. Rather, Satan was their spiritual father.

The religious leaders proudly claimed "Abraham is our father. It is you who is illegitimate." Some scholars wonder whether this accusation against Jesus' family reveals that there was a rumor about Jesus among the Jews. Some time after John wrote his Gospel, the Jews began to teach that Jesus was not a true Jew. Rather, he was the result of the union between a Roman soldier and a Jewish girl.

Jesus again responds that if they were really Abraham's children and God's adopted children, then they would know that Jesus was God's Son and listen to him, believe on him, and obey him. But their lack of faith and disobedience and attempt to kill Jesus revealed that they were actually Satan's descendant. The Jews taught that when Satan tempted Adam and Eve, he not only told lies but he was a murderer for he caused their spiritual and later physical death. So Satan was a "*murderer and liar from the beginning*." Jesus challenged them to point out one sin which he had committed. Of course they couldn't.

4. The Jews accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan and demon possessed (Jn. 8:48-59) The Pharisees were proud of the fact that they spent all of their lives studying God's Word and obeying it and all of the teachings of the elders. To be accused of having Satan as their father because they resembled him and not Abraham who put his faith in God made them very angry. They accused Jesus of being a "Samaritan." This was a great insult. The Samaritans were half Jews and half Gentiles by descent and they had a worship system which combined the Old Testament worship and the worship of Gentiles. So they were greatly despised by the Jews. To call Jesus that name meant that they despised him. They also called him "*demon*

possessed." This phrase could have two meanings. It could refer to their belief that Jesus did his miracles because Satan was helping him. (Mt. 12:24) Or it was a way to say that someone was insane.

Jesus' response was that he is only seeking to honor God, not to receive glory for himself as the Pharisees commonly did. Jews taught that to attack a messenger of a person is the same as attacking the sender himself. So Jesus intimates that by resisting Jesus and not honoring him, the religious leaders were dishonoring God the Father whom they claimed to be their father. Jesus promised them that no one who believed his words would see death. Jesus was not speaking about physical death, but eternal death and judgment that all who refused to follow him in faith and obedience would receive.

"Are you greater than Abraham?" they asked, ridiculing Jesus. In the Greek, the question is written to indicate that they expected Jesus to say "No." Imagine their surprise when Jesus answered in two ways.

First, Jesus said that Abraham himself rejoiced at the coming of Jesus. Some of the Jews believed that Abraham was so great that God gave him a vision of all of history from his time to the end. He even showed Abraham the coming of the Messiah and his great kingdom. Jesus claimed that he was the fulfillment of Abraham's vision.

Second, Jesus claimed "*before Abraham was born, I am.*" This is one of the most amazing statements Jesus made. Jesus clearly said that he existed before Abraham, even though Abraham lived more than 2000 years before Jesus. This hints that Jesus was "eternal." He might have received his physical body just 33 years earlier. But as God he lived from eternity past. When Jesus said "I AM" all of the Jews knew that this was God's special covenant name. (See Ex. 3:14) Jesus was showing more than that he existed before Abraham; he was claiming to be Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament who entered into a special covenant with Israel.

To the Jews, anyone claiming to be God was committing blaspheming, and the penalty of blasphemy was to stone the person to death. They knew that Jesus was now claiming to be divine. So they picked up stones to kill Jesus. But Jesus escaped. We don't know what Jesus did to escape. Did God hide Jesus like he had done for others in the past? (Jer. 36:26) Or was Jesus' personality so great that they were not able to do what they wanted? Or did Jesus perform a miracle? We don't know. But it was not God's time yet for Jesus to die. It would be several more weeks before God would allow Jesus to die on the cross. God controlled events, not the people.

Q. 25. a) Describe how some Christians believe their family or church heritage guarantees them salvation similar to how the Jews thought being Jewish guaranteed them salvation. b) Describe how when the way we live indicates who our spiritual father is. c) What does this truth indicate about those who claim to be believers but whose lives have not changed?

FOURTH DAY

JESUS HEALS THE MAN BORN BLIND

There are two types of blindness. There is physical blindness that can be caused by a disease or an accident. But the worst type of blindness is spiritual. This is the blindness of not being able to see spiritual truths. Only a few people on the earth are physically blind, but unfortunately, there are millions who are

spiritually blind. Although it is sad when we see people who cannot see and others have to lead them around to help them beg for a living, it is much worse to be spiritually blind, because then the person is judged with eternal death. Today's story illustrates that often those whom we would expect to have spiritual eyes can often be the ones who are the most blind. And those whom we would assume are blind are actually those who can see the best.

Q. 26. Read John 9. a) What was the question the disciples asked Jesus and how did he answer? b) What miracle did Jesus do? c) Describe how the Pharisees revealed they were blind. How did the man who had been born blind but could now see, illustrate that he could also see spiritually?

1. Jesus heals the blind man (Jn. 9:1-12)

It seems that as Jesus was leaving the Temple, there were many poor people begging outside; one of them was a blind man. This man was not blind because of some disease or accident. He was born blind. Like many of us, the hearts of the disciples did not respond with compassion to the blind man. They did not ask Jesus to heal the man. Rather, they used him as the basis of a theological debate. Like the three friends who went to comfort Job, Jews believed that a physical infirmity was always the direct result of sin. The Rabbis taught "There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity." Knowing that he was blind from birth, the disciples began to wonder if somehow the parents committed some sin when the baby was in the womb of the mother. But there were some Jews who taught that an infant was able to sin even before he was born. So they wondered if this man had somehow sinned while in the womb and God punished him with blindness.

Jesus did not enjoy useless theological arguments. He was a God of mercy and he was more interested in helping people. The disciples were wrong when they believed all problems came from sin. So Jesus told them that the man's lack of sight was not only the will of God, but for the glory of God. In this case, Jesus would heal the blind man. But in many cases today, God does not heal a person. Does this mean that God is punishing the person? Can God still get glory when something tragic happens? Yes, God is able to get glory from every situation, even if he chooses not to heal a person in this life. A woman called Joni has a powerful testimony after being paralyzed because of an accident. She chose to trust God in spite of the accident, and because she allowed God to use the accident to help her grow spiritually and testified to God's faithfulness in the midst of tragedy, God has used her mightily to bring glory to himself. You can read her story in the book called Joni. Unfortunately, many Christians today still believe that a tragedy is usually the result of some sin. So church leaders accuse a couple who can not have children of some hidden sin. Or the first thought that often comes to our minds when we hear of an unexpected illness is "I wonder what sin they committed." Jesus taught his disciples that we are never to think that way. Some things are the result of sin. But unless God reveals to us or to the person that sin is the cause, we should never think this way. Rather, in all tragedies, we should look for ways to glorify God. And often we glorify him most by rejoicing in God even when God does not take the tragedy away.

Jesus warned his disciples that rather than debate unanswerable theological issues, we are to work for God's glory. When people are suffering in any way, the followers of Jesus should get involved and help. It was "*day*," for they had the opportunity and physical life where they could work for God's glory. But the "*night*" of death or persecution when we are no longer able to serve God and bring him glory will come. Jesus is our example. He only had a short time to be in the world and through his work he was being the "light of the world." But when he returned to heaven, his followers would become the "lights of the world." (Mt. 5:14) Jesus wants all of his followers to be actively involved in serving others, helping in their

problems. Jesus' healing of the blind man also symbolized how Jesus is the light of the world, for he gives both physical and spiritual light to people.

Q. 27. a) Describe how many Christians have a similar attitude as the Jews towards suffering. b) List ways you have seen God use a tragedy for his glory. c) Why do you think so few Christians are actively involved serving others like Jesus did?

Jesus did not have one pattern to heal people. Sometimes he healed people by touching them and usually his healing was instantaneous without the individual having to do anything. In this case, however, Jesus used spit and dirt from the ground to make a paste to put on the man's eyes. Although Gentiles sometimes used spit as a medicine, most Jews saw it as something unclean. Some scholars think this action was done to help encourage the faith of the blind man. Jesus then sent him to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam which was in the southernmost part of the city. (Note: It was this same Pool that the priests had walked to every day during the Feast of Tabernacles to get water to pour out on the altar. Perhaps Jesus is indirectly saying that whereas the Jews look to the pool for spiritual cleansing, only he is the one who turns ordinary water into healing water. Only he opens spiritually blind eyes, not the water from the pool which the priests took for their worship practices in the Temple.) Jesus asked him to show his faith in obedience, much like Namaan demonstrated his faith by washing in the river Jordan. (2 Ki. 5) The power to heal was not in the water, but in faith that was demonstrated through obedience. It was Jesus who healed, not any special water.

The healing of the blind man caused a great commotion among the people. When they asked the man how he could see, all he could say is someone put mud on his eyes and he was healed when he washed his eyes. He had never seen Jesus so could not tell them who had healed him. Jesus did not even tell the blind man who he was. Unlike many today, Jesus was more concerned with people being healed than gaining a reputation as a healer. Again we see that Jesus made no attempt to draw attention to his healing power or gain a following as a healer.

2. The debate between the healed blind man and the Pharisees (John 9:13-34)

Because of the greatness of the miracle, and because the miracle broke the Sabbath laws established by the Jewish religious leaders, the people brought the man to the religious leaders. Jesus and the man broke three laws established by the religious leaders. First, Jesus made mud with his spit. Second, Jesus healed on the Sabbath, something only allowed when a man's life was in danger. Third, the man washed on the Sabbath, which was also prohibited. It was this breaking of the Sabbath traditions that angered the religious leaders. Their spiritual eyes were blinded by their traditions. They did not rejoice that the man could now see. They did not see the amazing power of Jesus. All they could see was that their traditions had been broken. This is a good warning to all of us that we must be careful not to allow our traditions or expectations to blind us to the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Q. 28. Give two examples of ways that we can allow our traditions and expectations to blind us to God's work in our midst.

The Pharisees examined the man to determine whether the miracle was a true miracle and who it was who performed the miracle. In their discussion together, we can see the confidence of the blind man grow

as he thought things through, and we see the hearts of the Pharisees harden as they remained spiritually blind.

The Pharisees claimed that Jesus was not a man of God because he healed on the Sabbath, disobeying their regulations. The blind man responded that Jesus must be empowered by God, otherwise how could he do a miracle? (Note: We know from other Scriptures that there are times when Satan, working through people, does miracles. So not every miracle comes from God. (2 Thess. 2:9-10, Rev. 13:13) We have all heard stories of great miracles by witch doctors. Even miracles need to be evaluated based upon other criteria: Is the one who does the miracle teaching things that agree with God's Word? Does his life evidence the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Is the person or God getting the glory? The answers to these questions help us to know the source of the miracle, whether it came from God or Satan.) When they asked the previously blind man his opinion, he did not even hesitate. He openly said that Jesus was "a prophet."

The Pharisees then called the parents to verify whether the healed person was their son and had indeed been blind from birth. They were thinking that there must have been some trick since they believed to restore the sight of a man born blind was impossible. The parents were willing to tell the leaders that the person was their son and had been born blind. But they were afraid that the religious leaders would expel them from the community of the Jews so that they could not attend the synagogue or Temple. As a result, they refused to comment on what the healing revealed about Jesus. All Jewish boys were considered "adults" at age 13 and responsible for their own lives and not the parents. So they told the religious leaders to ask their son.

[Note: The Jews were very reluctant to punish Jews with excommunication. They would do it primarily when a person refused to pay the fine assigned by the elders or when he lived in open disobedience to the teachings of God's Word or the teachings of the religious leaders. There were three levels of excommunication. First, the leaders would expel the person from the community and he would not be able to enter the Temple or synagogue for 30 days. He could not join in public worship of any type and was required to wear black clothes as if he was in mourning over a dead relative. Second, if the person still refused to obey God's Word, in the presence of at least 10 people, the man was openly "cursed" by the leaders. No one was allowed to talk to the man. Third, if the man still refused to obey after the assigned period, the man was formally cut off from the community of Jews (e.g. he could not buy and sell from them) and pronounced that he was going to hell. The early church followed a similar attitude in punishing its members who refused to obey God's Word. (1 Cor. 5)]

For the second time the religious leaders asked the healed blind man to appear before them. The words "*Give glory to God*" was a formal oath that the person was to get rid of any deceit and answer and only tell the truth. "Agree with us that Jesus is a sinner" they said. "Don't give glory to this sinful healer" they no doubt meant. But the man showed amazing courage. "I am not in the position to say that he did wrong and sinned when he healed me. All I know is that I was blind and now I see because of him" he responded.

The Pharisees wanted to reveal any "lie" that was in the story and discredit the man's story of being healed and so told the man to repeat what happened. But now the man was angry. Speaking sarcastically he said "Why should I tell you, are you ready to become his followers?" The man knew that no matter what he said, the Pharisees had already made up their minds. They were not interested in the truth but were

only in looking for a way to judge Jesus. His reply angered the Pharisees. "We are the true disciples of Moses. We know the laws. We know what is true. You are only the follower of some unknown person who obviously does not follow Moses. We don't even know where he came from. There is not one religious leader who taught him, so obviously he is untaught and not worthy for us to listen to" they said. The blind man now began to accuse them. "You say that you are the great religious teachers and followers of Moses. But you are showing your ignorance. This man you despise did a great miracle and opened my eyes. Even you teach that God will not listen to the prayers of sinners. This was clearly an act of God because the healing of a man born blind has never happened before. Obviously God would not have listened to this man and allowed him to heal me if he was a sinner. So he must be 'righteous' not a sinner as you say. Your own teachings convict you!" he replied. This was too much for the religious leaders. "You were blind because you were born in sin" they said and expelled him from the synagogue. In their anger the religious leaders went against all of their teachings about just decisions. Later they would do the same thing to Jesus. This revealed the sinfulness of their hearts.

3. Jesus reveals himself to the healed blind man (Jn. 8:35-41)

Jesus heard that the man had been expelled from the synagogue because he refused to agree with the wrong thinking of the Pharisees. So Jesus found him, encouraged him, and helped his faith grow from simply an acceptance that Jesus was a good healer and a prophet to helping the man believe that he was the Messiah. The man had never seen Jesus, but now Jesus asked him if he believed in "*the Son of Man*." (Remember, this was a special title for the Messiah coming out of the vision of Dan. 7:13-14) Obviously, the man now knew that Jesus was the one who healed him. When Jesus revealed to the man that he was the Messiah, the man immediately believed and "*worshipped*" Jesus.

This is a good illustration that for there to be correct faith, there must first be proper knowledge. Many times we try to get people to believe without them knowing what they are believing in. We must never hurry a person to raise his hands to make a profession of faith. Rather, we should carefully explain the truths about their sinfulness, about Jesus' death on the cross, and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Only then can a person make a clear decision. Jesus warns us not to hurry a person. They must know both the benefits and the cost of following Jesus. (See Lk. 14:25-33)

Q. 29. a) Describe how you have seen someone make a profession of faith in Jesus without having adequate knowledge about what his decision means. b) What negative things does this type of hurried faith cause to people who claim to follow Jesus?

Jesus told people that his coming into the world forced people to make a choice. Because Jesus is the only way to God and it was no longer enough to follow the Old Testament laws or any other religion, people must choose. All people are born blind spiritually just as the man was born blind physically. But after becoming his followers, Jesus heals us of our spiritual blindness. Those who refuse to believe in Jesus remain spiritually blind. Even if they are religious and know all of the Bible, if they do not personally choose to follow Jesus, their knowledge amounts to nothing and they are spiritually blind.

The Pharisees asked Jesus if he thought they were "*blind*." Jesus told them that if they had only realized that they were spiritually blind and turned to Jesus for healing, they would be forgiven of their sins and not be guilty. But because they were not able to spiritually see who Jesus is and become his follower, their belief that they could see since they knew the Law and teachings of religious leaders profited them nothing, and they were still guilty of sin. The physically blind man was better than they. Not only was he

healed physically, but he now had spiritual eyes to see. They might have enjoyed physical sight, but spiritually they were blind. When people are filled with self-pride think they can see, they are blind. They think that they are good enough in God's eyes, or they are Christians because they were born in a Christian family, or are the children of a church elder or evangelists, but they are actually blind. But when we humble ourselves before God, admit our need for a Savior for our sins and turn to Jesus, we receive the sight that really matters. When people reject Jesus, they are showing that they are really spiritually blind no matter how great and important they might be.

John used the example of this blind man as a model disciple. When John was writing, there were many Jewish Christians who were facing the choice to either renounce their faith in Jesus or be expelled from the synagogues. Many were tempted to return to Judaism and submit to their religious leaders. But John is teaching them that they must be like the healed blind man. They must firmly believe that Jesus has opened their spiritual eyes no matter what others believe. They were not to be afraid of the religious leaders who might appear to have spiritual eyes, but are blind. Even if they were expelled from the community of the Jews, it was better to have spiritual eyes and forgiveness from sin than enjoy fellowship with fellow Jews and remain spiritually blind and guilty of sin. And like the healed blind man, even though we have never seen Jesus with our physical eyes, we are to stay loyal to him and not hide our faith.

Q. 30. a) Describe people who think that they know truth but are actually spiritually blind. b) Explain what the blind man teaches us about the need to stand up for our beliefs in Jesus even when our friends, family, and community threaten to ostracize us. c) Describe how this story warns church leaders against thinking that they know everything and too quickly use their "power" and so miss the work of God in their midst.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. Read Mk. 9:33-37. a) What were the disciples arguing about? b) What did Jesus say defined a great leader? c) Compare Jesus' attitude towards leadership and what the world teaches is good leadership. How is it similar? How is it different? d) List different types of problems in the church that originate from wrong understandings towards leadership. What is the perspective on leadership that causes the problems?

2. Read Mt. 18:6-20. a) What warning does Jesus give against causing another Christian to fall into sin? b) Why do you think Jesus gave such a severe warning against causing others to sin? c) Describe ways Christians can cause other Christians to fall into sin today. d) List the steps a Christian is to take to reconcile with someone who is sinning and refuses to repent. e) What is the purpose of church discipline? How is it different from punishing a criminal? f) Which of these steps do Christians, especially elders of a church, not take when bringing church discipline? g) List examples of when these steps should be applied in a church. For what type of sins?

3. Read Mt. 18:21-35. a) What command did Jesus give about forgiveness and how often? b) What was Jesus seeking to teach in his parable about the king and the two servants? c) In what way are we like the one who owed a lot of money? d) In what way are we like the one who refuses to forgive the one with a small debt? e) List examples of situations where Christians have a difficult time forgiving

someone in the church or another tribe. What does this passage teach about God's attitude towards them when they don't forgive?

4. Read Lk. 9:57-62. a) What response did the three individuals have to following Jesus as his disciples? b) What did Jesus teach them about the cost of following him as a disciple? c) What do these verses teach us about how we are to share the Gospel with people and the need to prepare them for a life of discipleship?

5. a) What does the story of the healing of the blind man teach about physical blindness and spiritual blindness? Which type of blindness is worse? Why? b) List situations people can think that they see (understand) when in fact they are spiritually blind.

LESSON SEVENTEEN

FIRST DAY

Tsion was a popular girl in the choir who was very beautiful. She had grown up in a loving Christian home where she was taught God's Word. And in her church people desired to obey God's laws, especially his command to not commit sexual immorality. One day Tsion and another choir member fell into sexual sin and Tsion became pregnant. She was expelled from the choir as the elders of her church put her under church discipline. She was filled with shame over her sin. And she was deeply hurt as her parents, who were embarrassed by her sin, no longer treated her with love and her friends turned away from her. "Is there forgiveness for my sin? How would Jesus have treated me?" she wondered as she hid at home and refused to go to church.

When there is such a sin among followers of Jesus, it is very hard to be Biblical in the way that we treat the sinner.

First, we often follow the practice of our culture, which is to excuse the boy and punish the girl. Both Tsion and her friend sinned, but the major punishment and stigma fell against Tsion. Our culture often teaches that it is permissible for young men to be sexually promiscuous. "After all, they are 'men' and need sexual release" the world teaches. But the Bible never follows this cultural view. It does not matter if the one committing the sin is male or female, both have equally sinned in God's eyes.

Second, Christianity is a religion of forgiveness. We are promised that no matter how great the sin, if we come to God and confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin. (See 1 Jn. 1:9) God is a God of mercy, forgiving us when we fall. Church leaders and Christians must be very careful that we do not become harsh and judgmental when someone falls into sin. Rather than punish Tsion by refusing to show love and compassion to her, Christians are expected to graciously show love to Tsion, helping her get over the embarrassment she will feel for the rest of her life for having fallen into sin and bearing a child outside of marriage. As we have seen in the story of Jesus, he always forgave the sinners. He was even known as the "friend of sinners." Not once did Jesus ostracize a person because of their sin. In our days we must be very careful that we do not become so judgmental against sinners that we proudly look down upon them and judge them harshly.

Third, in Christianity we actively seek to be holy. Repeatedly the Bible tells God's people to be holy as God is holy. (See 1 Pet. 1:15-16) Often Christians fall into error of treating sin indifferently. The belief "Don't worry if you sin, God will forgive you" provides excuses for some people to continue in their life of sin without seeking to live in holy obedience to God's laws. But the Bible says that we are to discipline those who claim to follow Jesus when they refuse to repent of the sins which they commit. (See 1 Cor. 5:6-13) Christians should never become indifferent to sin, but work hard to maintain a standard of purity expected of followers of Jesus.

Q. 1. a) Describe how you have seen Christians fall into each of these three wrong understandings about sin. b) Read Jn. 7:53-8:11. 1) Describe the situation of the woman who was brought to Jesus. 2) What did

the religious leaders want Jesus to do? 3) What did Jesus say in response? 4) What did Jesus say to the woman about her life and sin?

THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY (Jn. 7:52-8:11)

Most scholars believe that the original Gospel of John did not include this story of the woman caught in adultery since the story is not found in the most ancient manuscripts. However, scholars do not think it was a "made-up" story. Most likely this true story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery passed on orally from Christian to Christian for several hundred years or was perhaps part of non-biblical writings about Jesus. Luke tells us that there were many such books. (Lk. 1:1) Eventually, a scribe who was copying the book of John and did not want this story to be lost included it in John's account of Jesus. This story interrupts the flow of the account of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles. (The story John wrote would have moved from Jn. 7:52 to Jn. 8:12.) Although we should realize it was not part of the original Gospel of John, it was probably a true story that provides an important insight into how Jesus treated sinners.

Jesus was ministering in Jerusalem. By now the religious leaders like the Pharisees were no longer seeking to know the truth about who Jesus was. Rather they were looking for ways to trap Jesus so that he would lose credibility and the Jews would stop saying that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus often spent the night in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives, a hill to the east of the city of Jerusalem. It could be he went to Bethany to stay with his friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus since Bethany was just beyond the Mount of Olives.

Early one morning Jesus was in the temple courts teaching the people. The fact that he was sitting down indicated that he was providing formal teaching as a religious teacher. But the Pharisees and the scribes interrupted his teaching and brought an woman to Jesus who had been caught in adultery and asked him to pronounce judgment against her. Most likely these were delegates of the Sanhedrin, the official Jewish court who had the authority to punish Jews for disobeying the laws of Moses. In Jewish law, the woman had to be caught in the act of sexual adultery for her to be punished. No doubt the Pharisees brought the required two or three witnesses needed for her to be condemned. These witnesses were to be the first to stone the woman once the judgment was pronounced. If they were found to be false witnesses, they in turn were to be punished with stoning just like the woman. (See Deut. 17:7; 19:19) Interestingly, they did not bring the man who committed adultery with her. The Old Testament laws commanded that both the man and woman were to be punished. (See Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:13-24) Some scholars wonder whether the Pharisees knowingly organized the situation so the woman could be used to trap Jesus. They let the man go free for cooperating with them.

The Jews saw adultery as a very serious sin in the eyes of God. There were two situations which they classified as adultery. First, the most severe was when a married woman had a sexual relationship with someone who was not her husband. Second, the less severe was when an engaged woman had sexual relationship with her fiancée during the period of her betrothal. The Old Testament laws were very severe when either of these situations arose. Both the woman and man were to be stoned to death. God wanted to maintain the purity of marriage among his people. But over time the Jews found this punishment to be too severe. During the days of Jesus, only rarely would they stone someone to death for the sin of adultery. When they did punish those guilty of adultery with death, Jewish practice at this time was that a person caught in adultery was to be buried up to their knees in manure. They would have two ropes tied around their neck and one group of people would pull in one direction and another group of people would pull in the opposite direction causing the sinner to be strangled. Usually the Jews chose to punish the woman

by demanding that her husband or fiancée divorce her. You will remember that this is what Joseph was planning to do with Mary when he thought she had been unfaithful to him. (See Mt. 1:18-19)

The Pharisees had no concern about this woman and the embarrassment they were causing her. When church leaders become self-righteous, they often have little compassion for the sinner. Nor were the Pharisees really interested in maintaining the purity of God's people. Otherwise they would have also punished the man. They only brought the woman to Jesus so that they could trap Jesus. They thought they had Jesus in a position that no matter what he did, he would bring disrepute upon himself. There were three things included in their trap:

a. Would Jesus obey the Old Testament laws to stone the woman to death? If not, then they could accuse him of going against the laws of God and demonstrate to the people that Jesus was not a righteous man and therefore not a true prophet.

b. If Jesus did punish the woman as stated in the Old Testament laws, then he would lose favor among the "sinners" who were attracted to Jesus because of his compassion.

c. If Jesus did punish the woman and encourage people to stone her, he would be going against the Roman law which did not allow the Jews to kill a person. The Pharisees could then accuse Jesus before the Romans and have him punished.

Jesus did not say anything. Rather, he bent over and began to write in the dust. Scholars have often wondered what he wrote. Was he just making meaningless marks as he thought how to respond? Or was he listing different sins which those gathered around had committed much like a Roman judge wrote down the list of crimes a criminal had committed before sentencing them? (The Greek word "to write" here was often used for the judge writing down a record of wrongs of an accused person.) Seeing Jesus writing their hidden sins would have embarrassed the people who did not want their own sins exposed.

The Pharisees became impatient with Jesus, so they demanded that he give a response to their question. Jesus looked at them and said "Go ahead and kill her- if you are without sin." It could be that Jesus is saying "If you are totally sinless, then you have the right to punish her. If you aren't sinless, then you aren't in the position to punish her." Clearly they were all sinners. And the attitude of the Pharisees of attempting to trap Jesus rather than seek the holiness of God's community was clearly a sin. Other scholars think that Jesus was not just talking about sin, but he was saying "If you have never wanted to commit adultery like this woman, then you are in the position to punish her. But if you have lusted at a woman and wanted to commit adultery, then you are not in the position to punish her, for you have actually committed the sin of adultery in your heart, even if you have not done it in person." (See Mt. 5:27-28 where Jesus joins lust with the sin of adultery.) Those in the crowd were men and Jesus knew that men frequently struggle with lust. So Jesus emphasized the holiness of God, but in a way that made each person acknowledge their sinfulness.

According to Jewish law, those who were witnesses of the sin were to be the first to cast the stone. (Deut. 17:7) But Jesus adds to the requirement of the Old Testament law. Now he demanded that those who brought punishment must themselves be pure from sin. In their attitude towards the woman and seeking to use her to entrap Jesus, the men were as evil as the woman who had committed adultery. Embarrassed, one by one those holding rocks ready to stone the girl crept away with the oldest ones

leaving first. They were the elders of the community who no doubt realized the sinful attitude they themselves had in seeking to use a woman to trap Jesus.

Jesus was left alone with the woman. She no doubt was expecting to die, but now Jesus looked at her with eyes of compassion and forgiveness. "Where are the witnesses who were demanding your death?" he asked her. "They have all gone" she replied. Jesus, God's representative, demonstrated his mercy by forgiving her sin. But he also upheld God's holiness by warning her to stop sinning. Jesus was not saying that it did not matter whether she sinned or not. Like the lame man (Jn. 5:14), Jesus warned her to stop her life of sin. Otherwise, God's mercy would end and she would face his judgment.

This story teaches us an important lesson about God. God is a God of mercy and he always seeks the repentance and forgiveness of sinners. There is not one sinner who comes to God for mercy who is turned away by God because his sin is too great. But just because God is merciful does not mean that he is indifferent to sin which people commit. If they persist in their life of sin, instead of his mercy, they will face his judgment.

This story is also important for church leaders to apply. There will always be those in our churches who fall into sin. They will commit adultery, get drunk, or divorce their wives. We must be very careful to not become like the Pharisees and treat them harshly, seeking to embarrass them and punish them. We should also be careful that we don't become proud of our "righteousness" in our hearts. The elders should never see themselves as the moral protectors of the church, going around with a "stick" to punish all who sin. We must always remember that we too are sinners who stand forgiven only because of the grace and mercy of God. We need to deal gently with sinners, for that is how Jesus dealt with them. (Heb. 4:14-5:3) Our first reaction when we hear of someone like Tsion falling into sin should be pity, not anger. Like Jesus did for the woman, we should always offer people chances to be forgiven by God and to have another opportunity to serve him with joy.

But on the other hand, church leaders should never become indifferent to *unrepentant* sinners among God's people. We must discipline them so that they will turn to God for mercy and turn away from their open sin. If we don't, then we abandon the sinner to face the severe judgment of God. Love for God means that we want to uphold his standard of righteousness. And love for the sinner means that we want them to be forgiven of their sin by repenting, not setting them up for God's punishment by allowing them to continue in their sinful ways.

Q. 2. How do you think church leaders should have handled Tsion's situation to show both mercy and yet a concern for holiness?

SECOND DAY

Q. 3. Read Jn. 10:1-21. a) Describe how Jesus contrasts his shepherding people with others who shepherd people. b) Describe Jesus' relationship with his sheep. c) Who do you think are the "other sheep" that Jesus mentioned in verse 16?

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD (Jn. 10:1-21)

Throughout the Bible, one of the favorite symbols of leadership is the symbol of a shepherd with his sheep. God is pictured as being the shepherd and Israel his sheep. (Ps. 23) The leaders of Israel (kings, priests, prophets) were also said to be shepherds, although often they took care of God's Jewish flock poorly. (Jer. 23:1-4; Ezek. 34) The Old Testament also predicts a day when the Son of David, the Messiah, would come and be the true shepherd of his people. (Is. 40:11) The New Testament continues this symbolism of a shepherd and his sheep. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd of the flock of God, the Church. (1 Pet. 5:4; Heb. 13:20) And elders, especially the teaching elder, was said to be the shepherd of a local body of believers. (1 Pet. 5:2-3)

In John 10:1-21 Jesus uses this very familiar symbolism of God's relationship to his people and applies it to himself. "*I am the good shepherd*" he said. In claiming this title Jesus was indirectly comparing himself to God whom all Jews knew was their Great Shepherd. He also used the word "good" because he wanted to contrast his style of shepherding God's people with the attitude of the religious leaders, like the Pharisees, who were also shepherds of God's people, but were "bad shepherds."

In order for us to understand the illustration of the shepherd and his sheep, we must know what a shepherd was like in Palestine during the days of Jesus. We are all used to seeing a small boy take care of his father's sheep and goats. Usually he pays little attention to the flock, but plays football with other boys. And he is often cruel to the sheep, hitting them with rocks or whips when they do not do what he wants. There is little care and compassion or close relationship between the shepherd boy and his flock.

In Palestine, however, it was very different. Much of the area around Jerusalem was not suitable for farming since it was very rocky and dry. So most of those living in remote villages would have large flocks of sheep. Because there was often little grass close to the villages, shepherds would walk for many miles to take the flock to where there was grass, living with the flock in the open fields for weeks at a time. Unlike the sheep we have in Ethiopia which are raised primarily for the meat they provide, the sheep in Palestine were raised for their wool. Only rarely would the Jews kill a sheep for food. This meant that a shepherd would have his sheep with him for many years and so the shepherd developed a very close relationship with the sheep in his flock. He would give special names to each of the sheep, and the sheep would get used to his voice and the special sounds he made to call them.

The shepherd had three different instruments to help him in his work.

First, he had a sling usually tied to his belt. If he saw wild animals coming towards the flock, he would use his sling to drive them away or even kill them, much like David did. (1 Sam. 17:48-49) If the sheep were wandering too far, he would use his sling to throw a stone in front of the sheep to drive them back into the flock.

Second, he had a rod. This was a short stick with a lump of wood at the end. Often the shepherd would put pieces of metal in the end of the rod. The rod was used to defend himself and the sheep. So when robbers came to steal the sheep or when wild animals came to kill the sheep, he would use his rod to beat them. A shepherd knew that his responsibility was to defend the sheep, even if it meant that he was injured or killed in the battle. If one of the sheep was killed or stolen, the shepherd had to find part of the body to show the owner. Otherwise, he was strongly reprimanded. A shepherd who ran away when there was danger was considered worthless.

Third, he had a staff. The staff was a longer stick and had a curve at the end. This stick had two major functions. First it was used to pull sheep out of dangerous situations. So if the sheep was caught in some brush in a ravine or about to fall off a cliff, the shepherd would use the staff to pull the sheep back to safety. Second, the staff was used to carefully examine each sheep at the end of the day to make sure there were no cuts on the sheep. The shepherd would often force each sheep to walk under his staff before entering the sheep pen at night. (Ezek. 20:37; Lev. 27:32) If he saw a sheep with a cut, he would use the staff to pull it to himself so that he could examine the sore and pour oil on it. (Note: David referred to the God's rod and staff as tools of comfort. Psalm 23:4)

Unlike shepherds in Ethiopia who drive the sheep in front of them, in Palestine the shepherd would walk in front of the sheep leading them to where the grass or water was. Because he had been with his sheep for many years, they would always follow him. In fact, there are stories where if the shepherd was not visible to the sheep, they would become very disturbed and run back and forth looking for him. Only when the shepherd was with them did they feel safe and would eat. At night, shepherds used two types of sheep pens. In each village there was a special pen where all of the neighborhood kept their sheep. It had a door and the community would hire a doorkeeper who would have the key to the door. But if they were far away from their village, the shepherds would build a sheep pen in the middle of a field. The sheep pen was made of a circle of rocks and they would often put briars on top of the wall to keep robbers or wild animals out. But this sheep pen had no door. Instead, the shepherd would lie down across the small opening in the sheep pen. Any robber or wild animal would have to first walk over him before they could reach the sheep. The shepherd would literally lay down his life on behalf of the sheep. Often there were several flocks using the sheep pen. So each morning the shepherds would stand in two different parts of the field and begin making their special noise by which they called their sheep. Hearing their shepherds' voice, each flock of sheep would go their respective shepherd and begin to follow him. But the sheep would never listen to the call of anyone who was not their shepherd. They would not listen to the call of another shepherd or the call of a stranger who was trying to steal them.

It was this type of shepherd that Jesus used to describe his relationship to his followers who believed on him. Notice the following points in Jesus' teaching:

1. Only the shepherd who enters the sheep pen through the gate is the real shepherd. Others who do not come through the gate are false shepherds. Jesus was saying that he alone is the real Messiah. One of the main names Jews gave to the Messiah was the true shepherd of God's people. Before, during, and just after the time of Jesus there were many leaders claiming to be the messiah who stood up and called people to follow them and revolt against Rome. Many people would join the rebellion against Rome and die in the effort. And there were many religious leaders like the Pharisees who called people to follow them, but would only weigh them down with religious rules, not bring true rest to their souls. These religious leaders abused people like the blind man healed by Jesus (Jn. 9) and the woman caught in adultery. (Jn. 8:1-11) Jesus calls them "*thieves and robbers*." Like thieves, these false shepherds were always getting things for themselves, not giving their lives on behalf of others.

The political and religious leaders also did not come through the "*gate*" of God's calling. They did not have the permission of God, the gatekeeper. Jesus claims to be this gate. (Jn 10:7) He is the one through whom people enter into the sheep pen of God's people. Other false messiahs and false leaders tried to get people to come into their own sheep pen. But only through Jesus could someone come into God's sheep pen and receive eternal life. Only in Jesus will life have true meaning, a joy that is full in a way that

the world does not know. Jesus does not promise a life of ease and comfort. But he says that when we follow him, our life will have meaning and a deep inner joy and peace in spite of persecution or problems.

There are false shepherds today as well. There are the false religious shepherds who teach things that do not agree with God's Word. Or there are the false elder shepherds who like to lead but show little compassion or concern for the flock, the members of their churches. And there are the false political shepherds who promise that they will do things for the people, but do not bring any change. Jesus is teaching his followers that we should never fully put our trust in other human leaders. They will always disappoint us. But we can trust him, because he alone is the "good shepherd" who will take care of us unselfishly.

Q. 4. a) List ways people put their trust in other shepherds rather than in Jesus the good shepherd. b) How are we often disappointed by them? c) Explain how Jesus has met your deepest needs and given you a type of joy and quality of life that is never found in anyone else.

2. Those who are the true sheep of God will recognize the voice of God's chosen shepherd, Jesus. Most of the Jews and especially the religious leaders did not believe that Jesus was God's chosen Messiah. That is because they were not really God's sheep, trained to hear the voice of God and his Messiah. But there were some, like the twelve disciples, who had recognized the voice of God in Jesus and followed him. Those who were of the flock of Satan would only listen to Satan's voice and follow him. But those who were of God's flock would hear Jesus' voice and follow him. This is true in every church as well. There are those who are in God's flock and prove it by knowing the voice of Jesus and following him. And there are those who pretend to be in God's flock, but show that they aren't because they don't know the voice of Jesus and don't obey him. They have no relationship with the shepherd, just like sheep had no intimate relationship with a hired shepherd.

Jesus compares the close relationship that exists between God the Father and him with the relationship between him and his sheep who know his voice. Just as Jesus personally knows the voice of God the Father and obeys it, so also the true sheep of Jesus intimately know the voice of Jesus and obey him. To the Jews, the word "know" (Jn 10:14-15) does not refer to knowing the facts about someone, but the knowledge of having a close relationship with someone. So Jesus is claiming to have an intimate relationship with God the Father, and he seeks that same type of relationship with his sheep.

We are living in days where many claim to be followers of Jesus, the good shepherd. But through their actions they show that they are not the type of sheep Jesus which they should be. They have two problems.

First, they don't know the difference between Jesus' voice and the voice of false shepherds. Jesus primarily speaks through the Bible, but they don't know the Bible. So they end up listening to the voice of false shepherds who promise them physical blessing or emphasize healing. These false shepherds often speak in videos, DVDs, and magazines which sound very good to those who are not trained to listen to Jesus. We must learn to listen to the voice of Jesus as he calls us to the path of truth and discipleship.

Second, they don't listen to obey. They come to church and Jesus speaks to them through a sermon, challenging them to be holy, to discipline themselves to pray more or study God's Word, or be more generous with their money in helping others or giving to evangelists. They say "that sounds good" but then they do not obey. They have not learned to listen and obey their master, Jesus.

Q. 5. a) List other "voices" that many Christians listen to today rather than to Jesus. b) What have you done to learn to listen to the voice of Jesus, your shepherd, rather than to the voice of others? c) Describe ways people claim to be Jesus' sheep, but do not listen to his voice and obey. d) Examine your life. Are there things in your life when you have heard Jesus calling you, but you are not obeying? Confess these and become one of his good sheep by obeying.

3. Jesus is the "*good shepherd*." Jesus compares himself to two groups of people.

First, there are the "bad" shepherds. These are the religious leaders who have assumed leadership roles over people but don't serve the sheep. (See Ezek. 34 for a description of this type of shepherd.)

Second, there are the "*hirelings*." These are people hired to work as shepherds. Jesus shows the big difference there is between someone who has the heart of a shepherd versus the heart of an employee. The true shepherd cares for his sheep and has a personal relationship with them. Because they belong to him, he does all he can for the benefit of the sheep, even giving his life to keep them alive when robbers or wild animals attack. The employee, however, thinks only of himself. So when something dangerous comes, he runs, saving himself and letting the sheep wander or be destroyed by the enemies. (Note: The wolf was a large animal, about the size of a hyena, which lived in the Judean wilderness and would attack sheep, seeking to kill and eat them. They were the chief enemies of the sheep.)

In contrast, the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. Jesus was no doubt pointing to the truth that in just a few months he would die for his sheep on the cross. But Jesus is not just the good shepherd who dies on behalf of his sheep. Every day he lives as our good shepherd by doing things for our benefit. He protects us from Satan's attacks. He meets our needs. He feeds us through the Word and through sermons. Jesus continues to meet our needs.

This passage provides an important challenge to church elders and employed church ministers. As church elders we can become like "bad shepherds" who serve to meet our own needs (power, honor, money) and not give ourselves unselfishly for the needs of the members of our churches. We can become like the Pharisees, weighing the members down with many rules and regulations, but with little compassion and not attempting to get involved in their lives and help them. The Bible warns us that God will judge such shepherds severely.

Those of us hired as pastors and evangelists must also be careful. We are called to be good shepherds serving under the chief shepherd, Jesus. (See 1 Pet. 5:1-4) But if we are not careful, we will develop the attitude of a "hireling." The difference lies in our attitudes when we minister. If we focus upon meeting the needs of the members of the church and not our own benefits, then we are good shepherds. We are laying down our lives for them by giving up of our time to meet their needs. Or we know each of them by name and seek to make sure they are spiritually healthy. When they struggle, we do what we can to help them. And if necessary, we protect them from false teachers who lead them astray. But if we are thinking "How can I get more pay? How can I get more education? Where can I go to live so I have a more comfortable life style?" then we have the attitude of a hireling, focusing upon our needs rather than the church. Unfortunately, many church ministers are no longer good shepherds but hirelings. When they find a ministry bringing greater personal benefits, they leave their sheep for a better place.

Q. 6. a) Describe a church minister who was a "good shepherd." What did he do that demonstrated that he served the flock rather than himself? b) Describe a church minister who was a "hireling." What did he do which demonstrated that he was more concerned about himself rather than the flock? c) Describe how many elders treat ministers more like hirelings rather than good shepherds.

4. Jesus claims that he has other flocks that are not in the sheep pen. (Jn 10:16) For thousands of years (since the days of Abraham) the Jews thought that only Jews could be part of God's flock. Many of them believed that it was impossible for Gentiles to be saved. They thought God had created the Gentiles to be slaves for the Jews or to be like wood for the fires of hell. If a Gentile wanted to become part of God's flock, they had to become Jews through circumcision. But Jesus is saying that in the near future he would have a Gentile flock of believers. They would not remain separate flocks that he would keep apart. Rather, Jesus would bring the Jews and Gentiles together into one flock.

This is an important truth for us to remember today. On the one hand we must remember that Jesus does have different "flocks" today. There is the Kale Heywet flock, the Mulu Wangel flock, the Makene Yesus flock, etc. Or there is the Oromo flock, the Amhara flock, or the Afar flock. But although we might worship in different ways and in different languages, we must always remember that we are actually one flock. We all belong to God the Father as his sheep. And we all have Jesus as our shepherd. So we should never allow pride or exclusivism to destroy the unity of God's flock. Jesus is not teaching that all "flocks" should become one by getting rid of all denominations. But he is saying that we must never let our differences divide us and keep us from working together for the glory of our one Father and one Shepherd.

Q. 7. a) Describe how you have seen believers seek to keep their flock separate from other flocks of Jesus. b) Describe how we can be part of different cultures and denominations with distinct ways of worshipping, but also have a spirit of oneness because we all belong to one flock.

5. Jesus says he has total authority over the laying down of his life. (Jn 10:17-18) We often look at the death of Jesus and think that the Jewish and Roman leaders put Jesus to death on the cross. But Jesus insists that that is not accurate. Jesus states that he had control over his own life. He would determine when and how he would lay down his life and die for the benefit of the sheep. The Jewish or Roman leaders did not take his life from him. His death on the cross was no accident, but the plan of God. And Jesus had the authority to "*take it up again*." Here Jesus is referring to his resurrection. Jesus had the authority to give his life in death, and he had the authority to raise it to life again.

As they listened to Jesus' claims, the Jews were again divided in their opinions of Jesus. (Jn 10:19-21) Some thought he was demon-possessed. Jews believed the lack of mental health was caused by demons. "Surely no one could make such claims about himself without being insane" they thought. But the others pointed to the miracles that Jesus did and said "these types of actions are not signs of insanity." If we take Jesus' words serious, then we are only left with two choices. We can either say "he was insane to think that he was God and that he was going to die for the sins of mankind." Or we can say "what he said is true and he is God's Son, the one who died for my sins on the cross." But we cannot say, as many people throughout the world say, "he was a good man who was mistakenly killed by the Jews and Romans." No sane good person would make the type of claims that Jesus made. Just like Jesus divided people into those who believed and those who didn't, so also today people are still being divided into two sides; those who

reject him and those who believe on him. Unfortunately, the majority of the world today joins those who claimed that he was "insane" because they do not believe in Jesus.

THIRD DAY

We have now entered into the last six months of Jesus' earthly ministry. Opposition to Jesus in Jerusalem was daily growing stronger. So Jesus left the city and began his last ministry tour. The Gospels give few details of this time of Jesus life. It seems most of the time was spent speaking throughout the regions of Judea. But Jesus made a quick tour to Galilee, then into Perea before returning to Jerusalem where he would die on the cross. (See map in Appendix A at the back of the book.)

Many of the truths discussed today are found in other passages that we studied earlier, so we will summarize what Jesus taught.

JESUS SENDS OUT 70 DISCIPLES TO ANNOUNCE HIS COMING KINGDOM (Lk. 10:1-24)

Q. 8. Read Lk. 10:1-24. a) Where did Jesus send the 70 (72) disciples? b) What warning did he give to them before he sent them out? c) What instructions did he give to them about their ministry? d) What did the 70 say about the results of ministry? e) What did Jesus say about the impact of the ministry upon Satan? f) What did Jesus say the disciples were to rejoice in?

The Gospels reveals that Jesus had different levels of disciples. Peter, James, and John were his closest friends and Jesus trained them the most. These three would become the first key leaders of the church once Jesus returned to heaven. This demonstrates that it is very important for the major leaders of the church to be well trained in how to minister and lead their churches. They must have the correct knowledge of what it means to follow Christ, be the spiritual examples that all other leaders and members can emulate, and also help the members minister in a way which expands the kingdom of God. Next, there were the 12 apostles, a unique body of disciples who were the foundation of the new people of God, the church. For one generation God set aside these 12 men to be his formal representatives, establishing the doctrines of the church, and guiding the new church during its formative years. There was another group of 70 disciples to whom Jesus assigned ministry just before he died on the cross. There was also a group of 120 men and women who were together when the Holy Spirit descended upon them. (Acts 2) Finally there were over 500 followers of Jesus who saw him after his resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:6)

Knowing that his earthly life would soon be over, Jesus wanted to have a final tour throughout the villages and towns of Judea, Galilee, and Perea to give them one last opportunity to hear the Gospel. To prepare each village for his arrival, Jesus sent out 70 disciples as messengers. Notice the following things about these 70 disciples:

1. There were 70 disciples. (35 teams of messengers.) The ancient manuscripts disagree over the number of messengers. Some manuscripts say 72 disciples and other manuscripts say 70 disciples, which is probably accurate. It is not clear if these 70 included the 12 apostles or not. Scholars agree that the number 70 had symbolic meaning for the Jews and could mean one of the following:

a. There were 70 elders appointed by God to assist Moses. (Numbers 11:16-25) So it could be that these 70 messengers symbolized that God had established another body of elders to lead his new people, the church.

b. There were 70 elders and religious leaders who led the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court. So some scholars think that Jesus was symbolizing that from now on, the church had its own "high court" to handle all matters. The believers no longer needed to turn to the Jewish leaders for guidance because Jesus had established his own leadership structure that replaced the Jewish religious court.

c. These 70 disciples symbolized the Gentile nations of the world and demonstrated that Jesus was now ready to move his church from being a Jewish religion to a universal religion where people from all nations were welcome as equals. In Gen. 10, the Hebrew Bible lists 70 nations of the world. (The Greek translation called the Septuagint, however, lists 72 nations.) So the Jews believed that there were 70 nations in the world. Perhaps Jesus was symbolizing that from now on there would no longer be a favored position for the Jews. Rather, his new people would consist of people from all nations. He was also symbolizing that his new people were responsible to take the Gospel to all nations of the world.

Each church is to be like the 70 messengers, taking the Gospel to the lost people in the world no matter what tribe they are from. They were not to keep God's message of salvation in their local areas or with their own people group. Christianity is a world-wide religion. And each nation, even Ethiopia, has a part to play in taking the Gospel to all nations of the world. We must always guard ourselves against the tendency to focus upon our own people group. Today there are billions of people in the world who have not heard about Jesus. Shouldn't the church in Ethiopia join other churches around the world and reach out to these other people groups with the Gospel? Rev. 7:9-10 tells us of a day when people from every tribe of the world will join us in worship before God's throne. Each church should work hard to make this vision a reality.

Q. 9. a) List unreached people groups in Ethiopia who need the Gospel. What is your church doing to reach them? b) List some of the major unreached peoples in the world. What is your church doing to reach them? c) What are creative ways the church in Ethiopia can reach out to its neighboring nations with the Gospel? d) Pray for some of these unreached people groups and ask God to raise up laborers from your church or the church in Ethiopia to take the Gospel to them.

2. The evangelists were sent two by two. This was for two major reasons. The Jews believed that there was to always be at least two witnesses to verify that something was true. (Deut. 19:15) By being two, these messengers fulfilled the Jewish obligation in testifying that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus also knew that it is very difficult for one person to stand alone in ministry. But when there are two, they can encourage each other when times of persecution, resistance, and loneliness come. (Eccl. 4:9-12) This is an important model to follow when assigning evangelists to start new ministries among unreached people groups.

3. These 70 messengers established the pattern for how all future messengers (evangelists) of the church should function. Jesus told them that he was "*sending them*." He used the word from which we get the Greek word for "apostles." He is saying that all evangelists are minor apostles, sent by Jesus into the world with the Gospel.

a. The church was to recognize the impossibility of reaching the world with the Gospel since the laborers were few. So we are to always ask God to touch people and raise them up as evangelists. (Lk 10:2) Each church is to make this a major prayer request. It is as we pray for God to raise up evangelists from our midst that we guard ourselves from our tendency to become selfish and only think about the ministries of our churches. And God uses our prayers to touch the lives of men and women and in our congregation send them out as messengers, fulfilling the most important ministry of the church.

b. The evangelists were not to expect a good reception from the people to whom they minister. Rather, it will be a dangerous and difficult ministry filled with opposition and persecution. Many people would be like "wolves" who quickly destroy the evangelists ("sheep"). (Lk 10:3)

c. The disciples were to not take extra money and clothes in order to maintain a convenient lifestyle. (Lk 11:4) Rather they were to trust God to meet their needs. Through the hospitality of those who receive them, God promised to provide for their daily needs. (Lk 10:7) [Note: Jesus would later change this requirement as the disciples were sent out into the world. (Lk. 22:35-36) Although the Apostle Paul accepted gifts from churches, usually he worked to supply the needs for himself and his fellow workers. (1 Thess. 2:9)] One of the great temptations facing evangelists and church workers is the desire to have a comfortable life as defined by the world. One reason many youth today do not want to be evangelists is because the pay is poor and they won't be able to live like they want. Jesus was warning his followers against this attitude. The early church took this warning seriously and taught that if any traveling evangelist or prophet asked for money or stayed too long in one place, he was to be classified as a false prophet.

d. The task was so urgent that the disciples were not to "greet" people on the journey. (Lk 10:4) Jewish custom was that when they stopped to greet people, the formalities of greeting would take a long time. Jesus was not saying the disciples were to be impolite to people as they met them. Rather, he was symbolically telling them that the matter of witnessing about Jesus was so urgent that they must focus on getting the Good News out without becoming side tracked with other matters. Most likely Jesus was using an Old Testament story as the basis for this instruction. (See 2 Ki. 4:29)

e. The 70 disciples were to trust God to lead them to the right people who would invite them in to stay at their house. (Lk 10:5-7) Jesus called these people "*men of peace*." Even if they were not believers, these individuals were open to the Gospel. These open-minded people would take care of the disciples' physical needs, for "*the worker deserves his wages*." In other words, through these people, God would provide money, food, and clothes for the evangelists. The church should never expect external evangelists to serve without enough wages to live on. Rather, if paid by the church, they should pay them sufficiently so that they do not need to worry about how they and their families can live but can focus upon the important ministry of reaching the lost with the Gospel and teaching God's people.

Jesus told the messengers not to move from home to home. Probably this was for two reasons. It would keep those who had opened their homes up to provide hospitality from feeling hurt as their guests moved on to someone else's home. It would also keep the evangelists from selfishly looking for a more convenient home. Suppose the evangelist came to live in a poor man's home and was given simple food and a mat to sleep on the floor with the rest of the family. As his popularity grew, a rich person came to him and said "stay in my home. I can give you a good bed and better food." Jesus told them to not accept that invitation.

f. The 70 disciples were to fulfill all of the ministries which Jesus had done. (Lk 10:8-16) They were given the authority to work as ambassadors of Jesus, speaking with his authority and ministering with his power. (This is what it means when it says "*in my name.*") Jesus gave these 70 the power to heal the sick, just like he healed the sick; and the authority to cast out demons just like he did. But most importantly, they were to proclaim that in Jesus, God's kingdom had arrived.

As messengers, they were responsible to proclaim clearly the Gospel. But once they presented the Gospel, each individual and town became responsible for how they responded to the message. If the town resisted the Gospel, the disciples were to "*shake off the dust from their feet.*" The Jews had a practice where when they were walking from Gentile territory into Jewish territory, they would shake off the dust of their feet as a sign that they were bringing none of the evil and uncleanness of the Gentiles with them into Israel. Those who refused to accept Jesus were supposed to be considered as unclean as the Gentiles. And Jesus insisted that these towns who heard the Gospel and saw the miracles and did not believe were in a very dangerous position, for God would severely judge them. Evil Gentile nations like Tyre (the nearest Gentile city to Galilee which historically was very evil- see Ezekiel 28) or even Sodom, the major model of God's judgment upon evil, would be in a better position than Jewish cities like Capernaum (which Jesus used as the base of his ministry and did many miracles) and Korazim (not mentioned elsewhere in the Gospels). God would judge their unbelief more severely on the day of judgment.

Because these messengers, and evangelists today, work as "ambassadors" of Jesus, how people treat them indicates how they would treat Jesus. If people listen to the evangelists, they are listening to Jesus. But if they reject the evangelists, they are rejecting Jesus. Even though the Jews claimed to worship the God of the Old Testament, when they rejected Jesus, they were rejecting God himself. No one could claim to worship God and reject Jesus.

g. The messengers report on the success of their ministry. (Lk 10:17-20) We have no idea how long these 70 disciples stayed in ministry; it could have been a couple of weeks or even several months. When they came back to Jesus, they were excited because demons submitted to them when they used Jesus' authority (name). (These disciples were used to Jewish religious leaders unsuccessfully trying to cast out demons through different magical sayings.)

Jesus told them that through the ministry of the seventy, he had seen Satan fall from heaven. Scholars debate over what Jesus meant by this statement. Some scholars think Jesus was looking into the past where he saw Satan's original fall into sin. There is some evidence in the Bible that Satan lost his privileged position in heaven when he first fell into sin. (Is. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-17) Jesus probably meant that the ministry of the 70 was part of a major spiritual battle. With the birth and ministry of Jesus and his disciples and the soon coming death of Jesus on the cross, Satan's authority and powerful kingdom was greatly weakened. (See Col. 2:15) Through spiritual eyes, as the 70 were ministering using the authority of Jesus, Jesus saw them defeating Satan's power and helping in the growth of Jesus' kingdom. In the same way today, as we share the Gospel, we are being used by Jesus to release people from Satan's kingdom and bring them into Jesus' kingdom.

As messengers of Jesus and ministering with his authority, the 70 disciples (and all Christians today) have the authority to trample snakes and scorpions. Probably these symbolize evil spirits who work against followers of Jesus in various ways. (See Deut. 8:15; Ps. 91:13) Believers even have authority over "*the enemy,*" which includes Satan himself. Followers of Jesus have the full authority and power of Jesus.

So we should never fear Satan and his evil spirits. As long as we are walking in holiness and obedience, dependent upon Jesus for his work in our lives, nothing can hurt us without God's permission. And we have authority to destroy Satan's work in our lives, in the church, and among non-believers through the preaching of the Gospel. But we must be careful to never think this power comes from us. It only comes from Jesus, which is what Jews meant when they said "in the name of Jesus."

The joy of the disciples over the success of their ministry created a dangerous situation for the disciples. They were beginning to boast in their success. Like many today, they were proud that they could heal people or cast out demons or plant churches or cause their church to grow large. Such boasting is always dangerous because it is only Jesus who gives us success. No hammer boasts over constructing a building; it is the skill of the carpenter who builds a beautiful home. We are simply hammers in the hands of Jesus, who is the master carpenter. In order to remind them that success in ministry is not the most important thing, Jesus told these disciples to rejoice in their salvation (i.e. their names are written in the book of life, the list of citizens of heaven). That is what really matters, not how large their ministry was. Jesus was also telling them that the most important ministry was not healing diseases or casting out demons, which seem spectacular, but the salvation of people.

h. Jesus is filled with joy at God's mysterious ways of working. (Lk 10:21-24) One of the mysteries of the ways God works is that he tends to use the "*simple*." This is seen in two ways. First, simple people have the easiest time understanding and applying the Gospel. They know that God must do everything for them; they don't have the power and ability in themselves. They more easily turn to God and depend upon him. But the rich and educated depend on their own power and ability. Therefore, they do not quickly understand the Gospel that we are saved only by faith and not works. Second, God seems to prefer using simple people to do his work for him. Not one of the 70 were from the rich and educated class of people. There were no Pharisees or scribes among them. Often we think that the more educated a person is or the more money or worldly respect a person has, the more he will become a major worker in the kingdom. How easy it is to get caught up in the thinking of the world! God can choose such people, like the Apostle Paul. But more often God chooses to work through those the world would never turn to for a major ministry. We see this constantly in our churches. Those who are the most effective evangelists and have started the majority of churches are those workers who few of us would choose as evangelists.

Jesus warns his disciples that success is not something earned, but a gift is given by God. God had given to Jesus all of the authority over the kingdom of God and the mysteries of that kingdom. Only Jesus is in the unique position to fully understand the desires of God. But Jesus had given the ability to understand truth and work for the kingdom of God to those whom he chooses. None of us have anything to boast about. (Eph. 2:8-9) Our salvation depends upon God opening our spiritual eyes and drawing us to faith in Jesus. It is not simply our choice. And all effectiveness in ministry depends upon God's graciously using us. It is not because we are better and greater than another person. As ministers of the Gospel, we must be very careful we never assume that our success is because we are better than another minister.

Jesus also reminds his disciples of the privilege of being part of God's plans. They were more privileged than even great men of the Old Testament like Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, or Jeremiah. As great as these saints of the Old Testament were, they could only look with longing towards the day of the coming of the Messiah. But the disciples lived in the days of fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. All of the Bible points towards Jesus. The Old Testament looks forward in expectation to the coming of Jesus. And the New Testament looks with joy at the coming of Jesus as the Savior of the world.

The disciples were living during the great days of fulfillment. The Gospel also looks with longing towards the fulfillment of all of history when Jesus returns against to reign over God's kingdom.

Q. 10. a) List specific ways we are more privileged than the Old Testament saints. b) Review the teachings given to the 70 messengers. What important truths do we learn about the Gospel and the ministry of evangelists today?

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN (Lk. 10:25-37)

Q. 11. Read Lk. 10:25-37. a) What question did the scribe ask Jesus? b) What two commandments summarize all of the desires of God for us? c) How does the story which Jesus told illustrate to us who our "neighbor" is?

One of the issues that the Jewish religious community often debated during the days of Jesus is "What must a person do to receive eternal life?" Each Jewish rabbi had his own list of things which he taught a person had to do to please God. The emphasis of all of the rabbis was on how to "earn" acceptance with God. "If we can keep enough laws or do enough good deeds, then God is obligated to reward us with eternal life" they thought. So one day a scholar who knew the Old Testament (*scribe*) asked Jesus to give his list of things which a person had to do in order to inherit God's kingdom.

Sometime during the days of Jesus, some Jewish teachers began to teach that the most important commandments were to love God with ones' whole being (Deut. 6:5) and to love ones' neighbor (Lev. 19:18). The command to love God with all their being came from the book of Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-20 and was often written in small boxes worn by Jews on their foreheads. These verses were prayed twice a day by all Jews.

Jesus often answered a question with his own question, so he asked the scribe his opinion. The scribe gave what was believed to be the best answer to the question. Jesus agreed that these were the two most important commandments in the Bible. But unlike the other religious teachers Jesus did not add to these two laws a list of other laws (e.g. keep the Sabbath, wash properly, etc.) as important in pleasing God. Jesus knew that if we keep these two commandments to love God and love others we will keep all of the commandments God desires of us. This is because all other commandments are contained in these two commands. For instance, we won't take God's name in vain if we really love him and seek to honor him by taking care in using his name. Or we won't lie against someone if we love them. Like Jesus, it is usually better for us to teach new believers the need to learn to love God with all of their being and to love others to the same extent that they love and long for good things to happen to themselves. We evangelicals tend to focus primarily upon the first commandment to love God. Therefore, we are happy to go to church and worship. However, we are often weak in this second command of loving others and treating them with the same care that we treat ourselves.

Although scholars debate who originated this summary of the Old Testament laws, all scholars agree that Jesus originated this unique definition of who is a "*neighbor*." When the scribe asked Jesus to define who the neighbor is he meant "What must a person do to be qualified as being my neighbor and therefore worthy of my help?" The Jews believed that only fellow Jews were their neighbors. A Gentile was never considered a "neighbor" and so Jews did not think God expected them to help them. In fact, religious leaders during the time of Jesus debated whether it was right for a Jew to help a Gentile mother give birth.

Jesus' response that "Anyone in need is your neighbor," would have greatly shocked the Jews. In fact, he changed the focus of the question to ask "What must I do to be a good neighbor?"

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was about 30 kilometers long. In this short distance, the road descended sharply over 1000 meters from mountains down into a low valley. Because the road was a major trade route, many traders traveled along this road. The terrain was very rough and until recent history, this road was known for its robbers who waylaid travelers and took all of their goods. Because this road was so dangerous, usually traders and travelers would travel together in groups so that they would not be robbed. The Jews would have thought it foolish for this man to travel alone to Jericho.

Three men saw the man who was beaten by the thieves so greatly that he looked like he was dead. The first was a "*priest*." No doubt those listening to the story would have thought "The priests are the model of spirituality; surely he will help the man." The well-educated priests were supposed to be close to God and models of spirituality for the people. (They would be similar to our pastors who have completed high level theological education whom we look to as examples of spirituality.) The Jews would have been amazed when Jesus said that the priest walked by without helping. Why did he do this? Some scholars wonder whether the priest was afraid of becoming ritually impure. In the Old Testament, if a person touched a dead person (perhaps the priest thought the man was dead), he would become ritually impure and could not serve in the Temple. So perhaps he did not want to limit his ministry. However, the story clearly says that he was walking away from Jerusalem down to Jericho. So touching the person would not have hindered his ministry at all. Although he had all of the religious qualifications, he did not have a heart of mercy or the heart of a true neighbor. Refusing to get involved, he walked by. Unfortunately, often those who are full-time church employees and have been trained at high levels of theology are the least likely to help the poor. We think that we do not have to help people. "After all, the problem is their fault. Perhaps their problem is because of God's judgment upon them. And I am too busy doing God's work" some think.

The second person was a "*Levite*." (A Levite was like an elder or deacon and the Jews would have thought of him as the next most likely person to help another hurting person.) Levites were not the leaders of worship in the Temple, but assisted the priests by leading the singing, carrying the wood for the sacrifices, etc. The Jews would have assumed that because a Levite was so closely involved in worship of God, he too would be a good example of what it means to be a follower of God. "Surely this person will help the poor beaten man" the Jews probably thought. But amazingly, this man also walked by the injured man without helping.

No doubt like many of us, the priest and the Levite were too "busy" to help. They thought they were important and busy and their hearts had grown callous to the needs of others. Or perhaps they were so concerned with ritual purity that they had no care for people; their laws were more important to them than helping those who are hurting. Jesus was no doubt trying to remind these religious leaders that true obedience to God will mean we reach out in compassion to others.

The last person was a Samaritan. It is amazing that a Samaritan walked on that road because Jews and Samaritans hated each other. Samaritans were not only political enemies, they were thought of as racially inferior to the Jews. The Samaritans were also considered to be unlearned in spiritual things since they had their own type of worship. To us today, he would be like a member of a non-Christian religion with whom we have poor relationships. If a Jew could help it, he would never accept the help of a Samaritan, so for the wounded Jew to accept the help of a Samaritan shows how desperate his situation was. "There

is no way that this person will help the Jew." the people would have thought. But amazingly this Samaritan helped his Jewish enemy. He poured on the wound wine (with its alcohol wine was considered by ancient people to have power to cleanse the wound from disease) and oil (considered by ancients to be like a salve on a wound to help it heal). He put the man on his donkey on which he had been riding. And he paid money to the inn keeper to take care of the man. This Samaritan did not ask himself whether or not this wounded person was of his tribe. He did not ask whether this person could in some way pay him back for what he did financially or with another good deed. He did not even stop to wonder if this person deserved the beating because of his foolishness. As a "neighbor" he got involved and helped the person. This "heathen" Samaritan showed more of God's character of love for the hopeless than those who knew the Bible and were the people of God!

Jesus wants to warn us that we cannot claim to be followers of Jesus and not love. We are not to just ask "What can Jesus do for me?" but we should ask "How can I serve God with all of my being?" And Jesus wants us to know that we cannot really love God if we do not treat others whom God loves in the wrong way. We must love all other people, even those we historically dislike; like people of other tribes, or the uneducated, or the potters. Love is not simply an emotion that we have for others in our hearts. Rather, it is a decision we make to get involved and help them in their problems. It does not matter if they are from our tribe or not. It does not matter if they are believers or not or whether they can pay us back. It does not matter if it is convenient or not. It also does not matter if that person or his tribe or religion are our historical enemies or continue to hate us now. They are our neighbors and God asks us to help them. After all, didn't God so love us that he reached out to help us even when we were his enemies? (Rom. 5:10)

Q. 12. a) Make a list of people many Christians do not like helping or do not want to treat as a "neighbor." b) Describe ways you have reached out to help them. c) List things that you and your church need to do to become good neighbors to the people who are hurting people in your community.

As evangelicals we are not often known for being people of compassion for those who hurt but are not evangelicals. We might help a fellow evangelical if they are in trouble. But like the priest and Levite we walk by many people who are hurting. This is especially true for some church leaders, evangelists and pastors. Could it be that we are in danger of becoming like the priest and Levite in Jesus' story? Jesus warns us that we cannot claim to love God as his followers if we are not being a true "neighbor" to those around us who are hurting. Using this story Luke wanted to remind each of us that part of being the followers of Jesus is applying our faith in action by showing love for others no matter whether or not they deserve it, or can do something in return for us, or if they are from the right tribe or denomination.

JESUS TEACHES IN MARTHA'S AND MARY'S HOME (Lk. 10:38-42)

Q. 13. Read Luke 10:38-42. a) Why did Martha get upset? b) What response did Jesus give to her? c) Describe ways we can often have a Martha-like attitude today.

Not far from Jerusalem was the town of Bethany. In that town was a family of two sisters and one brother. Martha was the oldest sister and Mary was the younger sister and Lazarus was the younger brother. There is no evidence that any of them were married. Jesus formed a close relationship with this family and for much of the last week of his life he would spend each evening in their home. You will remember that it was Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead. (Jn. 11)

During one of his journeys, Jesus and his disciples unexpectedly arrived at the home of Martha and Mary. He sat in their home teaching the disciples. Jewish culture was that if an honored guest arrived, it was very important to have a great feast. And probably Martha loved Jesus deeply and like most women wanted to show her love for him with a special meal. With all of the disciples, it would have taken a lot of work to get food ready for such a large crowd. Soon she was busy preparing the feast. But Mary did something very unusual. It would have been culturally expected that Mary help her sister in the kitchen and Jews did not believe that women should be taught. But Mary wanted to learn from Jesus as well. So rather than helping her sister, she joined the disciples in the living room and listened to Jesus. To sit at Jesus feet was to assume the position of a learning disciple. Martha no doubt started off happily getting ready for the meal. But then she began to worry; would she have enough food? How would she get it all prepared in time? Soon she was running back and forth trying to get everything ready and in frustration became angry at her sister. "How can she sit at Jesus' feet like a disciple when I have to do all this work alone. This is not fair" she no doubt thought. Finally, she walked into the living room where Jesus was teaching and interrupted. She did not quietly ask Mary to come help her. Instead she accused Jesus of not caring for her when she was so overworked getting the meal ready. Then she commanded Jesus to tell Mary to come help her. Can you imagine how embarrassed Mary would have been? Martha would have expected Jesus to be sympathetic to her and how unfair it was that she do all of the work alone. Imagine her surprise when Jesus defended Mary!

Martha is like many church leaders and church ministers when they are busy serving Jesus. They fall into several wrong ways of thinking which Jesus wanted Martha, and the disciples, to be aware of.

Martha became worried over the amount of work she had to get done. It was not long that her joy of serving Jesus was replaced with worry and she became upset. Haven't we all felt this? There is a conference and so much to do to get ready for it and we begin to worry that things will not be ready in time. Our joy of serving Jesus or expectation of what we can learn from the conference soon disappears.

Martha became angry at Mary when Mary did not seem to be working as hard as Martha was. She might have even been jealous that Mary could enjoy listening to Jesus while she was working so hard in the kitchen. So she did something to shame Mary in front of others. How many of us, as we are serving Jesus, look around at others and get angry at them for not working as hard as we do, or they are paid more salary than we are, or they are given more opportunities to preach or pray than we do. This changes our loving relationship with them and we become angry at them. And when we are angry, we can no longer serve Jesus with joy and thanksgiving for all he has done for us. Our good motives disappear, and anger replaces them.

Martha forgot her position in relationship to Jesus.

First, she accused him of not caring for her when in fact the problem was choices she had made. Isn't it amazing how quickly we accuse God for problems we bring upon ourselves! We accuse him of not healing us when we have not been wise in the things we eat. Or we accuse him of not giving us enough money when we have not been wise in spending the money he has given us. Anytime we accuse God of not understanding, we have forgotten that he is God and we are his servants. He is not our servant to meet our needs, especially our selfish desires. All he gives us comes from grace, not because we have the right to them.

Second, she commanded Jesus to do something to resolve the problem. She lost the order of relationship that God demands. She might have called Jesus "Lord" but through her words she was acting like the "lord" and treating Jesus like her slave. We must be careful to never treat God like our slave. We cannot command him to heal us, or help us, or meet our needs. All we can do is come as servants and humbly ask "if you will" as we present our requests to him. We must be very careful in our prayers that we never demand that God do something for us.

Q. 14. a) Describe ways you have lost your joy in serving Jesus by become too busy. b) Describe ways you have become angry at others when they do not seem as dedicated and hard working as you are. c) Describe ways Christians can often treat God or Jesus as if they were the "lord" and God was their slave.

Jesus told Martha that she only needed "*one thing*." It is not clear to what he was referring. It could mean that he was telling Martha that she only needed to prepare a simple meal of one thing, not lots of different types of food as was common in a feast. Or it could be he was telling her that she needed to properly prioritize her life. This was a unique opportunity for Martha to listen to Jesus and she should use the time rather than be distracted with preparing a meal. The one thing that she needed was to join Mary and listen to Jesus. She would not have Jesus in her house much longer. Listening to Jesus teach was much more important than eating food. Mary had chosen to listen to Jesus teach and Jesus would not take this away from her by telling her to join Martha in the kitchen.

The Apostle Paul prayed that the Philippians would learn to know what is "best." (See Phil. 1:10) Life is filled with choices not just between the good and the bad, but between the good and the best. A fruitful life means that we learn to choose the "best." For Martha and Mary, the "best" was listening to Jesus. For a church leader during a conference, the best thing to do is to calm his heart so that he can listen to God speak through the preacher. Too often we allow ourselves to get distracted with work that we forget what is most important. Some busy church leaders hold meetings during church rather than worship or listen to the sermon. They are acting like Martha rather than Mary. Satan tries very hard to get us away from what is best by getting us to focus upon what is good. We become busy in administration of the church and take no time for prayer, reflection, study of God's Word, etc. May God teach us to be like Mary and not Martha!

Hidden in this story is one further amazing truth. The Jews believed it was a waste of time for a woman to learn. The Jews would have expected Jesus to reprimand Mary and send her into the kitchen. But Jesus honored Mary for wanting to learn from him showing his support for women to learn. Our culture tends to focus upon allowing men to go to school or Bible school. We need to remember that Jesus honored Mary and welcomed her to learn from him.

Q. 15. Explain ways that we could honor the right of women to learn God's Word and serve him better.

FOURTH DAY

JESUS TEACHES THE DISCIPLES ABOUT PRAYER (Lk. 11:1-13)

Q. 16. Read Lk. 11:1-13. a) What question did a disciple ask Jesus? b) List the six requests Jesus said we should ask in prayer. c) What do you think the two parables Jesus told teach us about prayer? d) Compare your last prayer with Jesus' model prayer- what basic requests are similar and what are different?

At the heart of following Jesus is developing a healthy prayer life. Jesus modeled this for his followers when on earth. Not only did he pray when he had a major decision to make like choosing the disciples. (Lk. 6:12-16) But Jesus also regularly met with God to talk to him just as we will regularly meet with close friends just to talk and have fellowship with each other. One day when Jesus finished praying, one of his disciples came and asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. He already knew how to pray; he had been doing it since he was a small Jewish child. So why did he ask this question? There were two reasons for his request.

First, this disciple saw the great difference between Jesus' prayer life and his own or what the religious leaders practiced and he wanted to know how to pray like Jesus. Jewish prayers tended to be formal, as if they were making requests to a very remote God. But for Jesus, prayer was more like the meeting of friends to talk. We must be careful that we do not see prayer as just a tradition or habit to go through, saying the same words each time. Nor is it a time we come to God and present our long list of requests. The heart of prayer is for us to talk to our loving Father. One of the unique things Jesus did in prayers which the Jews never did was to call God by the word "Abba" which is like saying "daddy" similar to small children talking to their fathers.

Second, the disciple probably asked Jesus to give them a standard prayer because it was the practice of Jewish rabbis or famous people like John the Baptist to teach their followers a special prayer. Jesus gave his disciples a model prayer. Although this prayer is given in the form of a prayer to be prayed by the community of followers of Jesus, it is actually a prayer that teaches us the attitudes we must have whenever we come to God in prayer. Since we studied this prayer in detail when we looked at Jesus' Sermon on the Mountain (Mt. 6:9-13), we won't review the six prayer requests which Jesus says should form the basis of our prayers. Rather, we will look at two parables that Jesus gave which illustrate several important truths about prayer:

PARABLE ONE: (Lk. 11:5-10): The value of persistence in prayer

For the Jews, the purpose of a parable was to illustrate a few key truths. It is important to identify the major teaching of the parable is so that we do not misinterpret the parable. Most of those listening to Jesus were from small villages and were poor. Because they lived in small villages, those in the same village knew each other and everyone was expected to help when there was an emergency, like when an unexpected visitor arrives. Poor Jews usually lived in one-room houses. Like a small country hut, everyone slept on mats on the dirt floor. Jesus told the story of how late one night (*midnight*) a visitor unexpectedly arrives at someone's home. The Jews were obligated to prepare a meal no matter what time a visitor arrived. To not do so not only caused the host to feel ashamed, but brought shame to the whole village. So the whole community helped the host show hospitality. In Jesus' story, the host had none of the small loaves that Jews baked every day. Three loaves was what was considered enough for a guest. The host knew that one of his neighbors had bread. So he went to his neighbor and knocked on the door. But his neighbor and his family were already asleep on their mats. His neighbor did not want to get up because it would wake up his children, wife and disturb the animals. So he loudly whispers that the person should go away. But the host keeps knocking. By now everyone in the house is awake, so the neighbor gets up and gives the host the bread.

The major teaching of this parable is to illustrate the value of persistence in prayer. We should not just approach prayer as having to ask once and that is enough. One of the Jewish ways of expressing a truth was to present an argument by contrasting a lesser person with a greater person. So Jesus was

teaching that if humans (the lesser group), like the host, have learned to keep knocking until he gets an answer from a reluctant neighbor, so also we should know that in prayer, there is value to persistent prayer. When we pray to God (the greater body), we do not face a reluctant neighbor-like God, but a loving God who is always open to our prayers and will give us all things that are in line with his loving character and his will. (Note: "Asking," "seeking" after God (Deut. 4:29; Is. 55:6), and knocking "on the door of God's mercy" were all Jewish expressions for earnestness in prayer.) God values persistence in prayer. We are to keep on knocking or keep on seeking until we have a response. Jesus was emphasizing that prayer is not to be an emotionless listing of what we want, but should reveal the earnestness of our request by our persistence in prayer.

Why does God value persistence in prayer? Why does he not give us the answers to our prayers right away? In order to understand these verses, we must balance them with everything the Bible teaches about prayer. As we look at the Bible, we can see the following truths:

a. Prayer might seem simple, but Jesus is teaching that we must pray based upon a knowledge of God and his will. If we are not careful, we will think of prayer as primarily a way to force God to do what we want, to meet our personal needs. All believers need to focus prayer on seeking God's kingdom and his will, not our will. (See Mt. 6:33) We have confidence in our prayers because we know we have a powerful God who answers prayer.

b. We are encouraged to be persistent in prayer not because God is reluctant to give, but because God, who knows all things and wants to develop our trust in him, will often wait to respond so that our trust in him is revealed by our persistent prayers. God is seeking to help our faith grow.

c. When prayers are not quickly answered and yet we continue to pray to God, it reveals two major things. It reveals that we are living a life dependent upon God. We are acknowledging that all things come from his hand and they come from grace, not because we have a right to demand that God give them to us. It also reveals that we are serious about what we are praying for. We often have many selfish requests for which we pray. Sometimes we don't think through the implication of those requests upon us if God were to grant them. So God delays his response, giving us time to reflect if those things are truly important to us. Many of the things we pray for just once or twice are not very important.

d. Foundational to all prayer is the attitude "not my will but yours be done." In his model prayer Jesus told disciples to focus their prayer upon things which honor the name of God and further his kingdom. Often we don't know whether the things we are praying for come out of selfish desires on our part, or if they are requests made to honor God. So God delays his response so that we have time to evaluate our hearts and prayer to see if we are just using prayer as an expression of our selfishness or if we are seeking God's glory.

e. Jesus emphasized that our personal requests should come from the attitude "meet my needs today." Prayer is not a tool for us to ask for selfish things. Rather, we are to come each day to God and ask him to give to us what we really need to live. It is when we ask for things which bring honor to God, and when we are asking for basic things important for us to live that we can approach God with confidence that he will meet our desires and needs.

f. In prayer, servants are coming to the master. So we don't come demanding that God do something for us. Rather, we come with the humble attitude of asking. As the all-knowing master, God, can say "yes" or "no" or "wait." Trust means that we know that God is loving and will do what is best for us. It means that we know that he is powerful and can give us things that seem impossible to us, and he is all-wise and knows what is best. So we keep asking God until in our hearts we know which of these three answers he has given us.

Q. 17. a) List key truths about prayer that we can learn from this parable. b) Describe how many Christians misunderstand this parable. c) How do the six truths about prayer that we learn from the rest of the Bible help us understand the parable of persistent prayer?

2. PARABLE TWO: The loving God will never give us something which harms us (Lk11:11-13)

Sometimes Satan gets us to think that God is stingy and does not want to give us good things. So we are reluctant to pray with confidence. Inside of us is the thought that God is too busy to take care of us and "Who am I that he should think about me anyway?" But Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that we should never understand prayer this way. Using the Jewish argument style of contrasting the lesser to the greater, Jesus taught that God is so loving that he will only give us things that are ultimately good for us. Human fathers (the lesser) who are sinners would not think to give their children who ask for a fish or egg something that hurts them. Fathers will not trick them into thinking that the snake found along the rivers, which Jews used to catch fish, is good for them; or give them a scorpion, which when curled up looks like an egg, but will sting them if touched. Although sinners, human fathers give good things to their children. God (the greater) is totally holy and would never think of tricking his children. And his love for us is so much greater than the love any human father has for his children. So when approaching God in prayer, we can know that God will give us everything that he knows is best for us.

But God's perspective of "best" is not always the same as ours. Sometimes the "best" is a time of sickness, or persecution, or something that we would not naturally choose. But God is more concerned with developing our character and his relationship with us than in our temporary pleasure and ease of living. (See James 1:2-4) Could it be that some of the things that we ask for which God does not give us is actually a "scorpion" to our spiritual growth? And he focuses upon spiritual blessings. The major blessing he has given to us who are his children aside from our salvation is the Holy Spirit. Living before the day of Pentecost, Jesus encouraged the disciples to focus their prayers on the Holy Spirit. Although we all receive the presence of the Holy Spirit when we are saved, Jesus still encourages us to pray for the power and filling of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Q. 18. a) What does this parable teach us about God's character that encourages us in prayer? b) Search your heart- has Satan got you thinking that God is reluctant to give you good things? If so, confess this attitude to God. Change your attitude in prayer so that as you pray, know that Jesus will lovingly give you what is best for you. c) What are some prayer requests you made which God did not give because he knows what is best? d) Examine your prayer requests. How many of them are concerning important spiritual things like the filling of the Holy Spirit? If most of your prayer requests are for temporal matters, make a list of spiritual things you could ask God for to include in your prayer requests. Use the prayers of Paul in Eph. 1:15-19, 3:14-19 as an example.

JESUS IS ACCUSED OF WORKING THROUGH THE POWER OF SATAN (Lk. 11:14-28)

Q. 19. Read Lk. 11:14-28. a) What accusation did the Pharisees make against Jesus? b) Summarize Jesus' response to their accusation. c) What do you think Jesus was warning against when he told the story about a demon possessed person who returned with seven other demons?

When someone does something that appears to be a miracle, we are left with three choices. First, we can claim that what happened was a psychological phenomenon. Scientists have shown that if someone can be convinced that he can walk even though he is crippled, he will often walk. Usually such people will quickly return to their previous condition. Many living in the West view "miracles" in this way. Second, we can claim that what happened was through the power of God. God is a miracle-working God and many of the unexplainable things that happen is because he occasionally chooses to intervene and do something with great power. Third, we can claim that Satan did the miracle. Satan is able to perform miracles as well. Often it is hard to know which of the three things happened in specific instances like when someone is healed at a crusade. We can safely say that if God is clearly glorified and the miracle has long lasting result, then God has performed a miracle.

During the days of Jesus, his miracles forced people to choose between the power of God and the power of Satan. Most common people were willing to admit that Jesus was doing his miracles through the power of God. But the religious leaders who had already made up their minds that Jesus was not the Messiah chose to attribute Jesus' power to Satan. We have already seen how Jesus answered such accusations in Mt. 12:22-29. (See Lesson 12) We will only look at the new truths Luke adds here:

1. All people must choose carefully what they believe about Jesus. There is no middle ground. A person has either chosen to be a follower of Jesus, or he is in the camp of Satan. (Lk 11:23) There is no such thing as being a good Jew who believes in the God of Abraham but does not believe in Jesus. To be a good moral Jew who does not believe in Jesus still means that the person is a follower of Satan. When someone sides with Jesus and proclaims the Gospel, he is "*gathering*" people from Satan's kingdom to enjoy God's blessing just like God had promised in the Old Testament to gather his people from the nations of the world. (Is. 11:12) But to choose to resist Jesus makes that person a "*scatterer*," just like the Babylonians scattered the Jews because of their lack of obedience to God.

2. We must not just be concerned with getting rid of evil in our lives. Rather, we must make sure we replace the evil with the good which Jesus offers. (Lk 11:24-26) Scholars understand Jesus' teaching about the coming of seven demons in different ways.

First, Jesus could be referring to the attempts of Jews to cast out demons through their magical methods. He is saying that even if the Jews are successful in casting out one demon, because they have nothing to replace the demon with, it won't be long until a person is under even greater control of Satan. This is an important truth for us to remember when we cast out a demon from a person. It is not enough to get rid of the demon. Rather, we must make sure the individual replaces the demon with Jesus living in their heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. Often the demon will return with greater power if a person does not get their heart right with God.

Second, because the context of this statement is the evil teaching of the religious leaders, some scholars think Jesus is saying that in their attempt to provide religious solutions for their people, the

Pharisees were actually causing them to become even greater captives of Satan. They might be able to get them to give up certain evil actions and wash their hands in ritually approved ways, but because they cannot give them the Holy Spirit who helps them to be holy, these religious leaders end up adding more and more laws upon people causing them to be in even more bondage. This too is an important reminder to us today. It is easy for church leaders to focus upon telling new believers to not do certain things. The new believers are warned not to commit adultery or drink or chew chatt. Although these are good, getting rid of evil practices will never work unless we help people replace these evil actions with good things. So we must focus upon helping people develop habits of studying the Word and praying; becoming loving and kind, and obeying Jesus in all of their lives. A true follower of Jesus always fills his life up with these good things. Then he lives in victory over the evil that once controlled him. So Christianity is not just about getting rid of bad things from our life (selfishness, the world, injustice, sin), but we must replace what we get rid of with positive things (prayer, God's Word, love, ministry) for our lives to be truly free of Satan and his control of our lives.

Q. 20. a) Describe ways you have seen a delivered demon possessed person not fill their lives with the Holy Spirit and therefore end up in a worse condition. b) Describe how we often focus upon negative things that believers must not do rather than seeking to fill up their hearts with the character and actions of Jesus as enabled with the Holy Spirit. c) List truths we would change in our teaching of new believers if we were to focus more on filling up their hearts with good things rather than just cleaning out their lives from bad things.

3. True blessedness does not come from tribal or family heritage, but obedience to God's Word. (Lk. 11:27-28) The Jews believed that they were uniquely blessed by God because of their heritage as the children of Abraham. One common cultural way to honor a person was to bless their mother who raised them, so a woman in the crowd shouted out a blessing upon Jesus. But Jesus knew that true blessing in God's eyes does not consist of what tribe they belonged to or who their parents were. Nor was it in external conditions like wealth or education. The blessing that really matters is found in spiritual things. As Jesus told the woman, it comes from a knowledge of God's Word which we put in practice.

We live in days when we tend to think blessedness comes from external things. Therefore we do all we can to get education or more money or the power of leadership. We focus upon our tribes and families and the honor they bring to us. But these reflect the value of the world, just like the woman reflected the value of the Jews in her blessing of Jesus. True disciples of Jesus no longer focus upon these external things. Rather, they know that what brings true blessedness in God's eyes is how we align our lives to the truths of God's Word. We do not focus upon only raising our hands and saying we believe, or singing with great emotion and joy, or shouting Jesus is Lord but knowing God's Word and obeying it. Those of us who claim to follow Jesus must return to a focus upon knowing and obeying God's Word; that brings the type of blessedness to us and our churches that really matters.

Q. 21. a) Describe ways we can focus upon external blessings more than the true blessings Jesus emphasized. b) List ways you are "blessed" as Jesus defined blessing.

(Note: See the discussion on Mt. 12:39-42 and Mt. 6:22-23 for an explanation of Luke 11:29-36)

THE SIX WOES OF JUDGMENT UPON RELIGIOUS LEADERS (Lk. 11:37-54)

One of the dangers that religious leaders face when they zealously seeking to honor God is the tendency to focus upon rules and regulations which they have designed rather than upon the most important teachings of the Bible. So many church leaders get upset when church members have what they consider "sinful" hairstyles or dress, when they go to see movies at the cinema, sell chatt, or go to market on Sunday. Although it might be good to provide guidelines for church members, when we focus upon specific regulations we often overlook what is really important in God's eyes; which is having loving relationships with all people, being righteous and just, and sharing our faith with others.

Q. 22. a) Describe how you have seen this tendency among well-meaning church leaders. b) Read Lk. 11:37-54. 1) Why were the Pharisees angry with Jesus? 2) List each of the six "woes" which Jesus pronounced against the religious rulers.

One day Jesus was invited to eat at the home of a Pharisee. The reason this Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him was so that he and other religious leaders could listen more to what Jesus taught and ask him questions. It was common for religious leaders to gather around a meal and listen to the teachings of a famous teacher. At this feast, the guests usually ate reclining on cushions on the floor with their feet away from the table and their heads close to a low table.

Jesus knew the cultural traditions of the Pharisees who taught that it was very important to carefully wash their hands in an elaborate ritual before eating. This was not to make their hands clean, but they thought it removed ritual uncleanness which might have corrupted them as they walked among the people. Rather than go through this ritual, Jesus simply washed his hands and entered into the banquet room. This really upset the Pharisees who no doubt wondered how a famous religious teacher could call himself holy and yet not go through the ritual washings. Jesus wanted to show these religious leaders how imbalanced they had become and so he made six major pronouncements against them. The word "woe" is used not as an expression of sorrow, but an expression of serious judgment which God was going to bring against them for specific sins.

1. The religious leaders had become more interested with external traditions than the hearts of people. (Lk 11:39-41) During the days of Jesus religious leaders disagreed over how ritually pure a cup had to be for it to be used and someone not become ritually contaminated. One group said that as long as the inside of the cup was ritually clean, it did not matter if the outside of the cup was ritually unclean. But another group insisted that both the inside and the outside of the cup had to be ritually clean. Jesus compared the lives of people to that cup. The Pharisees had become so concerned about just the outsides of their lives; how they dressed, how they washed, or their appearance before other people, that they no longer looked into what really mattered, which was the inner spiritual life and character of a person. So they appeared spiritual to all others, but in their hearts there was pride, anger, jealousy, lack of love, and injustice. True spirituality starts in the heart. Once our hearts are right with God, then it is easy for the outside (e.g. our worship, our prayers, how we dress, etc.) to be purified.

We must be very careful as evangelicals to not fall into the same way of thinking as the Pharisees. It is very easy for us to emphasize things which we think make a person look spiritual. So we focus upon how we dress, how we sing and clap in church, how we don't commit adultery or drink alcoholic drinks; but rarely do we emphasize things of the heart. So our churches are filled with people who follow our man-

made laws, but do not live in loving relationships with others, gossip about each other, and do not take care of those who face hardships in life.

2. WOE #1: The religious leaders stressed details of obedience to God (as defined by religious leaders), forgetting the major requirements that God desires of his people. (Lk 11:42) One area where the Pharisees were very careful in their obedience to God was in tithing 1/10 of not just their money, but all things. The Old Testament said that all Jews were to give 1/10th of their money and crops to God. The tithe was used for the upkeep of the temple and to support the priests and Levites who served in the temple. But the Pharisees took this law one step further than what the Old Testament demanded. They tithed from the few garden herbs (like peppermint, rosemary) that they grew near their house, which the Old Testament never told the Jews to tithe. However, in their focus upon obeying specific laws which they thought demonstrated their spirituality, they overlooked what God had said about the major issues which define a righteous life. They forgot verses like Micah 6:8 that pointed out that people God's primary desire that they be merciful to those who faced some disaster in their lives or to seek justice between the rich and the poor. Jesus did not tell the Pharisees they did not have to tithe. But he warned the religious leaders that they must also emphasize the things which God desires; things like loving God with all their beings or taking care of those in society who do not have the same type of blessings they enjoyed.

Can't we too fall into this type of thinking? We encourage our people to come and fast and pray, or give to support evangelists, or sing with great fervor. This is good. But could it be that we place little emphasis today in helping the poor in our churches or community? And in our work places, we are not seeking justice for all people.

3. WOE #2: The religious leaders enjoyed being honored by people rather than serving people in humility. (Lk 11:43) At the front of each synagogue, close to where the Jews kept the books of the Law, were seats facing the congregation. On these special seats sat the elders of the synagogue and visiting teachers. The Pharisees and religious teachers enjoyed the honor these seats brought. The common people also liked to shake the hands of famous people, so these religious leaders felt important when another Jew came up in the market to shake their hands. This caused the religious leaders to think they were special, greater than the ordinary people. Much of their life was taken up demonstrating to people how they were exceptional as the leaders of the people.

The issue Jesus was dealing with is not where someone sits. Rather, it is what often happens in the heart of ministers in the church, the pride we can have in being seen as church leaders and pastors and evangelists. Again we see this dangerous tendency in our churches. It is easy for elders, evangelists, pastors, or choir members who are often in front of people to see themselves as special and enjoy the honor and respect of people. Pride enters our hearts causing us to sin.

4. WOE #3: Through their imbalanced teaching, the religious leaders ended up causing people to drift away from a pure relationship with God. (Lk 11:44) One of the teachings of the Old Testament was that if someone touched a grave, he would become ritually unclean. (Num. 19:16) The Pharisees even taught that if their shadow touched the unmarked grave, they would become unclean. One of the fears of the religious Jews was that they might somehow walk across an unmarked grave and become ritually unclean without knowing it. So, where possible, they put clearly marked grave stones on the graves so that they and others would not become ritually unclean. Jesus compared religious leaders to the unmarked hidden graves. They thought that they were teaching good truths to people, but because they caused people to

focus upon traditions and man-made laws rather than having a relationship with God; and because they modeled pride and not humility, they were unknowingly causing people to become impure before God. Through their attitudes and actions, they were teaching people wrong things about God, salvation, and righteous living. The Pharisees were as "unclean" as a grave; and they were also causing others to be spiritually unclean through their wrong teaching.

This is a strong warning to those of us who teach in the church. If we are not careful in how we teach, making sure we are Biblical and balanced, and if we are not living in agreement with God's truths, we too can have a negative impact upon others. If we overemphasize physical blessings rather than eternal spiritual blessings, it can make people "unclean" because they no longer focus their attention on the kingdom of God (See Mt. 6:33) but upon how to make their life better on earth. Or if we focus too much upon "spiritual things" (e.g. worship, prayer, Bible study) and we do not involve ourselves in showing mercy and justice, we end up becoming "unclean" in the eyes of God like the Pharisees of old.

5. WOE #4: The religious leaders added to the law many religious regulations. But they themselves did not obey these regulations and they did not graciously help people obey the regulations. (Lk 11:45-46) (Note: Jesus' discussion started with the Pharisees. But now the "*experts in the law*" became insulted by Jesus' teaching. The experts of the law were usually well-trained priests who worked as professional scribes. They became like "religious lawyers" for they were the best trained in interpreting the Old Testament and would often be asked to define what was allowed or not allowed.) One of the characteristics of the religious rulers was seeking to make rules for every part of their lives. For instance, in seeking to define what no work on the Sabbath was, there were hundreds of rules about what a person could and could not do. These rules made life a great burden for people. Knowing this, the religious rulers would make up other rules on how to get around one of their rules. For instance, they said that no one could walk more than 1 kilometer from his home on the Sabbath. But they knew this was sometimes impossible to keep, so they said that if a person put some dirt from his home 1 kilometer away from his house the day before the Sabbath, then he was allowed to walk one further kilometer. Not only did these religious leaders dishonor the very laws that they had designed, but when the common people struggled to obey these extra regulations, the religious leaders despised them, accusing them of not respecting the laws.

But don't we do the same today? Many church leaders tell church members to join Bible study groups or come to a church work day, but they don't come themselves. What they tell the members of the church to do, they don't model. And then when the members of their churches do not respond like they want, they angrily accuse them from the pulpit of not being spiritual or committed to the church.

6. WOE #5: The religious leaders pretended to honor the Old Testament prophets of God who were killed by the Jews for speaking God's Word, but in actual fact they had the same attitude towards true "prophets" that their forefathers had. (Lk 11:47-51) During the days of Jesus, these religious leaders would build large tombs to honor the Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, who had been killed by the Jews. Jesus mentioned two such "prophets." The first, Abel, was the first person to be murdered in the Bible. The Bible says that Abel's blood cried out to God for justice. (Gen. 4:1-12) In the Hebrew Scriptures, which end with 2 Chronicles, the last prophet to have been killed was a man called Zechariah who was murdered in the courtyard of the Temple. (See 2 Chron. 24:20-21) The religious leaders thought they were much more spiritual than their ancestors. But Jesus insisted that they had not changed in their hearts. It would not be long until they would kill Jesus and later people like Stephen.

How easy it is to think that we are spiritual and listening to God. But when God raises someone else up who proclaims the truth of God's Word, often we resist them, defame their character, and expel them from ministry and our church. Aren't we also similar to the Jews of old?

7. WOE #6: The religious leaders did not use the "*key of knowledge*" of God and his Word and hid it so others could not use it. (Lk 11:52) The Pharisees and scribes were the teachers who preached in the synagogues. However, Jesus accused them of hiding the true knowledge of God's Word. They did this in two ways. They "*hid*" God's real desires for his people behind thousands of laws so that people could no longer understand what God wanted from his people. They also "*hid*" God's teachings by making God's Word seem so complex that ordinary people began to think that it was impossible to understand what God wanted from them and so they did not even try to relate to the God of Abraham. Even the Pharisees, who thought they knew what God wanted of them, so focused upon their traditions that they did not study the truths of God's Word.

Throughout history this same thing has been done in the church in various ways. Often the Bible was in an ancient language people either could not understand (like Geez or Latin) or in a trade language which few except the educated spoke (e.g. in Amharic or Oromo but not in the Gurage language). As a result, ordinary believers are often hindered from being able to read God's Word with understanding themselves. One of the reasons God brought change in the ancient Protestant church was because in spite of great persecution, people were determined to translate God's Word in the language of the ordinary people. So Luther translated the Latin Bible into German, Wycliffe into English, and Bruce Adams into Wolaytinya. There will never be much spiritual power among God's people until each tribe has the Bible in their own language and read from it.

Like the Pharisees, throughout history church leaders have often claimed that ordinary people should not read the Bible since they could not understand it, and would misapply it. So they actively worked against people reading God's Word. But those of us who have advanced training in theology can do the same thing today. We can make understanding the truths of God's Word so difficult that those who do not have our level of education give up in frustration and do not study God's Word for themselves. On one hand the message of the Bible is so simple that even a small child can understand it. But on the other hand it is so deep that even the most learned person cannot fully comprehend it. As church leaders, it is important that as we grow in our ability to understand God's Word that we keep the truths simple so that people can understand and apply them. Otherwise, we lock the door to understanding God's truth so people cannot listen to God and obey him.

Q. 23. Review these accusations Jesus made against the religious leaders of his day. For each charge, list two examples of how we can do the same thing today.

Throughout the last six months of his earthly life, this antagonism of the religious leaders against Jesus would increase until it led to the cross. The religious leaders were determined to kill Jesus, but they did not have any clear charge against him. They no longer were interested in learning from Jesus, but had shut their minds to truth and were only listening to Jesus in order to accuse him. Unfortunately, they did not evaluate their lives to see whether or not what Jesus said was true. They became like many church leaders who are so blinded by their traditions or by their concern for their own glory that they resist anyone who teaches something they do not like or who seems to get more glory than they do.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) What does the story of the woman caught in adultery in Jn. 7:53-8:11 teach us about God, sin, and forgiveness? b) Discuss what happened to Tzion. If you were her church elders, how do you think Jesus would have advised treating her? c) What do the instructions in Mt. 18:15-19 and 1 Cor. 5 add to how we should treat someone like Tzion?

2. John 10:1-21 talks about Jesus, the Good Shepherd. a) What does this passage teach us about the character of Jesus and God? b) What does it teach about Christians who are his sheep? c) What does this passage reveal about how church leaders, who are also shepherds of their church, are to lead? d) Contrast how Jesus leads his sheep and how many church leaders lead their sheep. What is similar? What is different? What are the major areas of improvement that church leaders need to make to be Christ-like shepherds?

3. In Lk. 10:1-24 Jesus sent out 70 disciples as evangelists. a) What does the story teach us about evangelists- their relationship to material possessions, their ministry focus, and Satan? b) Why did Jesus tell the disciples to primarily rejoice that their names are written in the book of life? What important teaching does this statement have for church leaders?

4. In Lk. 10:25-37 Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. a) Jesus said that all of the laws are contained in two commandments. What are the two commandments and how do you think all of the laws in the Bible are contained in them? b) What does the parable teach about who our "neighbor" is and how we are to treat them? c) Evangelicals are sometimes accused about not showing love to those who are not believers. Do you think this accusation is true? What does this story teach about our obligation to help those who are not naturally objects of our assistance? d) Why do you think the two types of religious leaders refused to help? Is this a common problem for church leaders today? If so, why do you think many church leaders and evangelists are like the two religious leaders?

5. a) List the six woes in Lk. 11:37-54. b) Discuss ways that church leaders today can fall into the same way of thinking as the Pharisees when Jesus reprimanded them.

LESSON EIGHTEEN

FIRST DAY

JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES KEY SPIRITUAL TRUTHS (Lk. 12)

Q. 1. a) What do you think is the worst sin a Christian can commit? b) Why do you think that sin is worse than other sins?

How did you answer the above question? Was it adultery? Yes, adultery is an evil and destructive sin. Paul says that anyone who commits sexual sin, sins against himself. (1 Cor. 6:18) Adultery destroys God's ideal of a faithful relationship between husband and wife. When there is adultery, a trusting relationship between husband and wife is often destroyed forever. How about gossip? Probably few would say this sin is very evil, but there is probably no sin that destroys the harmony of a church more than gossip. One church in the United States realized how harmful this sin was and actually put gossiping Christians under more severe church discipline than if they committed adultery!

But how would Jesus answer the question? Most likely he would say that for the Christian, especially for church leaders and ministers, the sin of hypocrisy is the most destructive. Jesus spoke more strongly against the sin of hypocrisy than any other sin. Hypocrisy is the sin that grows most frequently among believers who have been Christians for a long time, especially if they are in church leadership or involved in a ministry where they are in front of other Christians leading worship, singing, teaching, or preaching. Jesus called this sin "yeast" to show how if hypocrisy is not rooted out, it will spread throughout our lives and throughout the church. The sin of hypocrisy reveals itself in different ways.

Hypocrisy is present any time we know something to be true but don't live out the truth. So we talk about being holy, and we pretend to be holy in how we sing or act around others, but in our hearts or in how we live throughout the week, we aren't holy. Or we tell others they should study the Bible or pray, but we don't study the Bible or pray. So we claim to live according to teachings of God's Word, but in reality we don't.

For church leaders and ministers, hypocrisy is claiming to serve God and the church, but in reality we are self-serving. We want positions of honor and glory. We want the pay that such a ministry can bring us. We enjoy the authority of making decisions, but do not get involved in helping the people. We forget that we are shepherds of the people and instead see ourselves as the boss of church members.

Hypocrisy is present when we loudly sing that Jesus is Lord, but make little effort to make Jesus Lord of our lives. Rather than asking Jesus what he wants from us, we seek education and a secular job that pays well. Or we leave our ministry because we have a chance for a better job with an NGO or get a DV to the US.

Hypocrisy overcomes us when we turn Christianity into a system of keeping rules established by our church. So rather than look into our hearts to make sure we love God with all of our being and are showing love for all people, we focus upon things like not drinking alcohol, not dancing, and wearing what is seen as proper clothes or hair styles. Those who keep these rules are seen as being good Christians even

though their character is not right. We often carefully obey these rules made up by man, but have a heart of disobedience. We become proud of our being good Christians rather than humbly following Christ. We think we are acceptable to God because we keep these rules, but make little effort to live in mercy, justice, or love.

Q. 2. a) Describe two examples for each of the four types of hypocrisy that you have seen in the church. b) Examine your own life. What are the ways you tend to fall into the sin of hypocrisy? Confess those sins now and look for ways to limit this terrible sin in your life and ministry. c) Read Lk. 12:1-12. 1) What warnings did Jesus give to his disciples? 2) List the major teachings Jesus gave his disciples in this section.

1. Jesus warns against hypocrisy and fear of persecution (Lk. 12:1-12)

The major example of the sin of hypocrisy during the days of Jesus were the Pharisees. While keeping thousands of human-made laws, they firmly resisted the Messiah whom God sent. Their spiritual eyes were blinded to the major truths of God's Word as they focused upon obeying the traditions of men. Last week we studied how Jesus talked against religious leaders and their wrong tendencies coming from their hypocritical hearts. (Lk. 11:37-52) Jesus turns from addressing the religious leaders to teaching his disciples in Luke 12. In spite of the animosity of the religious leaders, Jesus was very popular with the ordinary people who crowded around him by the thousands. Probably many of these had come to see Jesus because of the ministry of the 70 disciples whom Jesus had sent throughout Judea. Some scholars wonder whether seeing the success of their ministry, Jesus saw early signs of hypocrisy and pride growing in his disciples. Rather than wait, Jesus decided to address these sinful tendencies. Much of what Jesus taught in Luke 12 is found in other Gospels in different settings and we have already explained them. (See Mt. 10:26-33.) We will focus upon the truths that are different in the book of Luke. In his teaching of the disciples, Jesus mentioned the following major truths:

a. Followers of Jesus must be very careful not to become hypocritical. (Lk 12:1-3) They should remember that one day when Jesus judges us, although they had been able to hide the true condition of their hearts from others, it will be revealed to all. We might be able to hide the fact that we are not truly spiritual from others, but Jesus sees it and will one day reveal it. That can happen here on earth as one day the inner condition of our hearts becomes clear to others. But it will happen for sure when Jesus reveals our hidden thoughts and motives when he judges us at the end of times.

b. Followers of Jesus should never fear physical punishment and death. (Lk 12:4-5, 8-12) The worst thing religious and political leaders are able to do to us is kill our physical body. But the martyrdom of Christians is not a tragedy in the eyes of God. All it does is usher God's children into the eternal presence of God. Rather, we should fear God who not only controls our physical life, but also our eternal destiny. If we fear death and give up our faith we might add some years to our earthly existence. But we will still face physical death. And then we must stand in judgment before God who can condemn us to eternal death in hell. So we should not recant (called here "*blaspheme the Holy Spirit*") or be ashamed of following Jesus. These will bring God's punishment upon us.

Facing the anger of the "*synagogue*" (Jewish religious leaders) and "*rulers*" (Gentile political rulers) would be a normal result of following Jesus. But believers should not worry about how to defend themselves when brought before courts for judgment. The Holy Spirit will give them the words to say. Those words might help deliver believers from physical death. But more important, the Holy Spirit will

show them how to answer truthfully and honestly and proclaim that Jesus is Lord. (See Acts 5:17-42 for an illustration of how the apostles answered when before the Jewish court.)

c. Followers of Jesus should never worry about the details of their lives. (Lk 12:6-7) We have as our spiritual father the one who takes care of the sparrows, and he will take care of us in a much greater way. Our God is not indifferent to our needs but knows exactly what we need and meets those needs as he feels best.

Q. 3. Read Lk. 12:13-21. a) What attitude did the person asking for Jesus to decide on his favor evidence which Jesus warned against? b) How is it similar to the attitude of the rich fool? c) Describe how you have seen Christians, even church ministers, have a similar attitude today.

2. Jesus warns against overemphasis upon material blessings (Lk. 12:13-21)

Disciples of Jesus must be careful of the trap of focusing upon material wealth rather than the kingdom of God. As Jesus was teaching, suddenly a person cried out loudly asking Jesus to intervene in an inheritance dispute he was in with his brother. The Old Testament taught that the oldest son got a double portion of the inheritance, but all of the rest was to be divided equally among the rest of the sons. (Num. 33:54; Deut. 21:17) So was this a complaint that the oldest son took more than the double portion or was the man complaining that the double portion given to the oldest son was not fair? We don't know for sure. But it was common during the days of Jesus to ask a famous rabbi to pronounce judgment in unclear matters. (It would not be long until Jewish rabbis would become the major judges for Jews and travel from place to place pronouncing judgment.) When a famous rabbi would give his opinion in the matter, the offended people could then use what he said to put pressure upon the other party. Jesus refused to interfere in the matter. He had come to get people ready for his spiritual kingdom, not to be a judge of matters in society.

What concerned Jesus was the hidden attitude of this man. Jesus knew that the man, and many of his followers, would become distracted by emphasizing material wealth rather than upon the spiritual kingdom he had come to initiate. Jesus knew that many followers, even ministers of the Gospel, can begin to focus upon getting a more comfortable life on earth and become distracted from what really matters. (Note: We can see the tendency to focus on money when we begin to abuse per diem which the church might pay us, or when we expect churches to give us big gifts when we come to speak and are offended when they don't, or when we refuse to speak in a poor small church since they won't give us a big gift, or when we focus upon the pay we believe we should get since we have a higher level of education.) Jesus warned his disciples that a blessed life in the eyes of God has nothing to do with material possessions but in how much they focus upon their spiritual lives. Paul warns us that to focus too much on wealth is a form of idolatry, just as if we were worshipping trees or golden idols like some people do. (Col. 3:5)

Jesus liked to use stories to illustrate his truth, and so he told the story about a wealthy landowner. Scholars say that during the times of Jesus rich landowners owned most of the land in Judea where Jesus was teaching. Most farmers farmed for these landowners, much like during the days of Haile Selassie when Amhara landowners owned much of the land. These rich landowners would store their grain in large storage bins waiting for a better time to sell. This rich landowner was never satisfied with what he had, however, so he kept building more and more storage bins. And he focused upon enjoying the "*good things*" he had; eating and drinking in great parties with his friends. (Note: Look at the number of "I" listed in this story. Whenever we use a lot of "I" in our speech, we usually are demonstrated that we are focusing upon

ourselves and not others or God. The word tends to show either our selfish focus upon ourselves or our pride in what we have done. Both are wrong for the followers of Jesus.) Suddenly, God decided that it was time for the rich landowner to meet his Judge, and the person died. It was then that it was seen that he was a "fool." (Note: The word "fool" comes from the Old Testament and refers to a person who lives with little concern for God and his laws. (See Prov. 10:23; Ps. 53:1; 107:17) a "fool" is someone who focuses primarily upon life now, rather than life in eternity.) Now the rich man would face God and have nothing stored up for himself in heaven. He might have enjoyed his riches for a few years, but he could not take his riches with him. Instead, he would face God's judgment for eternity.

Jesus tells his disciples to be "*rich toward God*." By this he meant that we are to focus all of our energies upon what matters to God and that which will bring God's reward after we die. Jesus did not mean that it is wrong to be rich. Nor is it wrong for us to have good things, like living in a high-quality house or having a good job. But we must be very careful that "greed" does not take over so that we focus upon these temporary blessings and not upon spiritual things. In 1 Tim. 6:6-10 Paul warned that the love of money is very destructive to most Christians. If God gives us wealth, his desire is for us to use this wealth for the kingdom of God, not for temporary pleasures. But it is not just the rich who struggle with this. Even ordinary Christians or ministers can begin to focus so much upon looking for ways to get more money or physical blessings that they are "*poor towards God*" rather than "*rich towards God*."

Q. 4. a) Describe ways you have seen God use a rich believer greatly for his kingdom. b) Describe ways you have seen church members, even ministers, become more focused upon temporal things rather than eternal things. c) Examine your life. What are ways that you have begun to focus more upon temporal blessings rather than eternal blessings? What are things you can do to make sure you are "rich towards God?"

Q. 5. Read Luke 12:22-59. Make a list of truths Jesus taught his disciples in this section.

3. Jesus warns the disciples not to worry about their daily needs in life because God will take care of them (Lk. 12:22-34) [See Mt. 6:25-33 for similar teachings.] Central to Christianity is learning to trust God for everything. So Jesus tells his disciples that key to being his followers is learning to trust God and not their own efforts for the daily needs of life. In fact, their trust in God can be so strong that they can share their wealth generously with those who have none. In doing so, they are storing up true treasure for themselves in heaven.

4. Disciples are to diligently live their lives in service of Jesus so that when he suddenly returns, they will not be ashamed (Lk. 12:35-48) Those who are faithfully serving God will be greatly rewarded, but those who waste their lives in focusing upon themselves or earthly things will be punished.

5. Followers of Jesus should know that although Jesus is the "prince of peace," those who choose to follow Jesus will often face the resistance of others (Lk. 12:49-53) [See Mt. 10:34-36.] Christianity always divides. The followers of Jesus will often face the hatred of others in society, even those we love dearly. Our friends will often no longer relate to us when we choose to wholeheartedly follow Jesus. Even our family members will not understand as we give our lives to become ministers.

6. People must learn to recognize the spiritual signs that the Messiah has come (Lk. 12:54-59) As humans we are good at seeing indicators in the weather or in our nation and using that to predict whether or not it will be a good day tomorrow or a good year for our nation. But Jesus accuses the crowd about

being blind to the signs that matter. He, the Messiah and King, is in their midst; the kingdom of God has begun. But they can't see with understanding the various indicators (i.e. his miracles, his teachings) which reveal the coming of the kingdom.

Humans have learned that they must evaluate their situation when in the middle of a court case. If it looks like they will lose the court case, they know it is best to do what they can to reconcile with their accuser before coming into court. In this way they will get a better deal than when the judge punishes them. To be stubborn will bring greater punishment. In the same way, the Jews must hurry and be reconciled to their Messiah. Otherwise, God, the Judge, would bring upon them a greater punishment. Unfortunately the Jews did not reconcile with Jesus, and in 40 years time, God brought judgment upon them, destroying the city of Jerusalem, the Temple was burned, and the people scattered.

But this is true for all of us as well. Until we die, we are in a position to reconcile with God and Jesus to be saved and receive God's forgiveness and eternal life. But if we don't, when God judges us, there will be no second chance to be saved. And until we die, we have opportunities to live for God, storing up treasure in heaven. But once we die, we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15) At that time, our ability to store up treasure is over, and we will be rewarded or punished accordingly.

Q. 6. Evaluate your life. Are you ready to meet the Judge? If not, what do you need to change so that when you meet God, you won't be ashamed or face judgment.

Q. 7. Read Lk. 13:1-9. a) Why did the Jews think the Galileans and the people in the tower in Siloam were killed? b) What was Jesus' response to them? c) What do you think Jesus was teaching through the parable of the fig tree?

JESUS WARNS PEOPLE OF THE NEED TO REPENT BEFORE GOD'S JUDGMENT COMES (Lk. 13:1-9)

Like many of us, the Jews thought that every disaster or sickness was somehow related to sin. The Jews taught that without sin there is no sickness and the cause of any disaster is the sin of the people. One day some people came to Jesus and told him about two events which had recently happened to some Jews. It could be that Jesus had been up in Galilee and so had not heard about the disasters personally. The two events mentioned are not found in any Jewish history books so we can only guess at what happened. Pilate was the Roman governor, ruling over Judea from 26-36 AD. Being posted in Judea was not a popular posting for a Roman since it was considered one of the most backward provinces of the Roman Empire. So it is likely that Pilate was not happy to be working in Judea. Jewish history books tell us that Pilate had little diplomatic skill and showed little sensitivity to Jewish desires.

We know of several instances where Pilate greatly offended the Jews. One was when he wanted to build a water aqueduct into the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem did not have a good water source, so Pilate decided to bring water into the city from a spring a long distance away. This was a good idea. However, Pilate decided that since it benefited the Jews, they would pay for the project and not Rome. So he forcibly took money from the treasury in the Temple. The Jews believed this money belonged to God and was to be used for the Temple, not for other projects. So they became angry at Pilate. During one of the religious holidays, the Jews decided to demonstrate against the Romans. The Galileans were known for quickly joining any effort to withstand Rome, so most likely the Galilean Jews were at the forefront of the resistance to Herod's project. Herod had some of his soldiers put civilian clothes on over their soldier

uniforms and mix with the demonstrators who were in the Temple area. When he gave the signal, they took rods that they were carrying under their clothes, and beat the Jews, killing many of them. Killing someone in the act of sacrificing was viewed by the Jews as a very evil act. Some scholars think that this was the event that was told to Jesus and this was the reason Pilate and Herod Antipas (who was the ruler over the Galileans) became enemies (See Lk. 23:12). The Pharisees who taught against resisting Rome would have seen this event as God's judgment for resisting. The Zealots (those who took an active stance against Roman domination of Judea) would have also seen this as God's punishment for not expelling the Romans and for the Jews being willing to collaborate with the Romans in the water aqueduct.

The pool of Siloam was where many people in Jerusalem got water. Some scholars think that the tower mentioned was a tower in the city wall that was adjacent to this famous pool and it was somehow linked with the water project Pilate was building. This tower collapsed with 18 men in it and all of them died. No doubt this caused many Jews to believe that they were being punished by God for assisting the Romans in their water project.

It seems that the reason people were telling Jesus about these events was because they were interested in the theological question of why disasters happen. "Why does this happen to God's people?" is a common question humans often ask when they are sick or something happens to people they know. But Jesus was not interested in theoretical "why" questions. The Bible never gives a clear response to "why" bad things happen to God's people. Rather, Jesus changed the question to "If it were to happen to you, would you be ready to meet God?" Jesus taught two major truths to these men:

a. Jesus claimed that the disaster was not related to any sin in the lives of those who died. We must never think that natural disasters are the direct result of sin in the lives of people. In reality, all men are sinners, and if God punished us directly for our sins by causing our death, then all of us would be dead! Although God does punish when people or a nation have unrepentant sin, usually we do not know whether or not the event is related to a specific sin. This is hidden in the mystery of God's workings. So we should never accuse someone who is sick, or who struggles with being childless, or who has suffered an accident that the cause is sin. We should also be careful about claiming natural disasters as the direct result of sin. It was this false accusation which caused God to threaten to punish Job's friends. (See Job 42:7-9) Some of the greatest saints, like Paul, suffered greatly physically and because of persecution with no indication of it being linked to sin.

b. Jesus warned people that life is very uncertain. Jesus is hinting that every time we see a disaster, it should remind us how short life is and that we must always be ready to meet God. Since we don't know when we will die, we must always live our lives prepared to die. We must especially make sure our relationship with God is right. If we are not followers of Jesus, we must become followers of Jesus through faith. If we are not living holy lives, we must confess our sin and change how we live. If we are not serving God, then we must look for ways to serve God and his people. Who knows- tomorrow you might be the one who dies in a car accident or because of some disease. Are you ready?

c. Jesus warned the Jews that they must accept the Messiah while there is time or God will punish them. (Lk. 13:6-9) Jesus told a parable using an image from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God often compared his people to a fig tree or to a vineyard. (See Mic. 7:1; Jer. 8:13; 24:1-10) There was usually very little land available for planting, so Jews would often plant a fig tree in their vineyard. Fig trees usually started bearing fruit in three years. Farmers did not want a tree in their vineyard taking up space which did

not produce food. So this landowner decided to cut down the fig tree since it did not bear fruit. However, the gardener asked the landowner to give one year of grace to the tree. Over the year, he took special care of the fig tree, putting manure on it and watering it. If the tree did not bear fruit within the year, it would be cut down.

This parable was a picture of God's relationship with the Jews. God had planted the Jews by choosing them as his special people. He showered his grace upon them, giving them God's Word and the covenants made with Abraham and Moses. But throughout the Old Testament, and now during the time of Jesus, the Jews had not responded as God desired. They did not bear the fruit of obedience to God. They especially did not show mercy, justice, and love, the type of fruit God desired most. With the coming of Jesus, the Jews were in their "last year"- if they did not repent soon, God would punish them. And that is what happened. Forty years after the death of Jesus, in 70 AD, the Romans came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple and scattered the Jews. The early Christians saw this as God's punishment upon the Jews for rejecting their Messiah when he came.

But this is also a warning to each one of us. We often rejoice that God is a God of grace and we have forgiveness for our sins. And this is a great truth. As God described himself, he is a God who is slow to anger and long in love and forgiveness. (See Ex. 34:5-7) But unfortunately this has led many of us to become indifferent to how we live. We think we can turn from our sins at some later time, but we want to live for our own pleasure now. Or we think that it really does not matter when we sin because God will forgive us. But Jesus is warning each one of us that although God is a God of grace and forgiveness, there is a time of punishment. He might punish us in this life through some judgment like he did in the Corinthian church. (See 1 Cor. 11:30-32) But he will judge us after death. (1 Cor. 3:10-15) This time of grace is very short- so we should get right with God now and live for him now. Each of us should remember that at a time we don't know, a disaster could happen to us and at that time the time of repentance and grace is gone, and we will face the judgment of God. This warning should remind us that God desires that we live fruitful lives for his glory. But if we do not bear fruit, there will come a day of judgment upon us for wasting our lives in selfish things. God's grace upon our lives; the opportunity for education, salvation, and spiritual gifts are always given with a sense of responsibility. They are given to us not so that we can enjoy them and their benefits, but so we can use them for God's glory and the benefit of others. To not use them this way will bring upon us God's displeasure.

- Q. 8. a) Describe ways many Christians assume God is a God of grace and therefore do not take their relationship with him seriously and sin with little concern. b) Examine your life. If there are ways you are indifferent in your obedience of God because you know God will forgive, repent of those things now.
- Q. 9. Read Lk. 13:10-21. Describe what Jesus did on the Sabbath which angered the religious leaders.

JESUS HEALS THE CRIPPLED WOMAN ON THE SABBATH (Lk. 13:10-17)

What do we do when we see some church leaders doing something that is not Biblical? We can do several things:

First, we can join them in their actions even though we know it is not right. Many church leaders see other church leaders doing something wrong. But they don't want to be seen as being against these church leaders, so they act like them. They know stealing from the offering is wrong, but they do it since other church leaders are doing it. Or they know that leaving their government work early is wrong, but they do it

anyway since other people are leaving early. The fear of what others will say if we do not act like them causes many Christians to give up their godly standards and act like the world.

Second, we can refuse to join what the others are doing, but keep quiet about it. We don't want to cause a fight. Or we don't want those people to turn against us. So we keep quiet, allowing the sin to continue in the church or in the lives of other Christians.

Third, we can speak up so that people will know that what they are doing is wrong and have a chance to change their actions. It takes great wisdom to know when we should be quiet and when we should speak out, but one of the things we learn from Jesus is his unwillingness to accommodate to the views of people when those views go against the Bible and have a negative impact upon other people.

One of the things Jesus showed no tolerance for was how the religious leaders had changed the Sabbath into such a legalistic day that it took away from the joy of setting that day aside to worship God and rest. The Jewish leaders had so many rules about what people could and could not do on the Sabbath that few people enjoyed the day and joyfully worshipped God. They were too worried about what they could or could not do. The Gospels tell us of six times that Jesus knowingly healed on the Sabbath in direct disobedience to the expectations of the religious leaders.

Luke 13:10-17 is the last recorded time when Jesus taught in a synagogue. With the resistance of the Jewish leaders increasing every day, it seems that opportunities to teach in the synagogues became fewer and fewer. As he was teaching, Jesus saw a woman who had a crippling disease, which for 18 years caused her to be bent over and no doubt pained her greatly. (Note: It is not clear whether the woman's condition was the direct result of a spiritual attack on her by Satan or not. Most likely Jesus was saying that any time people suffer, Satan, the one who brought all suffering into the world, is involved.) Jesus openly healed the woman. He could have made an appointment with her and waited until after the Sabbath to heal her. But Jesus refused to accommodate to the wrong views of the Sabbath which the Pharisees had or delay suffering when he had the power to heal.

Jesus' actions caused the religious leaders to be greatly disturbed. The ruler of the synagogue, the one responsible to administer the synagogue, stood up and reprimanded the people for coming to be healed on the Sabbath. But Jesus would not let the wrong view of the Sabbath and the hypocritical stance of the religious leaders to go unchallenged. In front of everyone, he pointed out their wrong reasoning. These religious leaders knew that it was permitted to feed and water their animals on the Sabbath. "If it is possible to show care for simple animals, how can it ever be wrong to help someone much greater than an animal, like a *'daughter of Abraham'* (meaning a Jewess.)" argued Jesus. Jesus' open stand against the religious leaders in support of helping people pleased the common people greatly.

This story provides a warning to those who are church leaders. Like the Pharisees, it is easy to focus upon our rules rather than upon love and mercy for others. Jesus demonstrated that showing kindness to others is always more important than our rules, or our schedule, or what we think is important. Jesus was so concerned for this lady that he did not want her to suffer even one more day. Do we have this type of attitude towards others whom we often don't think are important?

Q. 10. Choose a situation that is common in the church but which is clearly unbiblical. a) Describe how you could react to the situation in each of the three ways described above. b) Which way of handling the situation is most common in the church? c) How do you think Jesus would address that situation?

Q. 11. Read Lk. 13:18-21. What did Jesus mean by his kingdom being like yeast or a mustard seed?

JESUS DESCRIBES HIS KINGDOM AS BEING LIKE A MUSTARD SEED OR YEAST (Lk. 13:18-21)

Jesus taught that the kingdom that he had come to establish would not appear suddenly and with great power as the Jews expected. Rather it would grow slowly, just like a mustard seed grew from a small seed into a large bush in which birds can rest. Some scholars think the birds symbolize the Gentiles. Jesus' kingdom is also similar to how a little yeast that seems insignificant and powerless can cause a lot of flour to raise. In the same way, Jesus' kingdom would grow from a few disciples until one day it would reach throughout the whole world. (Lk. 13:18-21) [See Mt. 13:31-33 for a fuller explanation of this passage.] Today, Christianity is the largest religion in the world.

SECOND DAY

JESUS TEACHES AT THE FEAST OF DEDICATION (Jn. 10:22-42)

Q. 12. Read Jn. 10:22-42. a) Why did Jews want to stone Jesus? b) Where did Jesus go when he left Jerusalem? What had happened to Jesus 3 years earlier at this place?

Jesus had been traveling throughout Judea for two months teaching people. But when the Feast of Dedication arrived, Jesus returned to Jerusalem. The Feast of Dedication which took place in December had started about 200 years before the time of Jesus. In Jewish history, on December 167 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes, who was the Greek ruler over Palestine wanted to force the Jews to live and worship like the Greeks. So he turned the worship in the Temple into Greek worship, sacrificing pigs on the altar and setting up an idol to Zeus, one of the Greek gods, in the Temple. This started a Jewish rebellion against the Syrian Greeks led by a family called Maccabees. Over 80,000 Jews died and many more were sold into slavery. For three years there was civil war until the Jews gained semi-independence from Syria. In December 164 BC, Judas Maccabeus cleansed the Temple and the worship of the true God started once more and the Jews celebrated for eight days. The Jews had a story that when the priests went in to purify the Temple, they found a small bottle of sacred oil for the burning of lights, just enough for one day. They lit the lights in the Temple that were kept alight all day long once again. Miraculously, that small bottle of oil lasted for the eight days of celebration and until new oil was prepared. So the Jews proclaimed that there would be an eight day celebration every year to commemorate the rededication of the Temple. In remembrance of the oil, on each day of the feast, great lights were lit in the Temple. And in each home a candlestick with eight holders was lit. The Feast of Dedication is today called "Feast of Lights" (Hanukah) by the Jews. Although Jews were not required to attend Jerusalem for this celebration, many devout Jews, especially those living in Judea, came to Jerusalem.

It was on one of these eight days of celebration that Jesus was teaching in the Temple. The Jews demanded of Jesus "*If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*" (Jn. 10:24) They wanted Jesus to openly proclaim that he was the Messiah probably so that they could accuse him to the Romans. There were very few times when Jesus publicly said that he was the Messiah.

1. Jesus insisted that there were enough evidences that he was the Messiah to convince them. The true sheep of God would be able to recognize that Jesus is God's Messiah. The fact that the Jews, especially the religious leaders, could not recognize Jesus as the Messiah revealed that they had no relationship with God. Jesus told them that God's true sheep recognized Jesus, listening to him and obeying him. One of the amazing things about Christianity is that if we have faith in Jesus, we see many convincing evidences that Jesus is who he claimed to be. But if a person chooses to not believe in Jesus, he cannot see or understand or accept these evidences. (Note how faith in Jesus is closely tied to following (obeying) Jesus. The Bible shows that faith must always be put into action if it is true faith. There are many Christians who make a verbal claim that Jesus is their Savior and Lord, but they never live changed lives. This is not saving faith. Only those who know, follow, and obey Jesus have the saving faith which Jesus insists makes them secure from God's judgment forever, and gives them eternal life which brings them the blessing of God both now and forever.)

No matter what the Jews or other enemies, even Satan, might try to do, Jesus' sheep are protected by God and secure. Standing behind each of his sheep is the full power of God. He is Almighty, so no one can ever do anything to his sheep without his permission. Our protection does not depend upon our having enough faith; or enough purity; or enough knowledge of God's Word; or enough prayer. Rather, the security of the sheep of God depends only upon the power of the shepherd, and since our Shepherd is God Almighty, we can rest assured in his care and protection!

2. Jesus insisted that his miracles and teachings were enough proof that he was God's Son. Although the miracles do not prove that Jesus is the Messiah since Satan also can do miracles, the miracles provide strong evidence that Jesus is the Messiah.

3. Jesus claimed "*I and the Father are one.*" There are two Greek words for "one." One word refers to the number one and would mean that Jesus is the same person as the Father; they are two names for the same person as the Jesus Only people claim. But Jesus did not use this word. The second word for "one" is "one in purpose and action, one in nature." In other words, Jesus and God the Father are equal and work together in perfect harmony.

4. The Jews recognized that Jesus was claiming to be equal with God the Father, so they decided to stone Jesus to death for the sin of blasphemy. (See Lev. 24:16) Jesus responded in two ways:

a. Jesus asked which "*miracle*" that he did caused them to want to stone him. He was again pointing to his mighty works as his proof that he had a unique relationship with God. The Jews acknowledged that Jesus did great miracles, but it was his claim that he was equal to God the Father that angered them.

b. Jesus pointed back to Ps. 82:6 to show that claiming to be God's Son was not necessarily blasphemy. It is not clear in Ps. 82:6 if it is angels or judges who are called "*sons of God.*" In the Old Testament both angels and great rulers (like Solomon- see Ps. 2) were called "sons of God" to reflect their close relationship with God and that they were working under his authority. But this title did not mean that they were deity. Jesus is saying that if humans or angels have the right to be called "sons of God," he has a greater right to that title.

The Jews were not satisfied with Jesus' answer and wanted to seize him and take him to the Sanhedrin to be tried for blasphemy. But they were not able to since it was not yet God's time for Jesus to die. Jesus and all of God's people are secure in God's protection until the "*hour*" of our death as determined by God arrives. Three months later, the high priest would command Jesus to openly say whether or not he was the Messiah, the Son of God. When Jesus answered that he was, it was this charge of blasphemy that the high priest used to pronounce Jesus worthy of death. (See Mk. 14:61-64)

Jesus knew that in Jerusalem and Judea things were too tense for him to continue his ministry. So he crossed over the Jordan River and returned to the area where 3 years earlier John the Baptist had baptized him and initiated Jesus' public ministry. Seeing Jesus in the area reminded the Jews of what John the Baptist had proclaimed about Jesus. Many Jews believed that John was God's prophet. And they believed that his prediction about Jesus turned out to be true. So people continued to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

Q. 13. Read Lk. 13:22-35. Summarize Jesus' teaching in this section.

JESUS CONTINUES TEACHING THE PEOPLE (Lk. 13:22-35)

In the final months of his life Jesus travelled from village to village teaching people, warning them to get ready for the Messiah's kingdom. Every chance he had, he taught people what that kingdom was like and what it meant to become his follower. Much of what Jesus taught in this section is taught in other Gospel passages, so we will only summarize the truths here.

1. Becoming part of Jesus' kingdom was not a natural process where Jews were guaranteed salvation because they were born Jews, but demanded a personal choice to be a follower of Jesus (Lk. 13:22-30)

One day as Jesus was traveling, people asked him how many people would be "*saved*" and become part of God's kingdom. Rabbis often debated this theoretical question in those days. Some taught that all Jews were guaranteed salvation since they were the children of Abraham. Others taught that only a few who were righteous (like the Pharisees or Essenes) would be saved and allowed into God's eternal kingdom. Jesus refused to get involved in this theoretical discussion. Rather than asking "How many will be saved?" he told the people that they should be asking "Will I be saved on that day?"

In his response to the people, Jesus taught that becoming part of God's kingdom was not a natural, easy process. One isn't born into it. No person born a Jew was automatically part of that kingdom. Each Jew had to make a choice, he had to believe on Jesus and become his follower. And no Christian is a true Christian because his parents are Christians or evangelists. Each person must make his own choice to "*enter the narrow door.*"

Jesus taught that salvation demands entering a "narrow door."

First one has to find the narrow door. The door was not narrow because God is seeking to keep people out of his kingdom. Rather it is narrow because there is only one way people can be saved and that is through getting to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Salvation is not broad as most people think. There are not many ways to God. Rather, salvation is only found in Jesus and it is only granted when we each personally turn to Jesus to wash away our sins and make a commitment to follow Jesus. Perhaps the door

was also narrow because Jesus is showing how few people actually choose to enter into the door of salvation.

Second, entering into the door takes effort. The word "*effort*" here means to do something that causes us to become very tired. It demands our whole being to enter into it and often comes at a cost of being rejected by others. Jesus is not teaching that we must keep a long list of things to do in order to be saved, unlike what the Pharisees often taught. Rather, he taught that it is very difficult for each of us to humble ourselves and turn to God alone to provide forgiveness for our sins. And it is very difficult for us to no longer seek to control our own lives, but to allow Jesus to be the Lord of our lives. Humility, repentance, and submission to Jesus always take effort.

Third, Jesus warned that one day the narrow door of salvation will be closed by Jesus, the owner of the house. At death, any opportunity we might have to enter the door of salvation into God's house will be taken away. At that time no amount of pleading will get Jesus to open the door so people could come in and enjoy salvation, which is pictured as a great feast. Even a claim by the Jews who had stood in the crowd and seen Jesus do miracles and listened as he taught them, but had not personally made a choice to follow Jesus, would deliver them. To the Jews, knowing someone's name, title and place of origin was a sign of having a relationship with the person. Here Jesus says that these Jews who knew his name and about his works were unknown to him for they had no relationship with him. Jews pictured salvation as a great feast, and reclining was the position where honored guests would lie on mats eating from a table filled with good food. Eating together symbolized having a relationship together. Jesus refused to allow them to eat with him since they had chosen in their lives to not have any relationship with him.

Like the Jews, there are many people today who come to church, sing hymns and may even be baptized, but have never made a personal commitment to follow Jesus with their whole lives. Being part of a certain denomination, or going to church, or even shouting "Jesus is Lord" will make no difference on that day. They will be shut out of God's kingdom since they did not personally enter into Jesus' kingdom. Jesus indicates that it is not those who attend who are saved. Rather it is those who enter into a personal relationship with him who are saved. To the Jews, the word "*know*" means more than understanding the facts or even approving the facts that Jesus died for us. Rather, it always refers to entering into a personal, vibrant relationship with someone. Because they did not have the personal relationship with him, on the day of judgment Jesus will say he never knew them.

Fourth, Jesus said that on that day of judgment many Jews (and Christians as well) who assumed that they were going to be accepted by God into heaven will be excluded. They will face great punishment, symbolized by "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*." And they will be like uninvited people watching a wedding without being allowed to join the celebration. Perhaps one of the worst things about hell will be the fact that people will forever comprehend how much joy there is in heaven and realize they will never be able to enjoy it.

Fifth, Jesus also said that whereas the Jews whom we would assume would be in the kingdom are excluded from Jesus' kingdom, people from the "*east, west, north, and south*" will be allowed into the kingdom. Jesus was warning the Jews that it would not be long when from among the despised Gentiles, there would be many who would enjoy equal privileges of being in God's eternal kingdom with Jews like Isaiah and David. When Luke was writing his Gospel, few Jews were willing to trust in Jesus as their Messiah. But many Gentiles were turning to Jesus and it would not be long until the church was mainly

made up of Gentiles. Paul called this time "the hardening of the Jews." Only in the last days will Jews enter the kingdom of God in great numbers. (Rom. 11:25-27) Today there are few Jews who accept Jesus as their Messiah. But God promises that one day that will change as many Jews will turn to the one they "spared" and trust in him. (See Zech. 12:10)

Q. 14. a) Describe how salvation is like entering into a narrow door. b) Many young people today think they are Christians and saved because they are part of a certain church, or have parents who are believers, or parents who are church ministers or leaders. What is your church doing to help these young people understand that they must personally choose to follow Jesus? c) What suggestions do you have for your church to help people better understand the effort it takes to enter the narrow door?

Jesus taught that often it is a surprise who is part of Jesus' kingdom and who isn't. The Jews, those who had the privileged position (*the first*) would suddenly find themselves outside of God's kingdom, and the Gentiles (*the last*) who did not enjoy the special privileges the Jews enjoyed would enter Jesus' kingdom first. But this truth is true today as well. The people the world sees as privileged (the educated, wealthy, powerful) seem to be in the "first" position. But it is often the uneducated, the poor, and the powerless (seen by the world as "the last") who come to Jesus for salvation. Spiritually, they enjoy the "first" position of being saved. Jesus is also hinting that one day the Christians whom the world despises will be in the honored position. When Jesus comes with his kingdom, those unbelievers who enjoyed the powerful and honored positions will face his judgment. And those who had been persecuted will be rewarded. Paul later said that in that kingdom Christians will reign with Christ. (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4; 22:5) Often times we find ourselves downtrodden on this earth as we follow Jesus. It is tempting to try to gain the honor famous people in the world enjoy. But Jesus warns us that we should be patient, for it is only when he comes to reign that the "last" will enjoy the "first" position. If we give up and join the "first" now, we will forfeit our position of being "the first" in eternity.

2. Jesus expresses his sorrow over the rejection of the majority of the Jews (Lk. 13:31-35)

While Jesus was ministering in the political region of Herod Antipas (either Galilee, or more likely Perea to the east of Judea- see map in Appendix A in the back of book), some Jews warned Jesus of Herod's desire to kill Jesus. Jesus showed no fear of Herod, calling him a "fox." To the Jew, being called a fox could have two different meaning. Often it was used of a tricky, evil, destructive person. Or it could refer to someone who is insignificant. (Neh. 4:3) How could Jesus show such indifference to a powerful political leader? It was because he knew that God, not the political leader, was in charge. Jesus knew that he was on the way to Jerusalem where he would soon die on the cross. (Notice Jesus' use of the word "*must*" to show that it was his destiny.) Whereas the Jews looked at Jerusalem as the seat of spirituality since the Temple was there, Jesus saw it as an evil location where God's prophets are killed. Not only would he die there, but Stephen, James, and many other early Christians would be martyred there.

There was nothing Herod or any other person could do to thwart the plans of God. The expression "*today, tomorrow, and on the third day*" was a Jewish expression meaning "soon" to indication that Jesus would soon leave Perea and travel to Jerusalem where he would face the fate of death similar to many prophets of the Old Testament. Scholars think that the expression "*on the third day*" would have reminded the Christians what happened on another third day, the day when Jesus would rise from the dead. Followers of Jesus realize that our lives too are controlled by God. Nothing, neither disease, disaster, or persecution or death would ever come upon us before God's time has arrived.

His coming death did not cause Jesus sorrow. What sorrowed him was the fact that his own people, the Jews, symbolized by Jerusalem their capital city, had refused to acknowledge him as their Messiah. (See Mt. 23:37-39 for similar words by Jesus.) In the Old Testament God was often pictured as a mother hen protecting her chicks. (Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1) Jesus wanted to have that same type of relationship with the Jews, but they refused it. Jesus knew that it would not be long until Jerusalem would face severe judgment. The city of Jerusalem, the center of the Jews, and the great Temple that every Jew looked at with pride, would be totally destroyed. This happened in 70 AD when the Romans completely destroyed the Temple and most of the walls around Jerusalem and many building in Jerusalem. Eventually they would prohibit any Jew from entering the city of Jerusalem.

But Jesus hinted that one day things would change. One day his people would once again sing "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" The Jews sang this Psalm (Ps. 118:26) whenever they walked up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. But Jesus is hinting that one day his people will acknowledge him as their Messiah.

Q. 15. Read Rom. 11:25-27. a) What promise did Paul make about the nation of Israel in the future? b) What does Paul say about these days called the "time of the Gentiles" which should cause us Gentiles to praise God for his grace upon us?

Q. 16. Read Lk. 14:1-14. a) What did Jesus do which displeased the Pharisees? b) What lesson was Jesus trying to teach by reprimanding those who sat in the best seats? c) What type of guests did Jesus say we are to invite into our homes?

JESUS EATS IN THE HOME OF A PROMINENT PHARISEE (Lk. 14:1-14)

1. Jesus heals the man with dropsy (Lk. 14:1-6)

In Jewish culture, the Sabbath (Saturday) meal was often a time for religious leaders to gather together and discuss theological issues among themselves without interference from others. One day one of the most important Pharisees invited Jesus to his house. Probably he and the other Pharisees invited Jesus so that they could test him and look for ways to destroy his reputation among the people and perhaps to find ways to formally accuse Jesus of some religious crime. Although the Jews viewed eating together as a sign of friendship, there was not much friendship in this meal, for Jesus was "*being carefully watched.*"

We are told that in the house was a man with dropsy. Dropsy is a disease where the fluids in your body builds up and your feet and hands swell and your joints hurt. Luke does not specifically tell us, but it is unlikely that the Pharisee would invite such a sick person for a meal out of friendship. Most likely he was invited so that the Pharisees would see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath. (To the religious leaders, the fact that Jesus would heal on the Sabbath would have been a major proof that he was not a "holy man.") Jesus knew that he was being tested so he asked the religious leaders "*is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?*" But the religious leaders would not answer Jesus. Jesus could have made an appointment on the next day to heal the man, but he wanted to teach an important principle that people are more important than rules. So Jesus healed the man and sent him away so that he could continue his discussion with the religious leaders in private.

Hypocrisy often causes us to become imbalanced in how we understand truth. We begin to focus upon our rules and regulations and not upon people. These Pharisees wanted to keep the Sabbath holy as

God had said, but in focusing upon regulations on what it means to keep the Sabbath holy, they forgot the importance of mercy and compassion for people. Jesus revealed how they were inconsistent in applying their laws for they were willing to help their child or an animal if it fell into a well, but they would not help a person who was sick. Rather than rejoice at God's mercy in healing a person, all they could think about was how Jesus had broken the law.

Jesus used the word "*immediately*" (Lk. 14:5) to show that we too must never delay in helping others if we can help now. Christians who work as nurses and doctors must pay close attention to this truth. Often when a patient is brought to them, they callously make them wait as they go off for tea, visit with their friends, or tell them to come back another day. Jesus models for us that if it is within our power to help, we must act immediately. We must be careful we do not grow callous to the hurts of others and put our personal preferences above their problems. To delay is to be cruel, a character inconsistent with followers of Jesus.

Q. 17. a) List ways that we too can focus upon our own laws and regulations and forget that people are the most important thing. b) List ways church leaders can be cruel in delaying help which they could give to people quickly. Why do they do this?

2. Jesus teaches the religious leaders about the value of humility (Lk. 14:7-11)

Jesus used every opportunity he could to show people how their lives did not meet the standard that God's law demanded. One of the ways the religious leaders broke the teaching of God's Word was in their focus upon status. In Prov. 25:6-7 Solomon had warned Jews that they should not seek to gain honor for themselves. But in Jewish culture it became very important for a person to be ranked according to his status. That status could come because of being older, or being more educated, or being a religious leader. When holding a banquet like at a wedding, the seats (couches) were arranged in the shape of a "U." At the top of the U, the host or the most honored guest (like wedding party) sat. Then the couches were arranged along both sides facing the honored guest. The closer one sat to the honored guests, the more status he was supposed to have. The seats farthest away from the honored guest were for those with the least status and honor. At a formal meal, people would lie down on cushions or low couches resting on their left elbow, eating with their right hand, with their head pointed towards the guest. The host was responsible to assign seats at the meal according to a person's status. It was a great insult for the host to set a more honorable person at a seat which was considered as having less status. If a person sat in a seat close to the honored guest, if a man with greater status came, the host often asked the first person to get up and take a less honorable seat and give up his position to the more honorable person.

Jesus watched the various guests trying to get the seats of most honor, probably the seats closest to him and the host at the top of the table. Jesus recognized this as revealing a wrong attitude towards life. Jesus gave the religious leaders some practical advice. He warned them that if they pushed themselves forward to sit in the seats with more status, they could end up being embarrassed. They could be asked to get up in front of everyone and be assigned a place at the end of the table, perhaps even being put in a seat with the least honor. How much better to "*humble*" themselves and take a less honorable seat further down the table and have the host come and ask the person to move up to a more honorable seat.

Jesus was not primarily concerned with what seats a person sat in. Rather, he was teaching a very important spiritual principle: "*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself*

will be exalted." It is interesting that this saying came from the Old Testament (Is. 2:12; Ezek. 17:24) where it usually referred to God's punishment at the end times. This principle can be applied in two levels.

First, in the kingdom of Jesus, God honors those who willingly humble themselves in service of others, those who place no emphasis in the external status humans give them. They don't care if they sit at the front of the church or at the back, on a bench or on the floor. They don't see themselves as too important to carry chairs or help out on work days. And they don't expect people to use the polite form of speaking to them or use special titles like "pastor" or "evangelist" or "doctor." Jesus said that those who are humble, God will one day raise up and honor. That could be here on earth as God gives them a greater role to play in his kingdom, but most certainly God will honor them in his eternal kingdom as being one of his honored people. As followers of Jesus, we are to humbly serve anywhere God places us without any attempt to receive honor and praise. We are to wait for God to honor us in any way he desires. If we are humble, there will be a day when God, like the host, will say "Come here to the place of honor."

Second, there is a day coming when God will overturn the standards of earth. The Pharisees proudly saw themselves as the most important people in Israel, thinking that they were the most spiritual ones. They looked down upon the common people and the "sinners." And throughout history political leaders, the educated, and the rich proudly seek to gain honor and status for themselves, often despising others. Most believers reading Luke's Gospel would have been from this despised category of people. It is hard to be happy when we are not honored so Christians are tempted to want to do something to gain the earthly status that others enjoy.

Don't we have this attitude today? Which evangelical church likes to be known as the church of the "country people?" Don't we prefer to be known as the church of the educated and the rich? Jesus warns that there is a day coming when God will turn things upside down. The proud will find themselves lowered as God honors those who have humbled themselves in serving God and others. Are you despised according to how the world claims things? Don't worry- be patient- stay humble. There is a day when God will change things, and you will be the honored one if you faithfully serve God; and others will be the lowered as they face God's judgment.

Q. 18. a) Describe ways you have seen believers focus upon worldly status and forget to be humble. What warning does this passage give to them? b) Describe how you have seen Christians and churches feel embarrassed by being considered as having less status than others or other churches. Explain how this passage encourages them .

We often reveal our pride in our conversation. If what we say is filled with statements of "I," then we are usually seeking honor. Or if we dominate a conversation, we usually are pushing ourselves forward seeking respect. And how many times do we do things which seek to push ourselves forward? If we are "important" we cut in line at a government office, thinking we are more important than the "common" people. Or we demand we be paid before the less important evangelist. Or we use our position to get a ride in a car when others are forced to walk. The attitude of the Pharisees is alive today- especially among those who are church leaders.

3. Jesus teaches the value of graciously doing things for those who cannot repay them (Lk. 14:12-14)

In Jewish society, people usually invited guests who were of equal or greater status. Or they invited these who could later do a favor for them. They were like the person who invited me to his home for a meal

so that he could ask me to buy him a camera when I went to America, or those who invite me to a wedding so that they can use my vehicle or gain status of having a "forenge" at the wedding. If we are honest, often the people we relate to, those we ask out for tea or invite for a meal are those who in some way can do something for us. No Jew would ever invite the poor and the despised people like the sick and crippled or blind beggars to their home for a meal. They would have been considered as being under their status. Plus such people could not do anything for them in return; they would never invite the rich person to their home for a great feast or be able to do a favor for them in the government.

But Jesus told the religious leaders that this was a selfish perspective. It only brought temporary rewards as people reciprocate and helped them in some way in this life. But a follower of Jesus must think about things from the perspective of eternity. If a person seeks to be honored and rewarded by God, then he can't do things from selfish reasons. Rather, he will generously reach out to those who have no ability to help him. He will do things simply to show love, not so people can do something in return. The blind, crippled and beggars illustrate to us how as followers of Jesus we are to look for those who have little financial resources and generously help them. A life lived in selflessly helping others, especially the poor, is greatly honored by God and God himself will reward us. Although we don't help others in order to get God's reward (this is another way of being selfish), we graciously serve God and others knowing that God is watching, is pleased with us, and will reward us one day in heaven.

Q. 19. a) Describe ways we often do things so that people can reciprocate and help us. b) List ways we can graciously help others with no concern that they help us back.

Q. 20. Read Lk. 14:15-24. Summarize Jesus' parable. Explain what you think is the main thing he was seeking to teach through this parable.

JESUS TEACHES THE PARABLE ABOUT THE MESSIANIC BANQUET (Lk. 14:15-24)

(Note: Jesus would teach a very similar parable again in Mt. 22:1-14. Most likely Jesus taught this parable twice, once at this time and then later just before he died.)

The Old Testament pictured the coming of God's eternal kingdom to be like a wedding banquet. (See Is. 25:6-9) The righteous would enjoy a blessed time of fellowship with God similar to the great joy experienced at a wedding. When Jesus mentioned the resurrection from the dead, one of the religious leaders at the banquet proudly said "*Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.*" No doubt he proudly thought that by keeping all of the laws that he would be there.

The Jewish religious leaders often debated who would be at that day of celebration. Some taught that almost all Jews by right of being the children of Abraham would enjoy salvation as symbolized by the banquet. Others, like the Essenes, insisted that it was only those who were very righteous who would enjoy God's kingdom. Indirectly this religious leader was asking Jesus "Who will be at that banquet?" Jesus did not answer this theoretical discussion. Rather, Jesus changed the question and through the parable asked these religious leaders and us "Will you be at the banquet?"

Jesus taught the religious leaders that those who will be at the banquet will often be those we do not expect. He illustrated his teaching through a story about a rich man who wanted to hold a banquet, probably a wedding celebration. In Jewish culture, when a rich man was going to hold a celebration like a wedding, he would send out invitations to the banquet to all of his social peers and his friends several

weeks in advance. As his servants went to each person, they would tell the rich host whether or not they were coming. When the day of celebration arrived and it was time to start the banquet, the rich host would send out his servants once again telling those who had accepted his invitation that everything was ready and they should come immediately to the banquet.

But when the servants of the host went to those who previously had accepted his invitation to tell them to come, every one of them began to make excuses and refused to come. The first man said that he had bought a field and wanted to see it. Some scholars think the man had heard about a field for sale and agreed to buy the field but would only finalize the deal when he had seen it. Others think it was a feeble excuse since rarely will someone buy an expensive field without first looking at it. The second man, a rich landowner who needed at least five pair of oxen to plow his land, said he had to try out his oxen. He too could have agreed to buy the oxen having heard they were for sale, but contingent upon seeing them plow. Or it could be another weak excuse for who would invest in 10 oxen without seeing them first? The third person said he couldn't come because he had just gotten married. The Old Testament established a principle that no man could go to war for one year after being married. (Deut. 24:5) Perhaps this person was expanding that idea and saying he would not attend the wedding since he was still within the first year of marriage. But again, this was most likely just an excuse. Marriages were arranged far in advance, so when this man had received his first invitation, he would have known whether he was getting married or not. Plus there was nothing hindering him from taking a few hours to attend the celebration of his friend.

Why did Jesus pick these three excuses? Could it be that he was indicating what types of things hinder people from giving their lives totally to following him? The first two men placed their material possession above enjoying the banquet. In the same way, one of the greatest hindrances of people to wholeheartedly following Jesus today is their concern for material possessions and the pleasure that riches bring. The last man placed family above following Jesus. Haven't we all known people who refuse to become believers because of fear of what their family will say? And aren't there people who are called to minister for God as evangelists who won't do it because of family concerns?

Q. 21. a) Describe ways you have seen people, including Christians, who will not give themselves wholeheartedly to following Jesus because of their focus upon material possessions. b) Describe ways an over concern for family can hinder people's spiritual walk.

In the story, the host, representing Jesus, became angry. The excuses made by others were very insulting to him, showing that they did not care for the joyous celebration of the host. Anytime we allow our personal lives and selfish ambitions to come ahead of Jesus' desires for our lives, we are insulting him in the same way. How many excuses do we make about not serving Jesus similar to these invited guests? "I can't serve as an elder, I am too busy at my job." "I can't go as an evangelist, the pay is not enough." These are common excuses we give showing our lack of concern for Jesus and his desires as we refuse the invitation Jesus has given us to serve him.

"I won't let any of those people enjoy my banquet" the rich host said. A rich Jew would never think of inviting poor people to a wedding feast. That would dishonor him and the occasion. He wanted the famous to be at his wedding, not the people of ill-repute. So what Jesus said next must have shocked the Jews who were listening. First, the servants were told to go out into the town and invite anyone they found on the "street." No doubt the street refers to those who are common, but respectable people, who walked along the main street. The religious leaders despised these "common people," but here the host invites them.

They were also told to go into the "*alleys*." Most likely the alleys referred to the people of disrepute, people like the beggars and the harlots. Even they were invited to the wedding celebration.

When these people came to the banquet, there was still room and food left over. So the host sent his servants out again, this time to the more distant places, the roads and country lanes. Many scholars think this was an indirect reference to the Gentiles who lived further away from the Jews. The host told the servants to "*make them come*." This does not mean that they were to force them to come against their will. Rather, it was to indicate that they were to use strong language to pressure them to come. All of their lives Gentiles had been despised by the Jews (like potters, metal workers, and tanners are despised in some parts of Ethiopia) and it was hard for them to really believe that they too could join the wedding party.

What was Jesus teaching through this parable?

1. Jesus is reprimanding the Pharisees. As religious leaders, they were the ones who knew the Bible and received the invitation of Jesus to enjoy his kingdom. But they were making many different types of excuses. Most thought that because they were religious they would be at that messianic banquet (be saved), but in refusing to accept Jesus, they were refusing God's invitation to the banquet of salvation.

2. Jesus is indicating that Israel would soon reject him, refusing to receive his invitation to the kingdom blessing. As a result, God would reject Israel as his special people, turning to the church, which included the despised Gentiles.

3. Jesus was teaching that in him the messianic banquet had arrived. Through John the Baptist, Jesus, and his disciples the final invitations to come and enjoy God's banquet of salvation were being passing out. The Jews were not to think that the messianic blessing was still far in the future. Time was getting short and they must quickly decide whether to accept the invitation. If they didn't, then God's gracious invitation would go to others. To reject Jesus as the Messiah would mean that they would miss out on the Messianic banquet they longed for.

4. Jesus was also teaching that enjoying the banquet (i.e. being part of God's kingdom, being saved) was an act of grace on God's part. All of the Jews would have acknowledged that blind, crippled, and the Gentiles were not honorable people who deserved God's blessings. The religious leaders proudly thought that the Jews and those who had to earn the right to be invited into God's kingdom through good works would be present. But Jesus said that God gives the right to be part of his kingdom based upon grace to those who don't deserve it. In reality, all people are sinners. All of us are without anything that will qualify us to be accepted by God. But God graciously invites us into his eternal banquet through faith anyway.

5. Those most willing to accept God's invitation of being part of his eternal kingdom by believing in Jesus are often not those who are respectable in the world's eyes. They are not the rich, powerful, or famous. Rather, it is those who seem insignificant and even despised by most people who are most willing to humble themselves and accept God's gracious gift of eternal life. (See 1 Cor. 1:26-31 for how Paul describes this reality.) How different this is from what we often practice in our churches today! Like the Pharisees we tend to despise those who are poor, uneducated, or those seen as terrible sinners. "God doesn't want them, he wants people like me- the rich, the educated, those whom society views as respectable" we think. So evangelists spend much of their time witnessing to the honorable people, overlooking those who are most prepared to become part of God's kingdom.

6. God's kingdom also accepts the Gentiles. For centuries, the Jews had told the Gentiles that they were worthless and God was not interested in them unless they became Jews. But now Jesus teaches that Gentiles too have received a gracious invitation to the messianic banquet. Don't we too have a similar attitude towards some people groups as the Jews had? "They are of that tribe. Why should we witness to them or let them into our church? Let them go somewhere else and worship. They are nomads, God isn't concerned about them. They are potters and blacksmiths- we don't want that type of person in our church. They are prostitutes, troublemakers in town, have AIDS, or part of that other religion- God won't extend his invitation to them would he?" we think. But in this parable Jesus is saying that everyone, no matter what his condition might be, whether respectable or not, has an invitation to join God in his eternal kingdom and enjoy the fellowship of the banquet. It simply requires humility to admit that they are sinners, repent of their sinful lives, believe that Jesus died for their sins, and commit themselves to willingly follow Jesus as their Lord. They too will sit with God at the great banquet he has for his family at the end time.

Jesus was challenging the religious leaders to ask themselves "Will you be at the banquet?" He is asking us the same question. Will we be there to enjoy the wedding feast between the church and Jesus? (See Rev. 19:7-9) We can only do this by accepting God's Son Jesus and living as his follower.

Q. 22. a) Describe how you have seen those the world usually considers respectable having a difficult time to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. b) Give examples of how those the world often despises are more open to trusting in Jesus. c) List people groups that many Christians often think are not acceptable to be part of their church. How is this different from Jesus' attitude?

Q. 23. Read Lk. 14:25-35. Summarize what Jesus teaches about becoming his disciple.

JESUS EXPLAINS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HIS DISCIPLE (Lk. 14:25-35)

It is common for Christians to say "I accepted Jesus as my Savior in the past. Today I accept him as my Lord." But this is not a Biblical expression or idea. The Gospels use many different words to describe salvation. They use words like "coming to Jesus" or "becoming Jesus" disciple' or "accepting the kingdom of God" or "enjoying the marriage banquet," or "receiving eternal life." But all of these ideas include the idea that when we come in repentance, we come with the heart attitude of repentance and submission to Jesus. We must be very careful that we don't make faith in Jesus to be so easy that people can claim to believe on Jesus but don't make any commitment to change how they live!

Jesus' popularity remained high up to the last days of his life. There were many people who followed him as he spoke in different parts of Judea. No doubt they thought they were "followers of Jesus" since they watched Jesus do miracles. However, they totally misunderstood what it meant to be his follower. They were following Jesus because they enjoyed watching his miracles or they wanted Jesus to meet their needs of healing. Most of them thought that Jesus was coming to establish a great kingdom that would defeat the Romans and the Messiah would pour out physical blessing upon the Jews.

But this was not the type of kingdom Jesus started. And he did not want disciples to follow him for the wrong purposes or with the wrong expectations. To clarify what it means to be his disciples, Jesus addressed the crowds around him. He gave three illustrations of those who are not "*worthy*" of being his disciples. (Note: Jesus is not saying that these are conditions for becoming a disciple, something that we do after we are saved. Rather, these are conditions for being saved. To "*come to me*" means to come to Jesus to join his kingdom and be saved. Jesus never taught that we can accept him as Savior and reject his

Lordship over our lives. Rather, he calls us to become his follower and when we are, he offers us the free gift of salvation.) Jesus knowingly used shocking language so that those listening would understand the radical type of disciples that Jesus wants.

1. Disciples were to hate their "*father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters.*" Like us, the Jews placed great value on family relationships, especially on the need to honor their father and mother. So these words would have shocked the Jews. The Bible is clear that we are not to hate anyone. We are even told to love our enemies. (Mt. 5:44) But the Jews had a way of speaking where they said someone was "loved" because they were loved more and the one loved less was said to be "hated." So God described his relationship with Israel as compared to Edom as having "loved" Jacob and "hated" Esau. (Mal. 1:2-3) This expression simply means that one is to be loved more than the other. (See Mt. 10:37) So Jesus said that only those who will give him first place in their lives, loving and obeying him even more than they love and obey their families, have understood what it means to be his disciple. There are many today who refuse to trust Jesus because of what their family thinks. Or there are Christians who knowingly go against the will of God because of pressure from their family. Jesus warns us that if we give our families primarily allegiance and obey them and not Jesus, then we are not his disciples. We haven't reached the place of saving faith.

2. Disciples were supposed to hate their own lives. All humans naturally love themselves. They give priority to doing what they want. They seek blessings for themselves first. These desires are natural. But Jesus is saying that if we want to be a follower of Jesus and enjoy salvation, then we must put him in first place. We no longer ask "What is good for me?" but "What is good for Jesus?" We submit our desires for education, or wealth or an enjoyable life to Jesus, and ask him "What would you like me to do? How would you have me live?" Another way of saying this is that when we come to Jesus in faith, we have decided to take ourselves off the "throne" of our lives and we are committing to putting Jesus on that throne. He becomes our master, not us. I wonder how many Christians in our churches made that commitment when they chose to trust in Jesus? Could it be that many of them still want to control their lives and so are not really saved?

3. Disciples are to take up their cross and follow Jesus. When Jesus said this, he was on the way to Jerusalem to die on a cross. So Jesus was speaking from personal experience. He was taking up his cross in obedience to God, and we must take up our cross in obedience to Jesus. For the Jews, the cross only had one meaning; it was how the worst criminals died. The Romans would make the condemned criminal carry the horizontal piece of the cross to the place of execution where the upright piece was waiting. By making the condemned person carry part of his cross, the Romans were saying "Look what happens when you rebel against us. You must submit to us or die." There were two truths included in Jesus' statement.

First, following Jesus consists of "killing ourselves." Each one of us has selfish desires to do what we want and not what Jesus wants. Those selfish desires must be killed. As Paul testified, when he trusted in Jesus, he (his personal desires and ambitions) had been crucified. He might still be physically alive, but in reality, since he was living his life in obedience to Jesus, doing his will through his power, it was really Jesus who was living through Paul. (Gal. 2:20)

Second, most likely Jesus was warning those who were considering following him that death was a very real possibility. When Luke wrote this Gospel, many Christians were being persecuted and dying because they chose to follow Jesus. Jesus did not promise his followers any earthly blessings. He did not

tell them he would give them jobs, or opportunities for schooling, or earthly wealth, or deliverance from disease. He only promised them a cross, the chance to die like he died. Only after death will there be the eternal blessings that really matter. So Jesus was telling the people in the crowd "Don't think about believing in me and following me unless you are willing to die as well."

4. Disciples were to give up everything. (Lk. 14:33) This is referring to the material possessions of the believer. Jesus uses the present tense verb to show that this was a continuous action. Every day of our lives we must be putting Jesus above our material possessions. It is clear from other passages in the New Testament that believers are not required to give away all their wealth when they choose to follow Jesus. For instance, Peter told Ananias and Sapphira that they had the right to give as much or as little as they wanted. (Acts 5:4) Jesus means that when we choose to follow him, our understanding of material possessions changes. We realize that we now own nothing, it all belongs to Jesus. If he says "give it away" we give it away. He is the one who controls our life-style, not us. Paul showed this type of thinking when he told people that as followers of Jesus the purpose for work is not to get money for themselves, but so that they can have money to give away. (Eph. 4:28) How different this is to the attitude of many Christians who believe that they are only obligated to give 10% to God and the rest belongs to them for their enjoyments. Jesus taught that 100% belongs to him, and believers are to do with it what he wants.

Q. 24. a) Make a list of promises evangelist make when seeking to get someone to believe. b) List differences between how Jesus challenged people to become disciples and how we seek to get people to believe. c) What do you think would happen in our churches if we gave invitations like Jesus gave? What type of Christian would be in the church?

Often we like to get people emotionally excited in church using music or great promises like "Come to Jesus and he will bless you with a good job, lots of money, a good family, educational opportunities, and freedom from all sicknesses." We try to make it easy for people to believe on Jesus. We hide as much as possible the difficult task of following Jesus and the persecutions we might face.

But Jesus refused to focus upon the emotions. He insisted that people make a choice to follow him clearly after they fully understood what it means to be a follower of Christ. In order to illustrate the need to make a carefully thought-through decision, Jesus told two short parables:

1. The story of a man who wanted to build a tower in his vineyard. Rich Jews who owned large vineyards would often build a stone tower for the guards to sit in and watch against thieves coming to steal the grapes. This farmer wanted to build a large tower, but he did not estimate the cost. So he started building, but then ran out of money before finishing. His unfinished tower caused people to laugh at him and brought him shame. It would have been much better to not start building than to only build a half of the tower. In the same way, Jesus suggests that it is better for someone to not even start to follow Jesus than to start to follow him for the wrong reasons and quit because it is too difficult. Such a decision brings shame upon the individual who "quits" and upon the cause of Christ.

2. The story of a king who wanted to start a war with another king. A wise king always examines his capabilities in the war and if it is probable that he will be defeated, he looks for other ways to come to a favorable settlement with the other king. Only a foolish king jumps into a war without knowing whether it is likely he will win. In the same way, it is foolish to choose to join Jesus' kingdom without understanding the cost of persecution or what Jesus expects of his followers.

In conclusion, Jesus told those who were considering becoming his disciples that their life is like salt. When they choose to become followers of Jesus, they become like salt. They bring flavor to the lost world and they preserve the lost world from even worse evil. But if they leave following Jesus or don't follow Jesus as obedient disciples, they become like salt which has lost its flavor. They are useless for the kingdom of God if they are born into a Christian religion or have Christian parents or want eternal life but do not obey Jesus and persevere in the midst of persecution.

Becoming a follower of Jesus and receiving the salvation he wants to give is not an easy thing that someone can get just by being in the "crowd" of followers. It takes a serious choice on the part of the individual. (See Lk. 9:23–27, 57–62; 18:24–30 for other passages where Jesus teaches what it means to be his follower.) Just like God told the Jews that they were never to have any other god "before" him, Jesus also insists that no one can love anything more than him. He demands priority in our lives. It is not shouting emotionally that "Jesus is Lord" that really matters. Rather, it is living our lives with him being the Master and we being the slave. He must be the first love of our lives, and everything else is to be subservient to that love. Is this how your life is like?

Q. 25. a) Compare Jesus' style of teaching perspective followers and how we share the Gospel to those who want to be believers. What is similar and what is different? b) What changes do you think would come in our churches if we shared more openly like Jesus about what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

We need to carefully think about these verses and compare it to what we are doing in our churches. We want to make it as easy as possible for a person to believe. So we hide the cross that comes with following Jesus. We try to "catch" a person and cause them to become a believer by making promises that will attract them to selfishly following Jesus. As a result our churches are filled with selfish believers. And people make a profession to believe and then soon drop away. But Jesus insisted it is better for us to go slowly. We are to teach people the eternal blessings that come when they trust in Jesus. But we are also to teach that there is a "cost" to following Jesus, and that cost is putting Jesus absolutely first in our lives. No longer can we desire to live in a way that benefits us, but in a way that obeys Jesus. And then we let people have time to think through the implications to their decision. When they choose the way of the cross, they will be true believers who commit their whole lives to following Jesus. And if they do this first, then we won't struggle with their selfishness in the church and with watching many fall away from the faith.

THIRD DAY

Bekele was a gifted young man who loved God and wanted to be used by him. He noticed in the market place a group of young men who sat around chewing chatt and causing trouble. God spoke to him telling him to make friends with them so that he could share with them about God's love. So whenever he had free time from his schooling, he would sit with them in the market place, talking and laughing with them, building relationships with them so that they would listen to him share about Jesus. Mihiret was a choir girl respected by all in the church. One night as she was traveling by taxi from the church to her home, she saw a group of prostitutes, most of them her own age. She felt compassion for them and wanted to tell them about the joy they could have in Jesus. So every night she would go out and spend time with them, building friendships and trust, gently sharing with them about the forgiveness they could enjoy in Jesus. It was not long until the elders of the heard about Bekele and Mihiret spending time with "sinful" people.

They called them into the elders meeting and told them to stop spending time with these people or face church discipline.

Q. 26. Read Lk. 15:1-2. a) What did the Pharisees complain about Jesus' ministry? b) How is the attitude of the Pharisees similar to the attitude of the church elders in the above story? c) Describe how you have seen a similar attitude to the Pharisees in your church. d) Read Ps. 1; Prov. 1:10-19. What do these verses warn us about spending time with the wrong type of people? e) How do you reconcile these two teachings in the Bible?

Q. 27. Read Lk. 15:1-10. What major message was Jesus seeking to teach through these two parables?

THE PARABLES ABOUT GOD SEEKING THE LOST (Lk. 15:1-32)

The Bible is filled with warnings about being careful of the type of people we spend time with. We are told that bad companions corrupt us. (1 Cor. 15:33) All of us know that the type of friends we have has a major impact upon our spiritual life. If our friends love God, study God's Word, witness, pray and live holy lives, then they greatly impact our spiritual lives for the better. But if we have close friends who have little concern for spiritual things, most often they will weaken our spiritual life as well. If we want to grow in our spiritual lives, we must develop close friends who will help us grow.

On the other hand, we cannot minister effectively without developing relationships with those who need to hear about Jesus, including people like youth in gangs or girls who are prostitutes. We have little impact in witnessing if we walk by and shout at them "believe in Jesus." It is only when we get to know them and offer our friendship to them that they will begin to listen to what we want to share.

Jesus was able to keep these two truths in balance. He had the 12 disciples, who were his closest friends with whom he spent most of his time. But he also developed relationships with people like tax collectors and "sinners." Although he was totally holy, the worst sinners enjoyed being with Jesus. He was fun to be with, not causing these sinners to feel uncomfortable by frowning at them or calling them names or preaching at them all of the time. And yet he did not compromise his message but asked them to repent and join God's kingdom.

Like many church leaders, the Pharisees assumed that a holy person would have nothing to do with those classified by society as "sinners." The Pharisees believed all common people were sinners because they were not as zealous as the Pharisees were for keeping religious laws. But they especially despised those who openly went against God's laws, like prostitutes. They refused to talk to them or shake their hands in case they become ritually unclean, and would not eat with them in case it gave the impression that they approved of these "sinners." They formed their own community of "righteous people" with whom they made friends and ate.

When these Pharisees saw Jesus relate with tax collectors (considered by many Jews as being dishonest collaborators with the hated Roman government) and "sinners" they were appalled. The word "*sinner*" could reflect the distain the Pharisees had for common people who did not keep their laws and traditions. But it probably referred to people like prostitutes felt comfortable coming to listen to Jesus, and he would talk to them and even eat with them. "How can this man be a righteous person?" the Pharisees wondered.

Jesus showed little concern about his reputation in the eyes of the Pharisees. Rather, he went against the expectation of how religious leaders act, openly relating to those disdained by these leaders. Jesus knew their thoughts, so he gave three parables to teach the Pharisees why he, as the agent of God, spent so much time with "sinners." Each of the parables emphasizes how sin is like getting lost, how repentance is like being found, and how God is extremely pleased with the salvation of every sinner.

1. The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Lk. 15:1-7)

Jesus was teaching in Judea. To the south of Jerusalem around Bethlehem most people were shepherds and had flocks of sheep. The average flock of sheep a person would own was about 100 sheep. Because there was little grass close to the towns, shepherds would lead their sheep over long distances to find enough grass. Much of the land was mountainous and desert-like. Jesus said that God is like one of those shepherds. (Although the Pharisees despised them, one of the favorite images of God in the Old Testament was of being like a shepherd.) Every shepherd, especially if they were hired by a local town to take care of the community sheep, was responsible for each sheep. If one was killed, they had to bring the carcass to the people as proof of how it had died. Every night as the sheep were brought into the town or into the sheepfold, the shepherd would count his sheep. When he did this, a shepherd noticed that one sheep was missing. So he left his 99 sheep in the care of another shepherd and went looking for the lost sheep. He found the sheep and because it was dark and the sheep was probably afraid and tired, he lovingly carried the sheep home. And when he got back, he called the other shepherds together to celebrate. What can we learn about God from this parable?

a. All people, even sinners, are part of God's sheep. Sinners are those who have wandered away from God's flock and are lost.

b. God actively seeks sinners to bring them back into his flock. The Jews believed that God would forgive a sinner, but it was up to the sinner to seek God and ask his forgiveness. But Jesus said that God actively looks for sinners and does all he can to bring them back into the fold. That is why God the Father sent Jesus into the world and why Jesus spent so much time with "sinners." He was seeking to take them from the "wilderness of sin" and bring them back to God. It is why he sends us into the world as witnesses. (Acts 1:8) This was a new teaching to the Jews and would have shocked them greatly.

c. God is concerned for each individual no matter how sinful he is. Most of us would have been satisfied with the 99 sheep. But God wasn't. Each person, no matter how evil they might seem to us, is important to him and he longs for that person to repent and be saved.

d. Although God seeks out the sheep, the sheep has a responsibility as well. He must "repent," acknowledging his sinfulness to God, turning away from that life of sin to following Jesus. (Lk. 15:7)

e. God takes great delight at the salvation of a sinner. He does enjoy the believer who loves and obeys him. But when he receives back a lost sheep, his heart is filled with joy.

The Old Testament often pictured leaders as shepherds. Jesus was telling the Pharisees that as shepherds who know God's truth, they too should rejoice at the return of God's sheep, even though they were sinners. And they were also to be looking for lost sheep. In their refusal to rejoice in the salvation of sinners, they were showing themselves to not be true friends of God, for they were refusing to enter into his happiness at the return of his sheep.

2. The Parable of the Woman and the Lost Coin (Lk. 15:8-10)

Luke liked to pick out parables which demonstrate a truth from a man's perspective (shepherd) and truth from a woman's perspective (woman who lost her coin.) So Luke describes God's joy over finding a lost sinner as being similar to a woman finding a coin. This woman would have been one of the poor women who lived throughout Judea. The "*drachmas*" was a little silver coin worth about a day's wage for a common laborer. Some scholars think that the 10 coins were part of the dowry that the woman got when she married a poor man. She would fasten these coins with a chain and wear them around her head as proof that she was married. In Jewish law, should her husband divorce her, these ten coins were hers and she would take them with her. To lose one of these ten coins would have been as painful to her as losing our wedding ring would be to us. Other scholars think these ten coins represented her bank account. She was carefully hiding these coins in case some disaster hit her family (e.g., someone got sick or there was no work and no food). To lose one coin was equal to losing 1/10th of her savings.

Poor people lived in very dark homes, usually with only a small window about 50 cm square. And the floor was either dirt, or if possible, made up of stones. So it would have been common for things to fall into cracks between the stones. When this woman lost her coin, she lit a small lamp like a small kerosene lamp and looked for the coin. And she took a small broom and swept her whole house, hoping that while she was sweeping she would hear the coin jingle against the stone. Eventually she found the coin. Then she called her friends and they all rejoiced together.

In the same way, said Jesus, God and the agents of God's work, angels, all rejoiced when a sinner repents. Rather than get angry at people spending time with sinners, church leaders should rejoice when someone like Bekele and Mihiret are able to encourage sinners to repent. Often we look at people in society who are not believers and do not live a "good" life as being beyond God's desire for salvation. We witness to those who are acceptable in society. There are some churches who do not even want a former gang member or prostitute to be in their church because it will ruin the church's reputation! Unfortunately, converted prostitutes or trouble making youth are rarely welcomed in our churches. How far we have wandered away from what Jesus would have us do! Have we become the Pharisees of today?

Q. 28. a) Examine your heart. Are you guilty of having an attitude like the Pharisees? Confess this to God. Determine to look for ways to reach out to sinners, even those despised by society. And when they are saved, welcome them with joy into your church just as God has welcomed them with great joy into his family.

Q. 29. Read Lk. 15:11-32. a) Who do the three major people in this story represent? b) List the lessons Jesus was illustrating in this story.

3. The Parable of the Lost Son (Lk. 15:11-32)

Scholars have called Jesus' story of the lost son the greatest short story in the history of literature. This story clearly reveals the heart of God in his desire for sinners to be restored into followership with him. If we have an image of God as a God who is angry at sinners longing to punish them we have totally misunderstood what God is like. Jesus insists that God is like a loving father who longingly waits for his wayward children to return, completely forgiving them as soon as they repent.

An understanding of Jewish culture helps us better understand this parable. The family described here was wealthy for they had slaves and servants. Jewish culture was that at the death of the father, the father was obligated to give his oldest son 2/3 of his wealth (property and money) and his youngest son

1/3 of the wealth. (See Deut. 21:7) The father could determine how to split up the property; how much he gave in land and how much in animals or money. Sometimes a farmer who was tired of running the family farm would split up the inheritance before he died so that his oldest son would begin to run the business and he could retire. However, legally the land and money still belonged to him until he was dead. Sometimes if a son wanted to immigrate to another country, the father would figure out how much 1/3 was and give a cash gift to his younger son. However normally the property was divided at the death of the father. But never would one of his sons demand to receive his inheritance early. This was a great insult and could be understood to mean "hurry and die Father, for I want my money." The Jews would have been amazed that the father did not punish his son or expel him from the family for such an insult.

This parable seeks to reveal spiritual truths through three characters.

a. The younger son represents the sinner. This son was probably about 18 years old since there was no indication that he was married and most Jewish men got married before they were 18. He was not happy living with his father, no doubt resisting the hard work on the farm, wanting to see the world. So he went to his father and asked for his inheritance "*now*." He did not want to wait until his father had died. Imagine how such rebellion must have hurt his father! His father probably had watched his son's rebellion and realized that it did no good to counsel his son; he would not listen. He might have realized that his son would never learn his lesson that sinful living causes great bondage without letting him go to learn from the bitter experiences of life. So his father agreed to his younger son's request. Most likely the father figured out the financial value of the younger son's inheritance and gave the money to him. He probably informed his oldest son that he would inherit the remainder of his property upon his death. But the father kept legal ownership of the property for he had the right to kill the calf and honor his younger son when he returned.

The Bible warns that the life of wickedness bring pleasure for a time, but in the end there is destruction. (Ps. 37:35-36; 73; Job 20:5) And that is what happened to this young man. Having gotten his money, he quickly left home and travelled outside of Judea to one of the Gentile nations. "I will really enjoy life there without any of the restraints of my father" he no doubt thought. He quickly found many like-minded youth to be his "friends" and party with. With no thought about the future, he lived to enjoy life. And it was not long until he had wasted all of his inheritance. But then things got serious. God sent a "*drought*" into the land. Not only did this symbolize the loss of blessing, but this word no doubt symbolized how the path of sin eventually turns all of life into a desert. He quickly lost all of his "friends" who only related to him when he had money to entertain them and now there was no one to help him out. Because there were no doubt many people desperate for work, the only work he could get was from a Gentile farmer who owned pigs. A Jew would have seen this as the worst possible job. The Old Testament taught that pigs were unclean animals (Deut. 14:8) and the Jews taught that no one was allowed to touch them or feed them. Otherwise, they would become ritually unclean. Desperate, he put aside his Jewish religious beliefs and fed the pigs. But it seems the farmer who hired him refused to pay him anything. It is not clear why he could not eat the food he was feeding the pigs. It could be the farmer watched him too closely and refused him the food. Or it could be he found eating "pig food" too difficult. Or perhaps the type of pods he was feeding the pigs were too bitter and not suitable for humans. In any case, life became extremely desperate for him and he was starving. The Jews listening to the story would have thought "Great. He got what he deserved after being so rebellious against his father." They would have rejoiced at the justice of how God had brought punishment upon the younger son.

One day the younger son began to think about his home. He was completely humbled, realizing that he no longer had the right to enjoy the benefits of being the son of a wealthy farmer. But he thought that if he went in repentance, perhaps his father would let him come back as a day laborer because the day laborers had a life better than he was experiencing. In rich Jewish homes there were usually slaves. Although they had no personal rights, they were fed and clothed as if they were part of the family. But there were also hired day laborers who had few rights. They did not know how long their employment would last and could be laid off at any time. The younger son did not even ask to relate to his father at the level of a house slave. Rather, he was willing to become a day laborer.

This process of "*coming to his mind*" and humbling himself symbolized repentance, the turning away from a wasted lifestyle of sin and seeking to return to God the Father with no sense of pride or that God owed him something. This younger son now openly admitted that he had sinned against God (all sin is an act of rebellion against God and his desires for our life) and against his father. He did not try to make any excuses for his actions. This is the process that all true conversions should take. As long as we maintain our pride or refuse to confess our sins and repent, the repentance that must precede forgiveness and acceptance by God does not take place. And yet today rarely do we emphasize the need to repent and humble ourselves before God. Rather we often emphasize the blessings new believers are going to get.

Q. 30. a) Think about the last time you heard an evangelist in your church lead a person to faith. What did he focus his presentation on, the blessings the person would receive if he "believed" or the sins that person had to confess and repent of? b) How do you think the presentation would change if the focus was on the sin of the person and the need to humbly confess and repent?

b. The father represents God and Jesus, God's representative: Jesus pictures the father as being constantly looking down the road for the return of his son. He did not angrily expel his son from being part of the family for the way the son had treated him. He also did not go looking for his son, but he never gave up hope that his son would return. Every day he longed for the return of his son as he watched the road to the house. One day he sees his son walking down the road. Jews wore long clothes similar to the Somalis. The father gathered up his clothes and ran to meet his son. In Jewish culture for a father to run like this was considered undignified. If anything, he would expect the son to run to him. But this father did not care what other people thought. He was overjoyed that his son was coming back home.

The Jews would have been shocked that a father would act this way towards a wayward son. "Punish him, don't forgive him" they would have taught. But God is not like that; he longs to forgive, not to punish. With great joy and forgiveness for all of the hurts of the past, the father kissed his son. When the son tried to ask his father for permission to return as a hired hand, his father interrupted and would not let him finish. Turning to a servant, he quickly told the servant to get a "*robe*." This robe could have been one of the father's special robes and symbolized being part of the family. Or it could be one of the robes often given to honored guests by the host. The son was also given the "*ring*." Although this ring could just have been a gracious gift for his son, most likely the ring was a special ring symbolizing being part of the family. The youngest son was being brought back into the family with the rights of being a son. And the slave was told to bring "*sandals*" for the son's feet. In most Jewish homes, slaves and day laborers did not wear shoes, only family members. Again the father was welcoming the younger son back as part of his family. The man told the servant to kill the "*fatted calf*." Jews only ate meat on special holidays or celebrations like a wedding. Normally they would kill a sheep since it would be enough meat to feed the family. But the

father killed a calf, probably indicating that he was inviting all of his friends to join in celebrating the return of his son.

Just like it was the father who initiated reconciliation with his son, so also God is the one who takes the first step to reconcile us to himself. He does not wait for us to find him, but sent Jesus to die for our sins and he sends others to witness to us. Notice there was no words of recrimination saying "Why did you do this?" There was no long sermon to his son. Even though the son's condition was completely his own foolish fault, his father still welcomed him back. All of the past and the hurtful sins were now forgiven. It is this way with God as well. It does not matter what sins we have committed, whether we are like the prostitute or a murderer. God still longs for our return. And when we do, he completely forgives the past, refusing to bring it up against us. (Ps. 103:12) His joy at our return is so deep that all of heaven wants to have a celebration!

The father realized what sin is like. A sinner is "*dead*" in his sin. (See Eph. 2:1-2) He is "*lost*" to a loving Father just as if he is a rebellious son who flees to a distant land. But when any sinner repents, it is as if he is now "*alive*." And he is "*found*" to God, welcomed back into God's eternal family. (See Jn. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:1-3) Salvation is not just being forgiven or receiving eternal life, it is being welcomed into God's special family.

c. The older son represents the attitude of the Pharisees. This older son now owned all of the property of the father and would one day have total rights to the property. That evening he came in from the fields where he would have been supervising the workers. He was shocked to hear sounds of celebration. When he asked a servant, the man told him his younger brother had returned. We would think that he would have been overjoyed that his brother was now back in the family. Instead, the older son became jealous and angry. He refused to go into the house and celebrate. His father come out to reason with him, but he was so angry that he insulted his father. No good son would ever address his father without saying "sir" or "*father*," but the older son did not do this. And he showed no relationship with his younger brother, calling him "*your son*" and not "*my brother*." He complained that his father had never even allowed him to celebrate in a small way by giving him a goat and inviting a few of his friends. Life for the older brother had become joyless. He served his father not out of love, but out of obligation. And he was jealous that his wayward brother was treated better than he. Was the father now honoring sin by celebrating at the return of the sinner? he thought. The father tried to gently reason with his older son. The older son would receive all of the inheritance; that would not change with the return of the younger son. But shouldn't the older son rejoice that he too has received his dead and lost brother back?

The Pharisees often spoke about the burden of obedience to God, saying they were slaves to the law. Their relationship to God was not one of love and appreciation, but of obligation. They should have seen Jesus' welcoming sinners into God's kingdom as welcoming sinners back into the family. But instead they only got angry that opportunities of repentance were given to the sinners. How much better to join God in celebrating the salvation of sinners, welcoming them into the church openly and without a judgmental attitude!

How easily the attitude of the Pharisees enters into our churches! Those of us who have grown up in the church or have been Christians a long time tend to think that we have "*earned*" God's blessing by our good lives. Often Christianity is seen as "*obligations*" and "*serving*" God with no sense of joy and celebration. The gratitude and love we once felt that God had accepted us into his family often dies out.

And in our hearts we tend to become proud, thinking that we are better than the sinners around us. Rather than seek to be God's agent to bring one of his loved children back into the family, we refuse to get close to them. And when they come in repentance, we often refuse to relate to them just like the older son refused to relate to his younger brother. May God guard our hearts and our churches from having an attitude of the Pharisees!

Q. 31. a) Think about your image of God; do you see him as a father longing for his wayward sons and daughters to return? Or do you see him as a God who is angry, seeing to punish the sinner? How about most Christians, which image of God do they have? What can you do to show them that God is like a loving God longing for the return of his children? b) Think about the reason you serve God. Is it out of "obligation" and "servitude" or out of a sense of love and appreciation to God? What can you do to change from joyless service to joyful service of God?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. In Lk. 12:1-12 Jesus warned against the sin of hypocrisy. a) Review the four ways that hypocrisy can be found in the church. List some examples of how you have experienced or seen each of these types of hypocrisy. b) Why is hypocrisy such a dangerous sin? c) What can we do to protect ourselves from becoming hypocrites?

2. a) How did Jesus describe salvation in Lk. 13:22-35? b) Why did Jesus call salvation a narrow door that requires effort to enter? c) How is Jesus' teaching different from how we usually present the way of salvation to people? d) Discuss how we should present an invitation of salvation to better reflect what Jesus taught about salvation.

3. Read Jesus' parable in Lk. 14:15-24. a) What was the major teaching of the parable? b) Discuss ways that we should apply these truths in our churches today.

4. Read Lk. 14:25-35. a) List what Jesus taught about being his disciple. b) What did he mean by each statement? How are those statements to be applied today? c) How is Jesus' teaching about the Christian life different from what we often hear from evangelists and preachers? d) How should our preaching and witnessing change if we are to be more like Jesus?

5. a) List the three parables about being lost and found. What was Jesus seeking to teach through each of the parables? What can we learn about the sinner, about God, and about salvation? b) Describe how people are like the lost son without Christ. c) Describe how Christians often become like the older son. d) Discuss whether or not sinners feel welcomed in your church. If not, what things would need to change for them to be welcomed like the younger son.

LESSON NINETEEN

FIRST DAY

How we handle our wealth is one of the most important indicators of our spiritual life. That is why Jesus had more to say to his followers about money than almost any other topic. In Luke 16 Jesus teaches his followers some important lessons about wealth. Money by itself is not evil. It is neutral and it can be used for great good in the world. None of us could eat or build a church building or send out evangelists without money. But our possessions easily become evil if we develop a wrong attitude towards them and how to use them. That is why the apostle Paul would later say that the love of money is the root of a lot of evil. (1 Tim. 6:10) In our preaching that God will bless us with material wealth, are we encouraging believers to develop the wrong attitude towards money? Or in our thinking that we should be paid a wage similar to how the world pays those with our level of education, could we be allowing something evil to take place in our understanding of money and ministry? All of us must pay close attention to these strong warnings of Jesus.

Q. 1. a) List ways that many Christians today are focusing upon material wealth and possessions. What result has this brought to their lives and to their ministry? b) Read Lk. 16. Make a list of principles that Jesus teaches about his followers and their attitude towards money.

THE PARABLE OF THE SHREWD MANAGER (Lk. 16:1-15)

Jesus was very concerned that his disciples have a different understanding of wealth than what the Jews had. The Jews thought that having lots of money was an indication of God's blessing. Like the Gurages of Ethiopia, they were known throughout the ancient world, and even today, as being very skilled at gaining profit. But Jesus knew that focusing on wealth can easily turn into a poison which will weaken the spiritual life of his followers. So Jesus taught much about money.

Luke 16:1-13 is one of Jesus' most confusing parables. In order to interpret it correctly we must remember that the purpose of a parable is to teach a few major truths. (The statement of Jesus in Lk 16:8-9 indicates the major teaching of this parable.) So we must not allow ourselves to get distracted by the details of the story. What makes this parable difficult to interpret is trying to determine if what the manager did to lower the amount owned by the debtors was a good moral action or not. And was the rich landowner praising the actions of the manager or just his shrewd use of money? There are some scholars who think that the landowner is praising the manager for his wise actions. But most likely the story shows the manager to be corrupt and the landowner was only praising how he manipulated the situation in preparation for when he did not have any job.

In Judea, much of the land belonged to rich landowners who then leased out the land either to land tenants or to rich merchants. Often the rich landowner lived far away from where his land was located (like in Rome) and left the affairs in the hands of a manager. A manager or steward could be a slave, but in this case the manager was a free man hired to work on behalf of the landowner. His job was to faithfully run the business in a way that maximized the profit for the landowner. One day the rich landowner visited his property and found out that the manager was wasting resources. It is not clear whether the manager was openly dishonest with the funds or just not running the business well and wasting money. Given his

character later in the story, most likely the manager was taking some of the money for himself in a dishonest way.

The landowner fired the manager. But before the manager left, he was told to bring all of the financial records to the landowner to provide a financial accounting of the business. To gather all of the finances together to turn the matters over to the landowner would have taken time. It was during this time as he was gathering all of the receipts and financial records together that the manager began to plan for his future after he was forced to leave the farm. He would now have no home and no one would hire him since he was known to be incompetent and corrupt. Having lived the life of luxury, he would not humble himself to dig as a day laborer, which was considered by the Jews as the lowest type of work reserved for slaves. And he did not want to beg for money, which would bring great shame upon himself.

Suddenly he came up with an idea. Much of business of the farm had been leased out to other wealthy merchants. It is not clear whether these merchants had leased land and olive trees from the landowner and agreed to pay the landowner in olive oil or wheat. Or it could be they had borrowed money and agreed to pay the landowner back with produce. It is clear that these were not simple farmers who had taken out a loan. Jesus illustrates two types of debts which were owed to the landowner, but there were most likely many other debtors not mentioned. The first man owned over 3000 liters of olive oil. This amount of oil required over 450 olive trees to produce, so the debt was very large. The second man owned over 350 quintiles of wheat. It is estimated that this would require over 100 acres of land to produce.

It is unlikely that the debtors realized that the manager was about to be fired and did not really have the authority to change things. Stewards were allowed to lower a financial obligation when there was a famine or other disaster. But this steward lowered the debt simply to earn the thanks of the debtors. Scholars debate over what the manager was doing when he lowered the amount owed to the landowner. Some think he was taking off the interest that he had charged the merchants. Jews were not supposed to charge interest to a fellow Jew (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36), but they often found ways around these prohibitions. Perhaps the law against charging interest only applied to those who were in desperate need, not for merchants doing business. It was common for someone loaning money to hide the interest by just increasing the amount needing to be returned, so some scholars think the manager was taking off the amount of interest he had originally charged the merchants, only requiring the return of the loan. Others think that the manager was taking off his commission for the sale. They think when he had made the first agreement with the merchants, his commission was very large. Most likely, however, the manager was trying to change the financial records of the agreement. Each change in what was owned involved just a small mark on the paper so as to not be quickly seen by the owner. That is why he made the individuals concerned to change the documents in their own handwriting since they had filled out the agreement in the first place.

What was the merchant trying to gain by this action? The merchant was trying to obligate the debtors to himself. In Greek and Roman culture, it was very important to return favors. If someone did something for you, then you had to return the favor. So the merchant was thinking that when he lost his job, he could go to all of these debtors and because they owed him favors, he could get help from them. Having saved them thousands of dollars, they would be willing to help him with his financial problems. Some scholars think that the manager was also getting evidence of corruption so that he could blackmail the merchants and get money from them after he lost his job. Perhaps in doing this, the manager was creating an impression that the landowner was being generous in lowering the debt people owed him. It would be very

difficult for the landowner to contest what was done and still retain his reputation of being a generous person. It seems that because the manager was still legally under the employment of the landowner and had the authority to renegotiate deals, the landowner could do nothing once the documents were changed.

The manager heard what the landowner had done. We would expect him to get very angry with the manager and look for ways to charge him with corruption and send him to prison. Instead, we are told that he "*commended*" the dishonest manager. Just like many of our fables honor the monkey who is able to trick others, the Jews also had stories which taught that being able to trick a person was a sign of shrewdness. The landowner did not commend the manager's dishonesty. Rather, the landowner commended him for the way he was shrewd and prepared himself for what would happen after he lost his job.

So what was Jesus seeking to teach his disciples about money from this parable? In Lk. 16:8-13 Jesus drew out four major truths about money that his disciples were to apply to their lives as they followed Jesus.

1. Followers of Jesus must use their money in such a way that they have "*friends*" when they enter into eternity at death (Lk 16:8-9) When the day of judgment and loss of a job arrived for the corrupt manager, he was prepared since he had made "*friends*" of the debtors who would help him. If such a person "*of the world*" (an unbeliever) was shrewd because he thought of the future and used his abilities to prepare for the future, so also the "*people of the light*" (believers) should learn to use their earthly wealth in a way that helps them in the future. The followers of Jesus are supposed to remember that we too will face a day of judgment after we die. At that time what will matter is whether we have "*friends*" whom we have helped who will be waiting for us in heaven. The Jews taught that the rich help the poor in this life and the poor help the rich in the life to come. Jesus agreed with this saying that if we use our money to help others and spread Jesus' kingdom, we will be welcomed with joy when we get to heaven. It is not clear to whom Jesus is referring when he tells them to have friends who will welcome them. Some think it is God, and because his followers have faithfully used their money for the kingdom of God, God himself will welcome them and "*reward*" them. Others think the friends refer to the poor or to those who have somehow benefited from the wise use of wealth for eternal things. They will be waiting for us in heaven to welcome us there.

Jesus is teaching that if we would use as much effort to prepare for eternal life in heaven as we do preparing for our life on earth, we would end up with a much more secure future. "*True wealth*" in God's eyes consists of what we give away for God's kingdom, not what we keep in the bank. Being shrewd in life for the believer is evidenced not by getting lots of money now, but by living all of our lives with the awareness that the day of judgment is coming and preparing for that day in how we live our lives and use our resources. It is important to realize that Jesus is not saying that giving away our money earns us salvation. Rather he is saying that how we use our money evidences whether or not we have true faith. The proper use of money as seen from the perspective of eternity will be rewarded by God on the day of judgment.

2. Money is one of the key areas where we demonstrate our faithfulness to God (Lk 16:10-12) Our money actually belongs to God who has given it to us in trust. This is not just the tithe, but all of our money comes from God and belongs to him. That is why Jesus demonstrates that earthly wealth is someone else's property. God desires that we use it wisely, for his benefit, not for our selfish desires. If we have

been selfish in how we have used the money God has entrusted to us, he won't reward us with greater honor when we get to heaven. Jesus calls worldly money, "*money of unrighteousness*" to show that money is part of this worldly system which is known for its corruption and unrighteousness. He calls the blessings of heaven "true riches" for only these blessings last forever. If we seek to use the money God has entrusted us by helping others, spreading the Gospel, and helping Jesus' kingdom grow, then in heaven God will entrust us with a much greater honor. Jesus says that the riches of heaven are "*the property we own*." By this he means that the rewards we receive from God in heaven are given to us and are ours forever. Only what we receive in heaven is "true wealth." All other money is with us temporarily until we die. So we are to focus upon true wealth, not temporary wealth.

3. We must be careful that money does not become our master, but that we live with Jesus as our master (Lk 16:13) Money by itself is not wrong, and it is not evil to be rich. The question is "Does our attitude towards money cause it to control us or does our attitude towards money reveal that we are disciples of Jesus preparing for eternity?" Although there were times in ancient days when two people would share a slave, this situation always caused problems. Who had the right to give orders to the slave, especially when both owners wanted the slave at the same time? A slave was at the total command of his master. In the same way, Jesus insists that if he is our Master, all of our lives; our spiritual gifts, our money, and our time, belong to him to be used as he desires. If we aren't willing to do this, then we can't claim to be the slave of Jesus. How we handle our money will often show whether or not Jesus is really our Master.

Jesus insisted that in our relationship with him, he, and not money is what must be most important. (Jesus uses the words "*love*" and "*hate*" in a Jewish way to show a comparison. To love means to give something priority and to hate is to treat something as having less priority.) If we often think of money, if it becomes the major reason why we serve, or if we keep looking for ways to better our life and make it more convenient for ourselves, then money has become our master. But if our thoughts focus upon seeking to honor and obey Jesus and to use money in a way that spreads his kingdom, then Jesus is the master of our life. How we use our money indicates which of the two is really our master. There are many Christians who emotionally shout out in church "Jesus is Lord." But if we examine their lives, what they think about the most is how to get more education so that they can get a superior job with good pay and all of the benefits such earthly blessings can bring. Not only do they not tithe, but they focus the use of their money upon themselves. Even many church leaders and ministers rarely tithe, let alone use the money above their tithe for God's kingdom. For them money has become their "master" and they have no right to shout "Jesus is Lord" because this is not true about them. Others, both poor and rich, give generously out of what they have and focus much of their attention on how to use their wealth for the glory of God. Jesus is truly their Lord.

4. God's perspective on wealth is different from how the world views it (Lk 16:14-15) The Pharisees were listening to what Jesus was teaching his followers which was totally against their understanding of spirituality. Like many Christians today, they thought that wealth indicated God's blessing, and the more money they had proved that they were spiritual and God was pleased with them. Not only did the Pharisees try to reveal their so-called spirituality by keeping man-made laws or look for the honor of people, they showed off their wealth (through fine clothes, etc.) as a symbol of their spirituality. They "*sneered*" at Jesus in scorn at his understanding of wealth.

Jesus told the Pharisees that God was not looking at the external things like money or keeping laws. He was looking at the heart, and what was in their hearts was detestable towards God. The world sees

money as the evidence of success and values it highly. People work very hard to become rich, often neglecting their families or church. They are willing to cheat on taxes to the government, pay bribes, and do anything they can to get rich. But when Jesus looks at this attitude towards money, he says that such an attitude and focus upon money is "*detestable in God's sight*." It reveals our selfishness, not our generosity, and does not honor God.

Q. 2. a) Review these four teachings about money. 1) Which of these truths do many Christians not apply to their lives? 2) Look at your life. Are there ways you are letting money become your master? What things in how you spend your money indicate that you are letting money or Jesus be your master? If money has become your master, confess this sin. And then take steps to make sure that Jesus and not money takes first place in your life.

Money is neither good or evil, it is neutral. It is only a tool for living. We use money to buy food, clothes, and pay for rent. God gives us money to take care of our daily needs. It is also a tool for us to use to serve God. Paul said that one reason we must work hard and earn money is so that we have the resources to help others. (Eph. 4:28) As followers of Jesus, we must look at all of the financial resources we have as belonging to God. We are stewards of it and has given it to us to use for his kingdom benefit. As we faithfully use our finances for God's kingdom, he often entrusts us with more money so that we can honor him even more through our wealth. Our attitude towards money reveals the condition of our hearts. To focus upon money and its selfish use reveals that we are living with a wrong perspective on time. To honor money means that we are living for the present, seeking to gain the benefits money can give us now. This means that we have forgotten that this life on earth is very short and death will soon come to all of us. None of us will be able to take our money to heaven. But there is a "*money*" (God's rewards and the eternal blessings) in heaven that lasts forever. How we use our earthly money increases our money in heaven. How about you? Are you living for the present or for eternity? How foolish it is if we use money just for our present needs and not plan for the future like the dishonest manager did!

ADDITIONAL TEACHINGS BY JESUS (Lk. 16:16-18)

One of the accusations the Jews often made against Christians during the New Testament times was that Jesus set aside the Old Testament laws of God. The fact that Christians did not demand circumcision of boys or keeping the food laws of the Old Testament concerned the Jews. So what was Jesus' attitude towards the law? In this section, we see the following truths:

1. With the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus, a new era has arrived which changed things. The "*Law and the Prophets*" refers to the whole of the Old Testament. From the days of Moses until the days of John the Baptist, God revealed his will to the Jews in the Old Testament books. This included three different types of laws. There were ceremonial laws which outlined for the Jews how they were to worship God. (e.g., laws about sacrifices and the priests) There were civil laws which described how the Jews were to live as a community of God's people. (e.g., laws about what to do when a cow enters someone's fields). Finally, there were the moral laws about how they were to act. (e.g., the ten commandments) God gave clearer definition through his prophets about how they were to live as the people of God. But the Prophets also foretold a time when God's representative, the Messiah, would come to right all of the evil on the earth. So the Old Testament reveals God's coming kingdom.

But something happened when John the Baptist started to minister. Scholars debate what the phrase "*until John*" refers to. Was Jesus saying that John the Baptist was the final person of the Old Testament era? Or was Jesus saying that John was the first person of the new era? Most likely Jesus is saying that John the Baptist was a person who brought the transition from the old era to the new era. He was part of the Old Testament era since Jesus had not yet died for sins. But he was also part of the New Testament era since he prepared the Jews for the coming of Jesus. The New Testament presents the thirty-year period of the birth of John and Jesus up through the death and resurrection of Jesus as the introduction of the new covenant period. It was the time when the Good News of the arrival of the kingdom of God in Jesus was proclaimed.

2. It requires "*force*" to enter into the kingdom of God. Many Jews thought that because they were the physical descendants of Abraham they were automatically part of God's kingdom. (This is similar to how many Christians think they are "Christians" because their parents are Christians.) And the Pharisees thought that to be part of God's kingdom all they had to do to was obey certain rules. But Jesus insisted that being part of the kingdom of God which he introduced was a personal choice and each person had to determine whether or not to enter the kingdom of Jesus. Clearly, the Pharisees were rejecting the kingdom because they were rejecting Jesus. Also entrance into the kingdom required effort. Each person had to make a conscious choice to humble himself to repent of his sins. And he had to submit his whole life to obey Jesus. Many were doing this. But this "*effort*" was more than most people like the Pharisees were willing to do. Most people refuse to become Christians not because they do not like Jesus and what he taught, but because they won't use the "*force*" needed to become a follower of Jesus through repentance and submission to Jesus.

3. God's Word, even its smallest details, are eternal. In the Hebrew alphabet, there was a small mark that was put above or below a character that would change the meaning of the character. But what did Jesus mean by saying not one small mark would every disappear from God's Word? This question is debated by scholars. It is clear that the New Testament shows that the civil and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament no longer apply to Christians. For instance, the apostles taught that people did not need to be circumcised and could eat "*unclean*" foods like pork. Perhaps Jesus meant three things. First, he is saying that he and his followers uphold all of the moral laws found in the Old Testament. Second, all of the Old Testament directly or indirect finds its fulfillment in Jesus and therefore is eternal. We might not apply directly many of the teachings of the Old Testament, but behind the teachings are principles which Jesus fulfills. For instance, the ceremonial laws like keeping the Passover point to Jesus, who is the true Passover. Third, Jesus meant that he fulfills all of God's intentions when he gave the laws. For example, Jesus knew that God was not only concerned about adultery when he gave the law in the Old Testament, but the hidden lust in a person's heart. (Mt. 5:27-30)

4. Jesus' demands even exceed the requirements of the Old Testament. (Note: We will study more about this issue of divorce in Day Three's teaching.) Jesus points to divorce to illustrate different ways his requirements exceeds anything taught either in the Old Testament or by the religious leaders.

First, even though allowed by Moses, he taught that divorce went against God's desires. Christians should always know that divorce is against the perfect will of God, because marriage is supposed to be a permanent relationship.

Second, Jesus did not have different standards for the woman than for the man. It was equally wrong for the man and the woman to divorce. (It was almost impossible for a Jewish woman to divorce her husband. Divorce was the right of the husband and the woman was seen as his property.)

Third, Jesus taught that remarriage was considered adultery. Some Jews during the days of Jesus taught that it was "adultery" for a man only when he slept with another man's wife; sex with a single woman was permitted. But if the wife slept with anyone, she was committing adultery against her husband. No one imagined that it was adultery when either partner married another person. Why was it adultery? Because in the eyes of God, marriage is a permanent bond and so they were still considered married to their original partner. So when a person marries someone else, they were living in permanent adultery with their new marriage partner.

If we claim to be followers of Jesus, we must take his teaching seriously and return to a belief that marriage is a permanent bond.

Q. 3. a) Contrast the view of divorce held by the world and what is taught by Jesus. b) Contrast what is the practice of divorce in churches today with what Jesus taught. c) Explain why it is important for Christians to take a strong stance against divorce in the church. What should church leaders do to reaffirm Jesus' teaching about divorce?

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (Lk. 16:19-31)

Jesus returns to teaching about money. As we mentioned earlier, Jews often saw material wealth as a sign of God's blessing. And they believed that poverty was a sign of God's judgment upon sin. In this parable, Jesus destroys this understanding of a relationship between wealth and spirituality by contrasting a very rich man with a very poor man and what happened to each of them after death. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus must have shocked the Jews for it went against all of their understandings of life. This parable is unique in that it is the only story that Jesus told which gives a name for one of the characters. (NOTE: It is important to know that this Lazarus is different from the Lazarus who was the brother of Mary and Martha, whom Jesus raised from the dead.)

One of the truths that Jesus taught was that in eternity, there will be a major change from how things are on earth. Those who are "first" on earth will be "last" in heaven. One way this will happen is in the financial world. Those who are rich and abuse their wealth will find themselves suffering greatly, and those who suffered in poverty while staying faithful to Jesus will suddenly find themselves greatly blessed. It is important to take this parable within the context of the teachings of the whole Bible. Nowhere does the Bible teach that being rich is a sin that brings eternal punishment to a person. Otherwise, Job and Abraham would be in hell. Nor does it teach that just by being poor a person goes to heaven. The Bible teaches that faith in Jesus is what saves a person.

In his parable, Jesus contrasts what happens to two men. The first picture is of their life on earth. One unnamed person was very rich. As symbols of his wealth, he wore purple, the color of clothes worn by kings. And linen was a special cloth from Egypt that was very expensive. Every day he ate food as if it was a wedding party. All of his life revolved around luxuriously living for himself. What was the rich man's sin? He did not abuse Lazarus, tell him to leave, or make fun of him. Rather he ignored Lazarus, treating him

with indifference and lack of compassion. His eyes had become blind to the situation of those around him as he selfishly sought to enjoy his own life.

In contrast, at the outside gate of his house there was a destitute man, no doubt thinking he would get some help from the rich man. He was covered with sores and was slowly starving to death. He knew that in the house this rich man was eating a lot of food. He longed to eat some of the scraps of food that fell on the floor from the rich man's table. On top of everything, dogs, who were considered by Jews to be unclean animals, harassed him by licking his sores. The man was so weak that he could not go away to another home where he might find someone kind enough to give him food. Unlike the rich man, we are told this poor man's name, Lazarus. By naming Lazarus and not the rich man, Jesus is pointing out the difference there is between God and man. Everyone would have known the name of the rich man, but not the name of the poor man. But God knew the name of the poor man who was the object of his compassion, but was indifferent to the name of the rich man. The riches that impress humans mean nothing to God.

The second picture in the parable is after death. It is said that death is the major equalizer on earth. It does not matter if you are rich or poor, educated or uneducated; death comes to all. None of the riches of earth does any good after death. Both the rich man and Lazarus die and suddenly things were reversed. The poor man Lazarus received great honor as he was taken by angels to where Abraham was. Jews taught that on the death of very special individuals like Moses, angels were sent by God to escort them immediately to their eternal home. So Lazarus was treated as one of these special friends of God. Abraham, the father of the Jews, symbolized the place of the living righteous enjoying eternal blessings. To receive a seat next to Abraham was seen as the place of greatest honor.

Interestingly Lazarus' name means "God is my help." From a human perspective it seemed like God had abandoned Lazarus since he died in abject poverty. But things are not what they appear. God was Lazarus' hope, but his help came after death when he was rewarded by God. In contrast, the rich man found himself in "*hades*," the Greek name for the place of the unrighteous dead. Instead of blessing, he received great suffering. (NOTE: This section clearly teaches that a person does not cease to exist at death, but his soul continues to live.)

In his story, Jesus said that the righteous dead and the unrighteous dead could see each other. Could this not be one of the extra torments awaiting those in hell, to see (or know) all of the blessings of heaven which could have been theirs if they had only made different choices on earth? Lazarus had watched the rich man selfishly live in luxury, and now it was the rich man's turn to watch Lazarus enjoy eternal blessings. The rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus to give him a drop of water. He was suffering the torment of great heat and fire and wanted some water to quench his thirst. But Abraham told him two important facts about heaven and hell.

First, heaven and hell are permanent places where no one can cross from one side to the other. There is no mention of "purgatory" where someone moves from a place of punishment to eventually get to heaven.

Second, Abraham also told him that it was the time of reversal. Previously the rich man had selfishly enjoyed great blessings ("*your good things*") but Lazarus had suffered the evil of the world systems and the lack of love and mercy on part of other humans. Now Lazarus enjoyed blessing and the rich man suffered. Contrary to the understanding of the Jews, there is no evidence that Lazarus' suffering

on earth was due to punishment for sin. Rather, life was not fair for him just like it often does not turn out fair for many people today.

The first major lesson this first part of the parable teaches is that how we use our resources on earth is an indication of our spiritual condition. If we look at life with only self-interest and use the wealth entrusted to us by God only to meet our selfish needs, it will bring great judgment upon us in the future because it reveals that we are not true followers of Jesus.

The second lesson of the first part of the parable is that death seals our fate and we cannot change our situation after death. A life selfishly lived as if God does not matter will cause us to face eternity in eternal punishment without God or any of his blessings. But a life lived in humble service of God and others will ultimately bring great reward. Such a life might not seem honorable and financially rewarding now. But we should not focus on the present which is temporary, but on life after death, which is the life that lasts forever. Live your life in light of eternity now, for later you will have no opportunity to change things. How many people after death will look back at their earthly life with deep regret and say "I wish I had lived differently!"

The second part of the parable in Lk. 16:27-31 deals with a different teaching. The rich man now realized that he could not change his life, but he wanted his brothers to not experience his fate. So he begged Abraham to allow Lazarus to go back to warn his brothers about life after death. "If they see the miracle of someone raised from the dead, they will believe" he argued. But Abraham replied that was not true.

a. His brothers (and all of the Jews) had the Old Testament (called "*Moses and the Prophets*") which revealed God's will for their lives. That was enough of a warning to them to change how they lived to honor God. But they were indifferent to what God had revealed to them. Most people refuse to become Christians or live for Jesus not because they don't know God's will, but because they refuse to believe or pay attention to what God has said in his Word.

b. Even if someone would rise from the dead this would not change their minds if they had already determined to live without God and only for themselves. Jesus had raised people from the dead already, but still people like the Pharisees refused to believe. And in just a few days he would raise another Lazarus from the dead, but those who were against Jesus just determined to kill him. (Jn. 11) Even when Jesus rose from the dead, most of the Jews refused to believe. We often think that a miracle will force people to believe. But in reality, if people have already made up their minds to live for themselves, no miracle can convince them to believe.

Q. 4. a) Compare how Christians would change how they live if they remember that this life is very temporary and eternity is what matters. How would their attitude towards material blessings change?
b) If you were to die today, what are things in your life that you would regret? Make a decision now to change those things so that should you die, you will not face an eternity of regrets.

SECOND DAY

Q. 5. Read Lk. 17:1-10. List the different truths Jesus taught his disciples in this section.

JESUS TEACHES TRUTHS ABOUT THE LIFE OF A DISCIPLE (Lk. 17:1-10)

What is expected of us as followers of Jesus? Is it only for us to raise our hands and believe? Or is it to stop drinking alcohol or committing other sins? Jesus taught that all of life must change if we are to live in obedience to Jesus as one of his disciples. In this section, Jesus teaches four truths about what is expected of disciples. Two truths refer to our relationships with other believers and two truths refer to our relationship with God.

1. Two truths concerning our relationship with other believers (Lk. 17:1-4)

a. Make sure nothing you do causes another believer to fall into sin and apostasy. (Lk 17:1-2) Jesus taught that we are not supposed to only think about ourselves and maintain our spiritual purity. Rather, we must make sure that there is nothing in what we do or say which causes other believers ("*little children*") to fall into sin. The Greek word "*cause to sin*" was used to bait a trap to catch a rat. Or it was used of putting something in front of someone so that they trip. And a "*millstone*" referred to a large stone used to grind grain which was turned by donkeys. Jews saw drowning as one of the worst possible deaths. Jesus used graphic language to shock his listeners into realizing how serious it is to cause someone to sin. He warned that living in a way that causes others to fall into sin brings great punishment. It would be better for us to die an early death by having a millstone tied around our neck and drowning in a sea before we cause others to sin. We might die early, but we would escape God's punishment, which has eternal implications.

Often we only think about ourselves and are satisfied if we think we are not sinning. But Jesus said that we are to live life thinking about how our actions impact others. Going to movies might not be a sin to us, but if it leads someone else to sin, we are wrong in doing it. Or wearing fashionable clothes might not be wrong for us, but if it causes another Christian brother to lust, it is wrong. Or if what we preach is not accurate to God's Word and causes believers to believe falsehoods and therefore receive judgment from God, we will be punished greatly. (Jms. 3:1) So Jesus warns us that we will not only be punished for the sins we commit, but for the impact of our lives upon whether it causes others to follow Jesus in purity or leads them away from the truth.

b. We are supposed to quickly reconcile ourselves to those who sin against us and forgive them. (Lk. 17:3-4) As long as we are on earth, we will do things that hurt others and they will do things that hurt us. So followers of Jesus must learn to confront the sinner in love, gain his repentance, and offer forgiveness for all sins. The number "*seven*" is not used here as a literal number, but figuratively for indefinite numbers of times. (The Jews taught that they only had to forgive three times, so Jesus' standard was much greater.) We are always supposed to forgive others. There are several important truths in this section:

1) We are to confront a sinner. This goes against the practice of most Christians. We tend to get angry at the person when they do something against us and then tell others what they have done. Rarely do we go to the person and share with them how their actions have affected us. (Note: If it is culturally inappropriate to confront personally, we are to use culturally appropriate ways (e.g., through a mediator) to resolve the matter.) It is unlikely that Jesus meant that we are to go around confronting everyone for everything they do that is wrong. Nor are we to be the judges over the motives of others. (Mt. 7:1-5) What Jesus is addressing is a clear sin which a person is doing but is not evidencing any repentance. We are not told to just let the sin go on. That will cause a lasting break in our relationship and leave the sinner vulnerable to punishment by God. We show love for them by wanting to heal our relationship and desiring

the person to receive ours and God's forgiveness so he will not be punished by God. Paul says that when we are relating to others, we must always "speak the truth in love." (Eph. 4:15) Love means that we are speaking the truth for the benefit of the other person. Before we confront, we must first examine our own hearts. The motive for confrontation should be the repentance of the person so that they do not receive the judgment of God. We should not angrily accuse the other person of doing something to us.

2) The sinner must repent. The word "*repent*" does not only mean that she must say she is sorry. Rather, repent means that the person acknowledges that what he has done is wrong. She also has a commitment to change how she acts so that the sin does not continue. Often people think it is not a sin until they are found out. And only then do they confess so that they are not punished. But true spirituality means that we constantly examine our hearts for all known and unknown sins and confess these, repent, and change how we live. It is not true repentance if we hide part of the sins that we have done or if we do not seek to change how we live. And it is not repentance if we just say we are sorry but continue doing what is wrong.

3) The one who is sinned against must forgive. He must not hold a grudge or seek to hurt the person in any way. Forgiveness of a sinner is so important to Jesus that he claimed that a refusal to forgive means that God will not forgive us of our sins when we try to repent. (Mt. 6:14-15)

2. Two truths about our relationship with God (Lk. 17:5-10)

a. Small faith in a great God works miracles. (Lk 17:5-6) The Bible clearly shows that faith is one of the most important factors in our relationship with God. We are told that without faith it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) The word "*faith*" can have many different meanings in the Bible. It can refer to the truths of the Bible which believers hold as true. It can refer to a mental agreement about a truth such as a belief that God is able to perform a miracle. It can describe our trust in the truthfulness of a promise of God. And it can be used to refer to our relationship with God where we live our lives trusting him for our salvation and we respond in obedience to him.

It is not clear why one of the apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. Was he talking about their ability to live in obedience to Jesus by forgiving those who wronged them as the context of the passage suggests? Or were they concerned that they did not have enough faith to work the miracles that they saw Jesus performing? The context of this request would indicate that the apostles were not so much asking for faith to perform greater miracles, but the faith to live in radical obedience to Jesus. They knew that to obey him totally and forgive each other would require more than they could naturally do.

But it seems they had a wrong idea about faith. Like many Christians, they thought faith was an ingredient like water that has to be added to until the glass is full. Only when the glass of faith is full that miracles happen. So Christians often look for ways to get more faith and when their prayers are not answered, they think it is because their glass of faith is not full enough. The disciples asked Jesus to help them fill up their glass of faith rather than having a glass half full. But Jesus taught that the issue in their relationship with him was not how much faith they had, but whether their faith was genuine. Only a little genuine faith in a powerful God is enough to work great miracles. A mulberry tree was famous for having strong roots that would not let it be uprooted, and a mustard seed was known to be one of the smallest garden seeds- and yet faith that is as small as a mustard seed can do the impossible.

Why is it not the amount of faith that matters the most? The power is not in the faith that we have. And the solution does not lie with somehow getting enough faith so it suddenly work. Rather, the key is what we place our faith in. We can believe that a chair will hold us up, but then it breaks when we sit on it. Our "faith" was defective not because we had no faith but because we put our faith in the wrong thing. Jesus is teaching that faith works because we have a miracle working God. As long as we trust him to work, God is willing to do things that are impossible for humans. But if there is a lack of faith in God, it limits God's willingness to work miracles on our behalf. So as followers of Jesus, when situations seem too difficult for us, we need to remember that the miracle working God wants to work in and through us if we but trust him.

b. Followers of Jesus must be careful to not think that they are doing God a favor when they serve Jesus. (Lk 17:7-10) One of the ways pride demonstrates itself in our lives is when we think that in our service of God, we are obligating God to thank us and reward us. We can begin to think we are doing God a favor by serving him. This was a danger for the apostles who had left everything to follow Jesus. It is also a problem for evangelists, pastors, and church leaders who usually serve God at great personal cost. "God must be pleased with me. I have left my family and am serving him as an evangelist among the nomads" we are tempted to think. But this thinking reveals a wrong view of God. During the days of Jesus, many farmers with small fields had one slave. The slave worked in the fields all day and then at night he would go home and cook the meal for his master. A slave would never eat with his master, only after the master had eaten. And the slave would never expect the master to reward him for his faithful work. It was his duty as a slave to do everything this master told him.

Out of love for God we are supposed to serve Jesus with all of our ability. And he does reward us, but not because he is obligated to us or has to pay us a wage for what we do. Anything God does for us is "grace," a free gift which we don't deserve. In our relationship with Jesus we must always remember that he is the Lord. We are to completely obey him no matter how difficult the job might be. We are slaves and he is our Lord. If we expect the praise of men or God, or if we think we are due a reward by God, our service of God has been corrupted by selfishness. We no longer understand our relationship with God as being one of Master and slave.

Q. 6. Review these four truths about a believer's relationship with fellow believers and God. a) Describe ways that many Christians do not fulfill these four truths. b) What attitudes need to change if we want to apply these truths to how we follow Jesus?

JESUS RAISES LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD (Jn. 11)

What enemy do all people fear the most? Is it those who take a strong stand against Christians? Or perhaps a sickness like cancer or AIDS? How about Satan? These are all adversaries and at different times in our lives we can fear them. But mankind's greatest fear is "death." The Bible shows death to be an "enemy" of mankind. (1 Cor. 15:26) Starting from Adam and Eve, the fear of death and what happens after death has troubled mankind. Every culture tries to do things to take away some of the pain that death causes. Some teach reincarnation, the belief that no one ever really dies, they are reborn in a different form. Others teach that death is only like going to sleep, but a long sleep from which no one ever wakes up since the soul ceases to exist. Other religions teach that after death a person enjoys great sensual pleasure in heaven.

One of the keys to living as followers of Jesus is learning to conquer this fear of death. Jesus knew that his followers would frequently face death. Not only would there be the natural process of death through disease or old age, but because of persecution, believers would often die for their faith. The New Testament teaches that in Christ the "sting of death" has been taken away. And it looks forward to a day when death will one day be totally done away with. (1 Cor. 15:54-55; 15:26; Rev. 20:14) The New Testament teaches that death is never something to be feared if one is a follower of Jesus for two reasons.

First, death is simply a tool to take us into a much better world. That is why Paul would say that it is much better to die, for he would be forever with the Lord. (Phil. 1:23)

Second, there will come a day of resurrection where God will give his followers new bodies free from all of the limitations of the earthly body we now have. (1 Cor. 15:50-53) This truth was so important to early martyrs of Christianity that they would often call the day of their death the day of victory. As they were being lit on fire or attacked by lions in the Roman arena, they would joyfully sing about the victory they would soon enjoy in the presence of Jesus.

There are two events in the New Testament that provide the greatest encouragement for believers when it comes to death.

First, there is the truth that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The New Testament calls him the "first fruits" or the first example of someone with a resurrected body. (1 Cor. 15:20-23) He is the promise that one day each one of us will receive our resurrected body. Second, there is the example of Lazarus rising from the dead. Although this is a real story about how Jesus raised someone who had been dead for four days, one of the major teachings of this story is that believers will all one day raise from the dead. As Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he claimed to be "the resurrection and the life." He is the one who has the power to restore spiritual and physical life. And he is the one who will raise his followers from death, giving us our eternal bodies.

- Q. 7. a) Describe how death is "feared" in Ethiopia. b) Explain why it is important for believers to conquer that fear of death if they want to live in a way that honors Jesus.
- Q. 8. Read Jn. 11. Summarize in your own words Jesus' teaching on death and the resurrection.

1. Jesus teaches the disciples about working according to God's timing (Jn. 11:1-16)

One of the families which was closest to Jesus was the family of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. When he was in the Jerusalem area, he would often stay in their home in Bethany, located about two kilometers east of Jerusalem. (Jn. 12:1-3) One day Lazarus became very sick. Martha and Mary sent messengers to Jesus telling him to come quickly so that he could heal Lazarus. The death of Lazarus would have great economic implications for the two sisters. It seems that their parents had died and neither Martha nor Mary were married. Lazarus would have been the only wage earner, so for him to die could bring economic ruin to Martha and Mary. Jesus was probably across the Jordan in Perea at this time and it would have taken a day for the messenger to reach Jesus.

Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters. But when he received the request that he come quickly, he did the opposite. Jesus delayed going to Bethany for two days. Why did Jesus delay going? Wasn't that cruel? Just because Jesus loves us does not mean that he immediately resolves our problems. There are many times that we ask him for something and he delays the response. Or it seems like he doesn't give us a

response at all. If Jesus has all power to resolve our problems, why doesn't he often do it immediately when we ask? Jesus gave his disciples four reasons:

a. Lazarus' death was temporary. Jesus said that Lazarus was only sleeping. The Jews often called death "*sleep*." Just as someone who is asleep wakes up in the morning, so also Lazarus would soon wake up from the dead. For Lazarus, his "waking up" took place just a few days later. But for us, the "waking up" (from problems, disease, or death) can happen at different times as determined by God. There are times Jesus heals us immediately from what is troubling us. But there are other times Jesus waits for months or years to answer our prayers. And there are even times where the answer does not come while we are alive. But that does not mean that the answer does not come. For Jesus, the temporary life on earth is not the most important thing, but eternity. And his promise to us is that in eternity, Jesus will "wake us up" from anything that is troubling us. As we are told in Revelation, in eternity there will be no more death and disease, no sorrow or crying. (Rev. 21:4) One scholar said we are now in the land of the dying because everyone who is born travels towards death. But when we die, we go to the land of the living, because all who die as believers receive eternal life where there is no more dying.

b. Jesus' primary concern was the glory of God. Many healers seem to seek to glorify themselves and desire the reputation of being healers. But Jesus had only one purpose in life and that was to glorify God. And in this case, Jesus knew that God would receive the most glory by delaying the answer until Lazarus was dead for so long that people believed that it was impossible to raise him from the dead. Jesus' primary focus was not on helping out his friends but in glorifying God.

c. By delaying, Jesus would be glorified as well. This would initially be by increased honor from raising Lazarus from the dead. But the book of John shows that the major way Jesus was glorified was through his death and resurrection, (Jn. 17:1) which some scholars think is illustrated by Lazarus' death and resurrection.

d. Jesus was concerned about the faith of his followers. (Jn. 11:15) Becoming a follower of Jesus doesn't mean that we instantly have the level of faith, understanding, and trust which Jesus wants to see in our lives. Rather, when we become followers of Jesus, we start the process of spiritual growth where our understanding and trust in Jesus grows through difficulties. Jesus wanted the faith of his followers to grow, and growth of faith is always best when things are difficult. Peter tells us that to God, the most important thing, more precious even than gold, is our faith. (1 Pet. 1:7) This is one reason God allows us to face trouble and not answer our requests immediately, for only then can our faith be refined of the impurities like selfishness and lack of trust.

God's ways are not our ways and God's timing is not our timing. We can't tell God when he must heal us or resolve our problems. We must trust his power of control over all events and his love for us, and leave the timing up to him.

Jesus knowingly delayed for two days and then began his day's journey to where Lazarus was located. When Jesus started towards Jerusalem, his disciples became worried. While in Perea, they were in the political region of Herod, but to return to Jerusalem was to enter the area where the Jewish religious leaders were in power. Just a few weeks earlier at the Feast of Dedication, the Jews had tried to arrest Jesus and kill him. The disciples tried to dissuade Jesus from going. Jesus told them that every day has times of "*light*" when a person can walk without stumbling and times of "*darkness*" when he will stumble

if he travels. Believers must learn the difference. In this saying Jesus was telling his followers that as long as they are in the will of God, they are able to walk in his "light" with the security that God will not allow anything to cause them to stumble. He was obeying God in going to Lazarus, and so there was nothing anyone could do to him without the permission of the Father. But it is when we don't walk in obedience to God that we stumble in darkness.

Jesus was never afraid of what others would do to him because he knew he was walking in obedience to God. Sometimes that meant he would leave an area rather than face persecution before God's timing. But at other times it meant that Jesus would go where persecution was possible in obedience to God. Jesus' response varied depending on what he believed God wanted. The disciples continued trying to dissuade Jesus from going, especially after Jesus said that Lazarus was sleeping. They misunderstood Jesus' statement and told Jesus that Lazarus was no doubt getting better if he was sleeping, so there was no reason to risk his life. When Jesus insisted that he had to go to Jerusalem area in obedience to God, the disciples resigned to go with him, even if it caused their deaths as well. Thomas is pictured as a model disciple here. Following Jesus is all that mattered to him, not his personal life, even if it meant imprisonment and death. In the same way, true discipleship means we care little about what happens to us, whether we become rich or stay poor, whether we live a long life in peace and security or die an early death by persecution. Obedience to Jesus is our most important concern.

Q. 9. a) Describe a situation Christians in Ethiopia face when following Jesus brings upon them great inconvenience. b) Describe how people, even those claiming to be believers, shy away from these situations and resist God's will for their lives. c) Examine your life. List ways that you are "walking in the light" in obedience to the will of God even if it brings upon you suffering.

2. Jesus encourages Martha and Mary to trust him (Jn. 11:17-37)

It was probably a day's walk for Jesus to arrive in Bethany. News of his arrival outside Bethany reached Martha and Mary who were in mourning over the death of Lazarus. Like Ethiopians, for the Jews, mourning the death of someone was very important. When Lazarus died, it would not be long for everyone in the area to hear that he was dead and they would gather at the house. Martha and Mary were responsible to quickly prepare the body for burial since in the warm weather it would not be long before the body began to decompose. After washing his body, they would take a special linen cloth and wrap his body from head to foot, tying it tightly with the arms at his side and his feet straight. After they wrapped the body in very costly spices to cover the smell of the body, they would then take another cloth and wrap his head, carefully tying up his jaw so that it would not sag open. Jews did not bury the dead in the ground if they were able to dig caves in the side of the cliffs. Most Jewish burial caves had two rooms. They would first place the body in the outer room on the floor of the cave where it would decompose. This would have been where the body of Lazarus was lying. Then there was an inner room about two meters long, three meters wide, and three and ½ meters tall. There were usually eight shelves, three on each side and two at the end. A year after the burial, the family would enter the cave, gather up the bones in a box, and put them on the shelf dug into the side of the cave. The opening of the cave was covered with a large round stone. The major burial ceremony took place at the cave, not at the home. The family was obligated to hire professional mourners who knew how to cry loudly with great anguish. And there were also musicians who played flutes and funeral music. Everyone in the community was obligated to attend and wail with the bereaved family. Then everyone would return to the home of Martha and Mary. All of the furniture of the home was removed, and the family would sit on the floor of the house. The community would prepare a meal for Martha and Mary and the guests. The community would then mourn together for seven days. The

first three days were called "days of weeping" where there was strong weeping over the death. And the last four days were called "days of mourning." Then the family mourned for a further three weeks.

The Jews had a belief that for the first three days after death, the spirit of the dead person would stay in the vicinity of the cave, seeking to return to the body. But on the fourth day, seeing the face decomposing, the spirit would give up hope and go to the place of the dead spirits. During the first three days accompanied by mourners, the family would often go to the tomb to weep and to see if there was somehow for the dead person to have risen from the dead. When Jesus arrived, it was the fourth day, the day when people gave up all hope of Lazarus somehow raising from the dead. (This would mean one day for the messenger to reach Jesus, two days while Jesus waited, and one day for Jesus to reach the home of Martha and Mary.) The Jews would have thought that it was possible for Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead during these first three days, but on the fourth day after the spirit had left the region, it was impossible. But Jesus wanted to show that he had total power over death no matter how impossible it might seem to humans, so he waited until everyone believed it was hopeless and then raised Lazarus from the dead.

When Jesus arrived, it was at the height of mourning time with people from the community and some from Jerusalem came to express their sorrow. It was unusual for someone in mourning to leave the house to go see someone. But when Martha, who was probably the older sister and used to organizing things for the family, heard that Jesus had arrived she hurried out to greet Jesus while he was still outside the village. She expressed her wish that Jesus had arrived before Lazarus had died, knowing that Jesus had power to heal her brother. It is possible that she even believed that Jesus could have raised Lazarus from the dead if he had been there earlier, but now with the fourth day, it seemed impossible. When Jesus told her Lazarus would rise again, she assumed Jesus meant at the end times, for most of the Jews at that time followed the teaching of the Pharisees who believed the dead would raise, unlike the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection.

Jesus told Martha that he is "*the resurrection and the life*." He has total power over life and over death. This is true in two levels. First, Jesus is the spiritual giver of life, the one who rises up the dead spiritual lives of people enabling them to believe and be saved. Second, Jesus is also the master over physical life. He determines who lives and who dies. And he is also the master over death, the one who has total control over raising people from the dead. He would raise Lazarus from the dead that day, even though it was the fourth day and he was already decaying. But he will also raise all people from the dead. It does not matter to him that their bodies are decayed or their bones scattered. With his mighty power, he will rejoin the spirit of all people with a resurrected body he gives them. Unlike what happened to Lazarus who rose from the dead back into a temporary body only to die later, at the major resurrection Jesus will join the spirit that has never died to a new resurrection body prepared for eternal life. It is doubtful that Martha believed Jesus' claim that he would raise Lazarus because when Jesus sought to raise Lazarus from the dead she said "*he will stink*." (Jn 11:39) Like many of us, Martha theoretically believed that Jesus could raise Lazarus, but when it came to her specific situation, she doubted Jesus' ability to act. True faith is not just a mental affirmation of a truth. Rather, it means living in a way that affirms what we believe to be true.

Martha left Jesus and quietly got her sister Mary. Rather than waiting for Jesus to come into her home, Mary left to meet Jesus. This time all of the mourners also got up and followed her, thinking she was on the way to the tomb to mourn there. She too expressed her wish that Jesus had come in time to heal Lazarus before he died, believing that Jesus would have healed him. (Jn 11:32)

When Jesus saw Mary and the mourners crying, the Greek says he became very angry. What was Jesus angry at? He would not have been angry at Mary for expressing her sorrow over the death of her brother. He also already knew that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, so he was not sorrowed by the death of Lazarus. Some scholars think he was angry at how sin had brought such death and sorrow into the world. Others think he was angry at the lack of faith in him and God that such crying evidenced. Like us, the Jews claimed to believe that God would raise Lazarus from the dead. But their actions expressed hopelessness, not the hope of the resurrection. This discrepancy between what they claimed to believe and what they were doing angered him. Later Paul would tell followers of Jesus that they are never to mourn "like the rest of men without hope." (1 Thes. 4:13) They might cry over the pain of separation death brings or the sorrow which those remaining behind would now experience without their loved one. But it was never to be crying for the dead person. Not only was the follower of Jesus in heaven with God, but Christians believe that Jesus will one day raise them from the dead. As followers of Jesus we must make sure that the sorrow we express at a funeral of a believer does not express hopelessness which the non-believer expresses at death.

Jesus then started to cry. Why did he cry when he already knew that he would raise Lazarus from the dead? Was he joining in the sorrow of Mary and Martha? Or was he crying over the fact that he knew that no matter what he did, even if he raised Lazarus from the dead, his people would still reject him? (This would be similar to the tears he shed over Jerusalem. [Lk. 13:34-35]) We don't know, but as believers we can know that Jesus is never indifferent to the pain we feel as we say good-bye to our loved ones when they die. (Note: For the Gentile readers of Luke's Gospel, this verse must have shocked them. Greeks believed that God had no emotions, that he was calm and nothing saddened him or pleased him. But that is not the God of the Bible. God is an emotional being. He rejoices over the salvation of people (Lk. 15:7) and sings over his people in love. (Zeph. 3:17) But he also gets angry at injustices and the impact of sin. (Deut. 6:15) And God understands our situation and empathizes with us. (Ps. 103:13-14; Heb. 4:15) One of the amazing truths of the Bible is that God rejoices with his children in our times of joy. But he also joins in our sorrow as we face death and painful situations.)

3. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:38-44)

Jesus led the mourners down to the gravesite. Despite the reservation of Martha over the smell that would now be present in the dead body, he asked that the stone be moved aside. Jesus was always in communion with God and he did not need to pray out loud. Rather he prayed so people could understand that the miracle was done with God's approval and enabling. Jesus' prayer to God expresses his awareness of the will of God in the situation. He did not need to ask God to raise Lazarus from the dead. Rather, knowing that God would use him to raise Lazarus, he praised God for using him so that the faith of those who watched could be increased. And then he "*commanded*" Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Earlier Jesus had told people that one day people would hear his voice and rise from the dead. (Jn. 5:25-29) Lazarus heard that command to raise from the dead and obeyed. One day all of us will hear this command, and our spirits and resurrected bodies will be joined together for ever. Notice that there is no evidence that Jesus put on a show before he raised Lazarus. Many healers try to entertain people in their healing, drawing attention to themselves. Jesus used a simple word of command because his purpose was not to entertain people nor glorify himself, but only God.

At the command of Jesus, two miracles took place. First, the body, which had been decomposing, was restored to its original condition. Second, the spirit of Lazarus returned from the place of the dead and re-entered the body of Lazarus. It must have been very difficult for Lazarus to walk since he was

wrapped tightly in cloth. Hopping out of the cave, he stood all wrapped up before the mourners who must have been astonished. Jesus told them to uncover him.

4. Reaction to Jesus' healing Lazarus (Jn. 11:45-57)

We would imagine that seeing such an irrefutable miracle demonstrating the power of Jesus would convince everyone to believe that Jesus was the Messiah sent from God. But it didn't. There were two reactions.

First, there were many who "believed" on Jesus. It is unlikely that this was saving faith because many of these would later join the crowd yelling "Crucify him." Unfortunately, many people make a claim to believe on Jesus in church or at a conference or at a healing service, but it only comes out of emotions, not a commitment to follow Jesus and accept him as Lord of their lives. It is not true faith. We can know if a person's faith is real by watching their lives after their commitment. Do they live in a way that honors God? Do they seek to honor Jesus with all of their lives? Do they hunger for God's Word and prayer? If they do, their faith was no doubt real. If not, then we should question the reality of their faith.

Second, there were those, like the Pharisees, who refused to believe. If there is no inclination to trust God, even the greatest miracle won't change peoples' minds. Some who witnessed the miracle told the Jewish leaders. No one doubted the miracle, but they refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. The religious leaders gathered the "*Sanhedrin*," the Jewish high court. In it were the high priest and major priests who belonged to the Sadducee party. There were also well-known scholars who were usually Pharisees. And there were major famous family heads called "the elders." These leaders were afraid of two things.

a. They were afraid that they would lose their positions of authority. Often the Romans would blame the Sanhedrin, especially the priests, for any uprising, and these religious leaders were afraid that they would lose their positions of authority as the Romans replaced them with other priests. Like many church leaders today, they wanted to retain their power no matter what evil they have to do to keep their positions. One person has said that we know the heart of a leader best when he is asked to step down from leadership. If he does things that are wrong to retain his leadership position, then he has been leading for his own glory, not for the glory of Jesus.

b. They were afraid that a war would start against Rome and in retaliation the Romans would destroy the city and the temple. The Jewish religious leaders taught that if the Romans demanded the death of someone who was a known thief or they would kill many people, the Jews were to hand over the thief and spare others' lives. But if the Romans demanded the death of an innocent person, everyone was to choose to die rather than hand over the innocent person. However, in fear, knowing that Jesus was innocent of any rebellion against Rome, the leaders decided that it was better for Jesus to die rather than allow death to come upon the nation.

Unknowingly the high priest gave a prophecy that demonstrated what would happen in just a few weeks time on the day of Passover. The high priest was thinking politically, seeking to save his nation from Roman retribution. (He was choosing the ethical path called situation ethics when what is best for the majority is believed permissible, even though we do something evil to make it happen. For instance, church leaders will lie to the government in order to get church property. They think the good "end" of getting church property is what is important, even if they lie. But God hates it when his people use wrong

methods to get things which they think are proper. To him a lie is a lie, and wrong.) But John knew that in the plan of God something much greater was about to happen. When Jesus died on the cross, he did not die for his sins. Rather, he died as a "substitution" for all people in the world. He was paying their penalty for sins by dying on their behalf. That way, those who believe in him are able to be declared "not guilty" by God and forgiven of their sins and given eternal life.

The Sanhedrin agreed with the high priest and sentenced an innocent man, Jesus, to death. After this, the Jewish leaders no longer tried to simply discredit Jesus before the people. Now they were actively trying to have him arrested and punished with death. In just a few weeks time, their desires were fulfilled as Jesus was arrested and died on the day of Passover.

Jesus knew the thought of the religious leaders, and he knew that God's time for his death had not arrived. So he left the region of Jerusalem and traveled to the northern part of Judea, to a village called Ephraim which was near Bethel. As the Passover drew near, many Jews gathered early to go through certain purification rites in preparation for this major celebration. Knowing that Jesus was a religious teacher, the crowd expected Jesus to attend the Passover. But others, knowing that there was a warrant for his arrest, thought Jesus would not come to the Passover at all. Jesus' time of death, however, was not determined by what the religious leaders were planning or what people thought. His life was in the hand of God the Father, and when God's time arrived, Jesus returned to Jerusalem and died on the day of Passover, the feast commemorating the day when God released Israel from bondage to Egypt. The release of mankind from the bondage of sin was about to take place.

Q. 10. Compare what the New Testament teaches about the death of believers to the attitude that many believers have towards death today. Do their actions reflect that they believe in the resurrection from the dead? Explain your answer.

Q. 11. Read Luke 17:11-37. a) What do you think the story of the lepers teaches us about following Jesus? b) List the things Jesus taught about his future return.

JESUS HEALS TEN LEPERS (Lk. 17:11-19)

From the region of northern Judea, Jesus traveled north along the borders of Samaria and Galilee. (See map in Appendix A at the back of the book.) This was Jesus' final tour throughout Galilee, Perea, and Judea before he went to Jerusalem to die. As he was walking close to a village, ten lepers approached Jesus. Because they were lepers, they were not allowed to live in a village, but in the countryside away from people. And they were not allowed to come close to Jesus or the people but had to stay about 50 meters away. (Lev. 13:45-46; Num. 5:2-3) The lepers had heard of the healing power of Jesus, so from a distance they cried out asking Jesus to heal them. Jesus pronounced no healing words over them. Rather, he told them to go show themselves to priests. The Old Testament mandated that all lepers were to show themselves to priests who would verify that they had been cured. (Lev. 14:1-32) True faith requires obedience, so it was when these lepers evidenced their faith through obedience that they were healed.

Only one of the ten returned to Jesus to thank him for the healing. What was amazing about this man was that he was one of the Samaritans who were hated by the Jews and who did not even worship God in a pure way. Jesus was amazed that the other nine Jews had no spirit of thanks, only this "*foreigner*." Whereas the other nine received physical healing, Jesus gave this Samaritan both physical and spiritual healing. He received the most important type of healing, the healing of his soul.

This story teaches several important truths.

1. It is possible to focus upon physical healing and miss the most important type of healing, which is healing the sin-sick soul. Many healers make this mistake as they get people excited by healing physical bodies. No matter how great a healing, however, there will come a time when those people will get sick again and die. Physical healing only prolongs physical life for a few years. Often these healers forget that what is most important, and the most amazing miracle, is spiritual healing. Only spiritual healing brings eternal life.

2. Those who enjoy the blessings of God often lose their spirit of thankfulness to God. The nine Jewish lepers were accustomed to being the "people of God." They thought that God owed them healing and blessing because they were the descendants of Abraham. They had little thankfulness in their hearts. But those, like the Samaritan, who often do not enjoy God's blessings and know that they deserve nothing from God except judgment, are those who are most thankful. Listen to your prayers. How much of them are filled with thanksgiving for all that God has been doing for you? Are they filled with requests but little thanks? The longer we are believers, the more we tend to lose our thankful spirits, thinking that we deserve these blessings rather than viewing them as gifts of grace and mercy that we do not deserve.

3. Thankfulness to God is an evidence of true faith. God owes us nothing. If God gave us what we deserve, we would all be in hell. Everything; our gifts, our abilities, our education, and our financial resources are all "gifts" of God given to those who deserve punishment instead. The Gospel teaches us that everything we have comes from God's grace and mercy. So our hearts should always be filled with thanksgiving. If they aren't, then we have forgotten the Gospel, and there is something wrong with our spiritual lives.

Q. 12. a) Describe how you have seen Christians often lose their spirit of thankfulness the longer they are believers. Why do you think this happens? b) Look at your heart and prayers. Have you lost your sense of thankfulness? Ask God to forgive you. Make a list of things that God has blessed you with simply by his grace and love. Thank him for these.

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS FUTURE RETURN (Lk. 17:20-37)

The Jews watching Jesus were confused. They understood that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. Jesus had openly preached that the kingdom of God had come. However, he did not show any of the evidences that they thought would indicate that the Messiah and the kingdom of God had arrived. So one day the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would start. By this they meant the kingdom where evil would be defeated, the Romans overthrown, and the Jews would be free to worship God under the blessed reign of the Messiah. Having preached about the coming kingdom, the Pharisees wondered whether Jesus would now start the political kingdom they were longing for.

Jesus told the Pharisees two major truths.

First, unlike what they thought, there would be no clear signs preceding the coming of the Messiah. There would not be things that they could point to and say the Messiah will come this year or next year. Jesus was warning the Pharisees and us that we should never try to guess when Jesus will return to the earth to rule.

Second, Jesus warned the Pharisees and disciples that rather than looking at the political world for the Messiah, they should start by looking at Jesus. Scholars debate whether in the Greek Jesus meant "*the kingdom of God is within you*" or "*the kingdom of God is in your midst*." (Note: To the Jews, the kingdom of God was not a physical location like the nation of Ethiopia. Rather, it was the reign of the king that defined the presence of a kingdom. Even if the king had no geographical or political kingdom, as long as he was reigning over people, he had a kingdom. So Jesus' kingdom is not so much a political place, but the reigning over our lives.) Some think that Jesus was teaching that the major kingdom we must worry about is whether or not Jesus is reigning as king over our lives. It is easy to look towards the future return of King Jesus but not allow him to be king of our lives now. Although true, this view is not likely what Jesus meant since he would not have said to the unbelieving Pharisees that they had Jesus' kingdom in their hearts. More likely Jesus was teaching that rather than look to the future, the Jews must be aware that God's kingdom had arrived in the person of Jesus who was living in their midst. It does no good for someone to long for the coming of the future Messiah and his blessed reign if they reject Jesus the Messiah whom God had sent.

Jesus' kingdom continues to be preached through the church and every time someone believes they are entering into Jesus' kingdom. This passage is a strong warning to believers today. Often we debate about the return of Jesus, longing for all of the blessings that his return will bring. But Jesus says that the first questions we should ask ourselves is "Is the King reigning in my life? Am I living in total obedience to him?" Is he reigning in our church? Are we trying to spread the reign of the king by sharing to all around us about Jesus? Or are we selfishly living for ourselves and our glory?

Jesus continued his teaching later with his disciples. Christianity teaches that on one hand the kingdom of God has come since Jesus, the King, is reigning in the hearts of believers and in the church. He is also reigning from heaven. But the complete fulfillment of the kingdom is yet to come, when Jesus, the Son of Man, as pictured in Daniel 7:13-14, returns. Jesus wanted his disciples to understand important truths about his coming return. When Luke was writing, there were many Christians wondering whether or not Jesus had returned and they had missed it. (See 2 Thess. 2:1-2) As time went on, some Christians even began to doubt that Jesus would ever return. (See 2 Pet. 3:3-4) So Jesus taught his followers the following truths about his return to reign on the earth:

a. The disciples would not see the return of Jesus. (Lk 17:22) Probably Jesus was hinting to the disciples that even though times would get very difficult and they would long for Jesus to return quickly and right evil, he wouldn't come during their lifetime. In fact, almost 2000 years have passed and Jesus still has not come.

b. Jesus' return will be a surprise. No one will be able to predict in advance exactly when Jesus will come. Jesus warned his disciples that there would be people who would spread rumors throughout the church saying that Jesus was coming at a certain place and at a certain time. But these would be false rumors, lies spread by people who disrupt the church. Throughout church history, this has frequently happened. To tell a lie in this way is one of Satan's tools to disrupt believers. Not only does it discourage Christians and cause them to stop anticipating the return of Jesus, but it ruins the testimony of the church among the non-Christians who think Christians are foolish. Don't allow anyone, not even if he claims to be a prophet, to deceive you into thinking he knows where and when Jesus will return. He is a liar for Jesus said that no one will be able to know in advance.

c. When Jesus comes again, it will be like lightening. Some people think this image means that it will be sudden, just like we cannot know in advance where lightening will strike. More likely however, Jesus was saying that his return would be evident to all just like everyone can see lightning flash on a dark night. Jesus is saying that his return will be clearly recognizable, not something hidden which people can overlook.

d. Before his return to reign as king, Jesus must first die. Once again Jesus warned his disciples that he would soon die. "*This generation*" means those religious leaders who were living and ruling at that time. Before the glory of Jesus' reign would have to be the humiliation of the cross.

e. The return of Jesus would be sudden and unexpected. It would be similar to the days of Noah and Sodom. During the days of Noah, although Noah had no doubt warned people of the coming flood, no one paid attention. They ate their food, farmed, and got married, doing all of the things that they normally did. But when they did not expect it, the flood came and all of them perished. It was the same for Sodom. The people continued in their evil lifestyles not expecting any judgment, but it came suddenly and destroyed the city. In the same way, at the end times people will be living their lives as if Jesus will not return. But when they least expect it, the King will return. So we must be like Noah who was ready when the flood came and therefore escaped the judgment.

f. The return of Jesus will be so sudden that no one will have time to prepare for it. Jewish houses had flat top roofs with an external stairway up to the roof. When it was hot, the people liked to sleep on the roof at night since it was cooler than inside their homes. Jesus told them that should they be on the roof when he returns, they won't have time to climb down the stairs and go into their homes to gather belongings to flee. To think about earthly belongings would make them similar to Lot's wife. She had escaped God's judgment upon Sodom, but her heart was still back in the worldly city. So when she looked back, she turned into a pillar of salt. Jesus was warning his disciples not to long after worldly wealth and pleasure lest they receive a judgment similar to Lot's wife. The only way to be ready for the return of Jesus is to be ready in advance, to be living as if he can return at any time. Only then will followers of Jesus not be embarrassed by being caught unready.

g. When Jesus returns, the fate of an individual cannot be changed. If they have rejected Jesus, they will not have time to repent and be saved. Or if they are worldly Christians who were living for selfish pleasure, they will not be able to change their lives. If they chose to "*keep*" their lives by living for themselves now, they will "*lose*" their lives by facing the judgment of Jesus. But if they are faithful followers of Jesus, then they will be able to welcome the coming king with no regrets.

h. At the return of Jesus, there will be a clear delineation of who is part of Jesus' kingdom and who isn't. It is not clear if the people being taken are to be punished or taken to meet the king. Nor is it clear if the people being left behind are those left for judgment or deliverance. But the image is clear. When Jesus comes, all people will be divided into those who are ready for Jesus' kingdom and those who are going to be punished. And many of us will be surprised by who Jesus accepts and whom he does not accept. Within one family, one will be accepted by Jesus and one judged. Two people who were friends working together in grinding grain would suddenly be separated: one would be rewarded and the other one judged. No one is accepted by Jesus into his eternal kingdom just because they are part of the same family. So the Jews were not supposed to think that they would be accepted into the kingdom just because they were Jews. And those with a Christian heritage should not think that they will be received by Jesus just because they

claim to be Christians. And children of Christians or evangelists should not think that they will be received by Jesus just because their parents are famous, or evangelists, or church leaders, or they were in the choir. Each person must make an individual decision to follow Jesus, and their individual decision is what matters. This went against the understanding of the Jews and many Christians today who think that God will accept them because they are Jews or Christians.

i. Where the return of Jesus takes place will be evident on the day of punishment. Jesus quotes a well-known Jewish proverb, but it is not clear what he meant by the proverb. It teaches that the reality of Jesus' return will be evident to all. Some scholars think Jesus was answering the question "Where will those who are judged be kept?" Jesus answers that it will be as clear as the place of dead bodies is known by vultures gathering. Probably Jesus meant that one vulture means nothing, but where many vultures gather, it is a sign that something is dead in that place. In the same way, when the Son of Man comes, there will be clear indicators that he has come.

Q. 13. a) Do you think most Christians are ready for the return of Jesus today? Explain your answer. b) How would we live differently if we expected Jesus to return at any day?

THIRD DAY

Q. 14. Read Lk. 18:1-14. What do you think Jesus was trying to teach by these two parables?

THE PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT WIDOW (Lk. 18:1-8)

It is easy to misunderstand Jesus' parable for two reasons. First, in applying the parable to God, we can come up with a wrong understanding of God. If we picture him like the wicked judge who has to be nagged to answer our prayers, then we have misunderstood the parable. This is a parable of contrasts. Jesus is saying that it is because God is so different from the wicked judge that we can trust him to answer our prayers quickly. We don't have to wear him down by our requests, unlike what the widow had to do for the judge. Second, some scholars insist that we must understand the context of this parable. We can apply the teachings of this parable to our prayers thinking that Jesus is teaching that he wants us to be persistent in our prayers and not give up just because we don't receive an answer right away. But the context of this passage seems to be about the second coming of Jesus. So Jesus is saying that in our desire for Jesus to quickly return to right the wrongs on the earth, we must be patient. We must keep praying "maranatha; come quickly Jesus and bring us justice." It is important for us to remain patient and persistent. Otherwise, when Jesus does return, we could have lost our faith. (Lk 18:8)

This parable contrasts our prayers for Jesus to return to deliver his people from a wicked world to how a widow was able to get justice. The Jews usually took their issues to the elders for them to pronounce judgment. But the Romans and Herod preferred to appoint judges who would listen to the matter and determine what is right and what is wrong. These judges were known throughout Israel as "robber judges" for they would corrupt justice by making a decision in favor of those who gave them the most money. As Jesus said, this judge had no desire to honor God with his life. He did not love (fear) God or love (care about) others. He only cared about himself. A widow in ancient societies was a symbol of the most hopeless person in society. Without a husband or a son to argue for her, she had little chance of getting justice. She only had one means to try to get some justice from the unjust judge. She kept asking for a just judgment. As she went back to the judge every day, she eventually tired him out and he finally judged in

her favor.. The judge did not pronounce judgment for the widow because he thought she was right. Rather, he was in danger of earning a bad reputation, and he was tired of seeing the woman.

Jesus is teaching that the goal of prayer for justice is not to tire God out with our requests. Rather, we are to be persistent in our prayers for Jesus to return, patiently waiting for God to right the wrongs of the world. During the days of Luke, and often throughout world history, God's people find themselves in unjust situations. Many are killed for their faith in Jesus. Others lose their property. And life in the world is filled with difficulties such as sickness and death. God's people keep wondering when Jesus, the Messiah, will return and right the wrongs, delivering them from a world that is not just. ("*To bring justice*" can mean to deliver his people from the unjust situation or it could mean to bring punishment upon those who are persecuting God's people.) It is easy to give up hope. Or it is easy to give up our faith and join the wicked world. But Jesus taught through this parable that, as his followers, we should persevere. And we are supposed to demonstrate our perseverance through prayer. (Prayer helps us maintain our focus upon God and renews our faith in him.) Believers should know that the God we pray to has no tolerance for injustice and he cares for his people. His reputation of overcoming injustice is also tied up with his eventually righting the injustices in the world. In his time, the Messiah will come and right the wrongs. It might not seem like God is working quickly, but he is working. (See 2 Pet. 3:8) It is important for God's people to keep praying "Maranatha; come quickly Lord and make things right." Otherwise, our faith will grow weak and we will want to join the enemy rather than stay faithful. As Jesus asked, if people forget to pray with persistence, will he find faith (faithful people) on the earth waiting for his return?

In times of difficulty we long for justice. Jesus tells us that we are to patiently persist in praying to God for justice and not give up our hope. He is not indifferent but is listening to our prayers. There are times he will work in a situation quickly and move government officials to give us a just solution. There are times he will wait 20 years and then remove a government like he did the derge. But we should know that basically until the Messiah returns, there will never be complete justice upon the earth. There will be political and religious opposition to those who choose to follow Jesus. And there will be problems like sickness and death. It is only when Jesus returns that we will have complete deliverance from these. We are to prayerfully and patiently wait for Jesus to return. We are to always be praying and living in the spirit of "may your kingdom come." We must be careful we don't forget that Jesus is coming back soon and therefore give up hope or give up our faith. As one English song says "Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King." When he comes, will he find you and me faithful?

Q. 15. a) Do you think most Christians in Ethiopia frequently think about and long for the return of Jesus to reign? Explain your answer. b) How do you think our lives would change if every day we expressed our longing for the return of Jesus in our prayers?

PARABLE OF THE PRAYERS OF THE PHARISEE AND TAX COLLECTOR (Lk. 18:9-14)

When we have been Christians for a long time there is a hidden danger which concerned Jesus. That is the danger of comparing ourselves to others and thinking that we are good because our spiritual lives seem better and so we become proud of our good lifestyle and obedience to God. Pride in how good we are rather than concern about how sinful we continue to be is very dangerous.

During the days of Jesus, the Pharisees were viewed as the most pious spiritual people. They were very zealous to live lives of moral purity, obeying every law in God's Word plus the laws that they had made

up. All Jews would have assumed that the Pharisees were the most acceptable people to God. One of the most "sinful" people were the tax collectors. They were not only considered traitors because they helped the Romans, but they were known for cheating people by taking too much taxes. So the Jews would have assumed that the tax collectors would receive no welcome from God. In this story, Jesus taught that actually the opposite could be true.

Jesus told about a time two men went up to the Temple to pray. Most religious Jews would pray at the Temple three times a day, at 9 AM, 12 noon, and 3 PM. Prayer in the Temple was believed to be more effective than prayer in their homes. It so happened on this day, two men entered the temple to pray at the same time, a Pharisee and a tax collector. When they prayed, Jews would usually stand up with raised hands and faces towards heaven. In his prayer to God, the Pharisee boasted about his spiritual life saying "God, I am not as sinful as others, not like this tax collector." The Jews liked to thank God for their moral life. Jews were only required to fast once a year on the Day of Atonement. But religious Jews often fasted on Monday and Thursday. They might have chosen these days because they were market days and it was a convenient way to demonstrate to others how spiritual they were. When they fasted, they wore special clothes and put white chalk on their faces to make them look pale. Jews were required to tithe from what they sold. But this Pharisee also tithed things that he bought, going beyond what the law required. Obviously, this Pharisee was proud of how spiritual and obedient he was.

The tax collector entered the Temple area, but stood at the back. He was so ashamed of his life that he would not even look up to heaven where God was. No one had to convince him how sinful he was. He knew he did not deserve any mercy from God, but hoping that God would forgive him, in great sorrow (beating his chest was a sign of great sorrow), he begged God to forgive him. He could not point to his good works for there were none.

Which one of the two people did God declare to be justified? (Note: The word "*justified*" here means to be declared "not guilty," to be viewed as being in the right relationship with God.) We would have thought the one who worked the hardest to be spiritual. But Jesus said it was the one who understood his sinfulness the most. In truth, both the Pharisee and the tax collector were sinners. Neither one of them deserved God's forgiveness and acceptance, but only his punishment. A right relationship with God never comes because we can somehow earn it by doing good things. It is always a gift of God, something that we should never boast about in our hearts. (See Eph. 2:8-9) Jesus is warning that when we think we are good enough since we are not as bad as others or because we are doing something good like being an evangelist or tithing, we have fallen from a proper understanding of spirituality. Rather, a right relationship with God means that we must always be aware of our sinfulness and have a humble spirit of begging him for mercy. Then we are truly spiritual.

Have you been a follower of Jesus for a long time? This passage warns you that you should be very careful to not get proud. Don't compare yourselves with anyone else thinking you are better and therefore good enough and that God is pleased with you. Compare yourself to God's perfect standard of righteousness. Realize that you are still a great sinner. Keep focusing upon the grace of God; the free gift of salvation, the free gift of daily forgiveness and cleansing for our sins, the free gift of giving us spiritual gifts and abilities, the free gift of the chance of education, the free gift of the ability to work, etc. We have nothing to boast about. Let us learn from this tax collector's example the way to be right with God.

Q. 16. a) Describe how you have seen believers get proud of their spirituality or their spiritual gifts. b) What have they forgotten about the grace of God? c) List 10 gifts God has given you in grace. Thank him for these.

Q. 17. a) Describe the things which you think makes a marriage a "Christian" marriage? b) Read Mt. 19:1-15. Describe the reasons why Jesus said divorce was not God's will for his followers. c) Read Deut. 24:1-4. What instructions did Moses give about divorce? d) Read Malachi 2:16. What is God's opinion concerning divorce?

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT DIVORCE (Mt. 19:1-12, Mk. 10:1-12)

"We want to have a Christian marriage" said a young man and his fiancée. What did they mean by this? Often we think that a Christian marriage means that we get married in a church with the bride wearing a white wedding dress and the two exchanging vows, lighting a candle to show their unity, and exchanging wedding rings. But that is not what makes a marriage Christian. Rather, a Christian marriage consists of the bride and groom having a marriage that fulfills God's original design as seen in Adam and Eve. For a marriage to be Christian, both the bride and groom must understand that their marriage is a reflection of Jesus' relationship with the church. (Eph. 5:22-33) It can only be Christian when the man has a Biblical understanding of God's view of a woman. As long as he treats her as being inferior to him in any way and sees her function as primarily to meet his needs, he still does not have a Christian marriage. A Christian marriage is one where both partners lovingly serve the other. If there is no true unity where both the husband and wife share their thoughts with each other, if they do not view all of life as something they do together, or if they hide things from each other (like how much money the husband earns or how much he sold his coffee for), then they are not really "one" as God intended. Christian marriage is much more than just what happens on the wedding day in a church. It requires a radical change from our culture. I wonder how many marriages around the world today Jesus would classify as Christian?

Jesus was on his final journey towards Jerusalem. For the last time he left the region of Galilee. Instead of traveling the shortest way through Samaria, he crossed over to the east side of the Jordan River and followed the river south. This was the region of Perea, which was politically under the control of Herod. Crowds continually followed him. As he travelled, some Pharisees came to him with a trick question seeking to trap Jesus.

The question was "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?*" Divorce was a strongly debated issue among the Jews. In Jewish society, only a man was allowed to divorce his wife. All he had to do to divorce her was to have two friends witness as he gave his wife a certificate of divorce that stated that he was divorcing her and she was now free to marry another person. The woman had no right to contest the divorce. The Jews taught that she was allowed to take all of her dowry with her when she left unless she was caught in adultery.

The theological debate arose regarding Moses' words in Deut. 24:1-4. There Moses outlined how to handle a situation where a man sought to divorce his wife. Moses stipulated that a man could divorce his wife if she did "*something indecent*." But the question arose as to what "something indecent" means. Jewish opinion had divided into two major ways of thinking. Some of the Jews followed the teaching of a rabbi called Shammai who taught that the only ground for divorce was if the woman was caught in adultery. For him, something indecent meant adultery. The other Jews, like most of the Pharisees, followed the teaching of a rabbi called Hillel who taught that "something indecent" could be anything at

all. So if her food did not please him or if he found a more beautiful woman whom he wanted to marry, the man had the right to divorce his wife.

This question was a trap because the Pharisees believed that any way that Jesus answered the question, part of the crowd would disagree with Jesus and he would lose his popularity. The Pharisees already knew that Jesus took a more strict interpretation on the law than the Old Testament. (e.g. Mt. 5:21-37) So if he answered too strictly, he could be accused of disagreeing with what Moses taught. Plus there were many common people in the crowd who had divorced their wives, so they would get angry with Jesus and stop following him. But if Jesus took too lenient of a stance on marriage, others in the crowd would think that he did not honor verses like Malachi 2:16 that says God hates divorce.

The Pharisees were like many Christians today who want to know how much they can get away with without sinning. So men ask the elders "Can I braid my hair and go to dances?" And women ask the elders "Can I wear this type of fashion clothes?" Often these types of questions show that we are looking for permission to do what we want and obey the elders or God as little as possible. But Jesus always looked at situations from how it impacts others. He would ask "Do your actions honor God's original desire?" We must learn to ask ourselves "Does it reveal that we are seeking to honor God in all that we do, even in ways we dress? Does it demonstrate love for the reputation of Jesus among non-Christians? Does it show love for how it affects the spiritual life of brothers and sisters in Christ?" In his response to the Pharisees, Jesus did not directly answer their question, but took them back to God's intent in marriage. For Jesus the major issue was not "When can a person get divorced?" Rather it was "How can we live according to God's ideal standard?" That is the type of question we should ask in all debatable matters. Rather than focusing upon how much we can do without getting God angry with us, it is better to ask "What we can do to live in a way that most pleases God?"

Notice Jesus' response to the Pharisees:

1. When God created Adam and Eve, he did not create them with the intent that they divorce each other. In God's original design for marriage, we can see the following:

a. Marriage is between a man and woman. This clearly teaches that God's intent in marriage was between a man and woman, not between people of the same sex. God's Word clearly teaches that homosexuality is wrong. (Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9)

b. Marriage is between "one" man and "one" woman. God did not create many women for the man or many men for a woman. So it was always God's intent that marriage be monogamous, not polygamous.

c. Marriage changes family allegiance so that neither the husband nor the wife give primary allegiance to their previous families, but to each other. They are to "leave" their families (not necessarily leaving the area where their families live, but by forming a relational priority to each other over their previous families) and be united to one another. Many cultures teach that the wife leaves her family and becomes part of the man's family. And these people believe that the husband's primary responsibility is to his parents, not to his wife. But this goes against God's original intent in marriage.

d. Marriage creates a new "unit." A man has his own personality and the woman has her own personality. But when they get married, they are supposed to form a unit. They become like two oxen which

have been put into a yolk. Now they function as one and not two. Where one goes, the other goes. Jesus is not just talking about the sexual "oneness" of a husband and wife. Rather, he is saying that the two individuals in marriage must now function as one, to do everything with an attitude of doing it "together." They must plan together, work for the same purposes, seek to honor God together, handle their money together, etc. It isn't a Christian marriage if the man makes his own plans without his wife and the wife earns money and thinks that money is hers. Just like a team of oxen can only plow well if both oxen are about the same strength, in the same way marriage only works as God intends it when the woman is treated as an equal partner, not as an inferior partner. Marriage changes our words from "I" or "mine" to "we" and "ours." Marriage is one of God's ways to take away our natural tendency to think only about ourselves and help us to learn to think about others. The key to a successful marriage is to take Paul's advice and think of the other before we think of ourselves. (Phil. 2:3)

e. Marriage is a permanent relationship. God did not create marriage so that people could get divorced but so that they could be permanently joined into one unit. Whether or not the marriage ceremony was held in the church, all marriages are viewed as God bringing the two together just like he had earlier brought Adam and Eve together. So any attempt to separate the husband and wife (this could be through divorce, but it could also be where the husband and wife work in different parts of the country in order to make more money) is to be viewed as rebellion against God desires. So any divorce is an act of rebellion against God's intent in marriage. This means that all divorces are "sinful." Rather than for his followers to be thinking about ways to get out of their marriage covenant, they should be focusing on what they can do to have a marriage as God designed it. Only if there is no possible option of repairing marriage should divorce ever be considered.

2. Moses' instruction on what to do when divorcing a wife did not reflect the ideal that God wanted, but was allowed because of sinful hearts of people. Any divorce is a sign of defeat, a sign that sin has overcome what God desires in a marriage. Divorce, no matter what the reason, is not a neutral choice, but an evidence of evil. It could be that when there is a choice between two evils, like staying in a situation where a spouse is abusive or continually unfaithful sexually, divorce might be the lesser of two evils. However, it is always evil. Jesus is holding his followers to a higher standard than Moses. He expects his followers not to consider divorce as an option. It is interesting that Paul would later not even mention the possibility of two followers of Jesus getting divorced, probably because he could not imagine believers who were walking in obedience to Jesus and under the power of the Holy Spirit to ever seek divorce. (See 1 Cor. 7:10-16)

3. The unity of marriage should only be broken by sexual unfaithfulness. (Note: The word "adultery" here does not only refer to sexual relations with another married person, but to all sexual relationships outside of marriage. So if it is with a prostitute or another unmarried woman, the sexual act is still "adultery.") The Jews taught that there were two situations where a man was obligated to divorce his wife. The first was if she committed adultery and the second was if she did not bear him any children. Jesus refused to accept the second situation as a reason to get divorced. (If a couple has no children, God never gives them permission to divorce or to take a second wife. To do so is to refuse to submit to God's will for their lives. Science teaches that 50% of the time the problem is the man's and 50% of the time the problem is the woman's. No man would be happy if his wife divorced him if he could not father children, so why should he think it is permissible for him to divorce her if she does not bear children?) And Jesus did not go as far as the Jews in stating they "had" to get divorced. Rather, he is teaching that if one of the partners

destroys the marriage vows by being sexually unfaithful in an on-going way, then the "unity" of marriage is no longer possible and divorce becomes the last option.

Jesus was giving this instruction in the context of Jewish society. He is not seeking to give all possible conditions where divorce might be permitted. The apostle Paul would later say that divorce was permitted if the non-believing spouse divorced his believing spouse. (1 Cor. 7:15) Most likely Jesus would allow divorce in situations where the husband's actions endanger the children or wife. So if a husband is sexually abusing his daughter or if his beating his wife endangers her or her children's lives, it seems that Jesus would permit divorce.

4. It would seem that if there is unfaithfulness in marriage and divorce takes place, then both the husband and wife are permitted to remarry. Although the ancient church often refused remarriage after divorce or death of a spouse, there are no clear Scriptural verses that prohibit remarriage.

5. For a man to divorce his wife for a reason besides adultery and remarry is to "commit adultery" with the new wife. Why? It is because in the eyes of God, the man is still joined to his first wife. This statement went beyond what any Jew taught. All rabbis taught that once divorced, even if the reason for the divorce was wrong, a person was free to remarry. Jesus does not tell us what to do if a person has divorced and remarried in order to right the wrong. Does this mean that if an unbeliever or backslidden believer who divorced and remarried repents, he must put away that wife and go back to his first wife? Rarely is it possible to undo a sin by committing another sin. To "divorce" his second wife is a sin against that woman. So it would seem that the best position is to openly confess that what they have done is a "sin" against God. With God's forgiveness, the parties can be restored into fellowship in the church but not allowed leadership since they are no longer models of a godly marriage.

Jesus' teaching on divorce sets a standard that he wants all believers to seek. But it would seem that like Moses, Jesus knew there will be times that hard-hearted Christians will disappoint God and get divorced. The solution is not to permanently judge them and never forgive them for this sin. God is a God of grace. If he forgave an adulterer and murderer like David, he will forgive a divorced person. But as believers we should always be striving to maintain God's ideal in marriage like he desired when he brought Eve to Adam.

Divorce is one of the growing sins in the church. In the West, about 50% of Christian marriages end in divorce and in the Ethiopian churches it is growing as well. Jesus was giving these instructions to his followers. If both husband and wife are serious about following Jesus and obeying him, then divorce is not an option. With the power of the Holy Spirit, the two must be committed to rebuilding their broken relationship. When believers divorce, it is as if we are saying that the power of Jesus in our lives is not able to help us. The church will never be able to completely stop divorce in the church. But in its teaching it should always point out that it is an act of rebellion against God. And anyone who knowingly rebels against Jesus in this way, are they really committed to following Jesus? In done knowingly, could it be that they are not really saved? At the very least, we should be able to say that they are living in the flesh, not in the power of the Holy Spirit.

6. The disciples were astonished at Jesus' strong stance against divorce. Many Jews thought similar to Solomon, that it is better to live on the top of the roof rather than in the house with a quarrelsome wife. (Prov. 21:9) So divorce was seen as their "insurance policy," a way to get away from a woman who did not

have a pleasing personality. Now that Jesus took away their "insurance policy," the disciples saw marriage as being too risky. "Perhaps it is better to not get married" they told Jesus. Jesus responded in two ways:

a. Marriage should be seen as the normal pattern for life. As he has already shown, God usually brings a man and woman together to become "one." Or as he says here "*only those to whom it has been given*" can live without being married. Paul would later say that being single was a "gift" or a "calling" by God. (1 Cor. 7:1-2,7) But most believers will be "called" to be married.

b. Being single is not a curse, but a special calling by God. The Jews taught that it was a command by God to get married so all Jews were expected to be married before they were 20. Only those studying to be rabbis were allowed to delay marriage. And they believed that a person who was born with defective sexual organs was cursed by God. But Jesus did not see it that way. There are those who are not able to have children because God allowed them to have defective sexual organs. There were others, like slaves working among the women in a palace, who were made eunuchs from no choice of their own. Neither of these should be looked down upon. Finally, there were those who voluntarily became "*eunuchs*" for the kingdom of heaven. Jesus did not mean that they cut off their sexual organs. Rather, he is saying that they choose to not get married so that they could serve God with singleness of purpose. Paul taught that although not possible for many believers, singleness was actually a great sacrifice to God. (1 Cor. 7) A single person who does not have family obligations is free to serve God wholeheartedly in a way a married person can't. We should not scorn those who are single or not prohibit singles to serve in the church. This would have meant that neither Jesus or Paul, who were both single, could serve. We should honor singleness as a special calling from God. For those who are single, rather than becoming bitter about being single, until God chooses to give us a spouse, let us use all of our energies and time to serve God wholeheartedly. This might not be what our culture claims, but this is what the Bible teaches.

Q. 18. Review the above teachings on marriage, divorce, and singleness. a) Describe how the teachings of Jesus go against many cultural expectations in Ethiopia. b) Explain how our marriages would change to become truly Christian if we would apply God's ideals of marriage. c) What important truths about divorce and singleness should be taught in our churches so that believers better understand the teachings of the Bible?

Q. 19. Read Mt. 19:13-30. a) Describe how Jesus said we are to treat children. b) What relationship between wealth and the believer do you think the story of the rich man seeks to teach? c) Make a list of teachings about the relationship of wealth to being Jesus' disciple.

JESUS' TEACHING ABOUT LITTLE CHILDREN (Mt. 19:13-15, Mk. 10:13-16, Lk. 18:15-17)

Like Ethiopians, the Jews believed children were a gift from God. The more children a person had, the more honor he had. But the Jews also saw children as being the least valuable of people in society. The men were the most important, then the women, and finally the children.

One day as Jesus was traveling many mothers brought their children to Jesus to be blessed. (The word "child" here refers to anyone up to about 13 years old.) It was Jewish culture for people to bring their children to a rabbi for a blessing. He would place his hands on them, and then pray and ask God to bless them by making them faithful to God and the Law. The disciples refused to let the mothers bring their children to Jesus, however. Why did they do this? Probably out of good motives. They were concerned that Jesus not become too tired by what they considered unimportant ministries. They also did not think

blessing children was a valuable use of Jesus' time. How much better to teach and heal. So they wanted to protect Jesus. Jesus ordered the disciples to allow the mothers to bring the children for his blessing. Jesus used this situation to teach his disciples three important truths.

First, Jesus greatly values children. They are not insignificant to him. Any church that overlooks ministries to children because they are "too little to count" has not learned to honor children like Jesus honored them.

Second, children more naturally have the attitude needed for salvation than adults have. Children model what adults need to become to be saved. Adults tend to be independent, thinking they can do something themselves to be saved. They are proud of their own abilities and it is hard for them to humble themselves and trust God for salvation or for taking care of them. But a child is naturally humble. They openly ask for help knowing that they do not have the ability to do things for themselves. And they trust that their parents will meet their needs without worrying where their food or clothes will come from. It is this attitude of humility and trust that Jesus says is at the root of what we need to be saved and walk with God.

Third, children are more open to faith in Jesus than adults. Jesus is not saying here that children are saved just because they are children. Even children must choose to trust in Jesus as soon as they can understand that they are sinners and Jesus has saved them. This is usually possible from ages four to six. In fact, statistics show that around the world, the majority of people chose to follow Jesus when they are still children, before they become teenagers and adults. Children are actually the most receptive group to trust in Jesus.

Q. 20. Look at the ministries of your church. a) Does your church reflect Jesus' honoring of children or does it tend to treat children as unimportant? Explain your answer. b) What do you think your church could do to better reach the youth in your church and in your community with the Gospel before their hearts become hardened?

FOURTH DAY

JESUS AND THE RICH YOUNG MAN (Mt. 19:16-30, Mk. 10:17-31, Lk. 18:18-30)

1. Jesus meets with the rich young ruler (Mt. 19:16-22)

Few believers take Jesus' teaching about money seriously. "Come to Jesus and become rich" we sometimes say seeking to make it easy for people to believe. Or we go to those who are rich (traders, the educated) and seek to get them to join our churches. But few of us realize how dangerous riches are to the spiritual health of most people. Jesus was very concerned that his followers develop an attitude towards wealth that was very different from what the world had.

One day a person came up to Jesus to ask him about eternal life. We are told that his person was "young," he was "*rich*," and he was a "*ruler*." (Lk. 18:18) By this it means that this person was one of the ruling families in Judea. This rich young ruler thought that he could do something to earn "*eternal life*," or God's eternal blessings. During those days, rabbis often taught that there was a special law or act that a person could do to obligate God to giving them eternal life. Each rabbi had his own perspective, so this

young man came to Jesus to find out what he taught about what special law or practice ("*good thing*") a person could do to be saved.

Scholars debate what Jesus meant when he asked the young man why he said "*good thing*." The other Gospels say Jesus reacted against being called "*good teacher*." It is clear that Jesus was not questioning the fact that he was "good" for the Bible clearly shows Jesus as being sinless. (Heb. 4:15) There seems to be two issues that Jesus wanted this rich ruler to start thinking about. First, by calling Jesus "*good*" he was indirectly saying that Jesus is like God who alone is perfect goodness. So the young man's words were actually teaching a much deeper truth about the person of Jesus than the man realized. Second, by saying that only God was "good" Jesus was trying to get the man to stop looking at his own actions and comparing himself to others as his standard of holiness. Rather he was to look to God as his standard of holiness. This would undo the pride that the man had in his ability to obey the laws, which no one could perfectly obey even though the man thought he did. Jesus wanted him to realize how sinful he was and how much he needed God's forgiveness. Salvation is only possible when we know that we can't work to get it but can only humbly receive it as a gift from God.

Jesus referred the man to the Ten Commandments. It is interesting that he did not list the first four commandments that refer to man's relationship with God. Rather he listed the commands that focus upon a person's relationship with others. Could it be that Jesus is indicating that often it is easy to claim to have a relationship with God in how we sing and pray, but the real indication of our relationship with God is how we relate to others? He also included a summary statement of how we are to relate to others by listing Lev. 19:18, which taught "*love your neighbor as yourself*." Perhaps Jesus listed this because in using his wealth for himself, Jesus was showing the young man that he had in fact not kept the commands of God. No one can have a selfish perspective to wealth and still claim to obey God's laws.

In spite of thinking he had kept all of the laws of God, this rich young ruler knew in his heart that somehow he was still not in the right relationship with God. To be "*perfect*" does not mean to be sinless, no one is able to do that. Rather, it means to be spiritually mature. And spiritual maturity means that we look at things like money in the way God views them. No matter how good we are, if we trust in our own efforts, we always wonder if we are good enough. In fact, it is common for people to be "good" according to the standard we establish in church (dress right, not drink, not go to cinemas) and still be very far from God because their whole life is not surrendered to him. Jesus gave this man two commands:

a. Jesus told the man to give away all of his wealth. The Jewish rabbis taught that no one was allowed to give more than 20% of his money to the poor, but Jesus here ordered the young ruler to give it all away. Jesus was not teaching that by giving our money to the church or poor we can earn our way into heaven. Rather, Jesus is demanding absolute allegiance. The first commandment is to not have any other God before the true God. And the greatest commandment is to love God with all of our being. So Jesus was providing a "test" to see if this man would actually love him more than his wealth and all it could buy. The fact that the man was not willing to give up his wealth showed that money had become his primary "god." And neither God nor Jesus will allow himself to be in second place. I wonder if we would ask merchants to do the same thing today how many would choose Jesus over their money? To become a follower of Jesus involves a choice to put him above all other things in our lives. For many, the most important thing is money; for others education or family. Salvation starts with the commitment to put Jesus first in our lives. As one scholar said "If Jesus is not Lord of all of our lives then he is not our Lord at all."

Wealth is dangerous because it often gets us to believe we can live without God. Rather than turning to God for solutions, the rich often turn to their money to get them out of trouble. Wealth is also dangerous because it causes us to focus our attention on the things of earth rather than the things of heaven. Jesus had earlier said that we are to seek "first" his kingdom, but wealth tends to keep us from doing that. Riches also tend to make us selfish. It does not matter how much we have, we always want more. And the richer we become, the more we tend to want to hold on to our wealth.

b. Jesus' second command was for the young man to become a follower of Jesus. Notice Jesus did not say just "Believe on me," he said "Follow me." Christianity is not just about "believing" the facts that Jesus died for our sins. It is about making a firm choice to follow Jesus. Following Jesus means that we submit our lives totally to living in obedience to him, desiring to change so that we resemble him in all of our character and having the same understanding about life and ministry as Jesus did. Jesus was inviting this young man to become one of his followers. To submit to the Lordship of Christ over his life and to humbly serve God and others would bring him greater treasure, the one stored up for him in heaven.

This young man was not willing to make such a sacrifice for Jesus. His choice revealed that he loved something more than he loved Jesus. So he left Jesus unsaved, much to Jesus' regret. Jesus does not force anyone to believe on him. He gives them the facts and allows them to make their own choice. That is all we can do as we witness about Jesus. We are to place before people the truths about Jesus and what it means to become a follower of Jesus. And then we must leave it to the person and the Holy Spirit to work. Any attempt on our part to make it easier for people to believe works against what God has chosen as his way of saving people.

(Note: Jesus was not saying that by giving his money the man would be saved. The New Testament clearly shows that it is faith in Jesus that brings salvation. Nor is Jesus teaching that all people are to give away all of their money if they want to be saved. Throughout history God has had faithful rich people (e.g. Job, Abraham, Joseph of Arimathea) who were honored with wealth. But Jesus is saying that for this rich man to enter into a relationship of being a disciple, it required that he get rid of his wealth. Jesus knew that until this man got rid of the temptation of wealth, he would never truly follow Jesus. And without following Jesus, there would be no salvation.)

2. Jesus teaches the disciples about the stumbling-block riches are to belief (Mt. 19:23-26)

Although most Jews knew that no one could "buy" themselves into heaven, they believed that riches were an evidence of God's approval upon a person's life and that God was honoring him by giving him wealth. No Jew thought that riches could actually be a major hindrance to faith and God's true blessing. So the disciples were shocked when Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to be saved. The camel was the largest animal that Jews were familiar with and the eye of a needle was a very small opening. It was physically impossible for a camel to walk through the eye of a needle. Some scholars teach that there were two gates in Jerusalem, the normal wide gate open during the day through which camels would travel bring produce into the city. But this gate was closed at night and there was another very narrow gate kept open for people. This narrow gate was called "the eye of a needle." Other scholars don't think such a gate existed until many years after the time of Jesus.

Jesus used this illustration to show how difficult it is for the rich to be saved. Jesus is not saying that it is impossible for the rich to be saved. There were people like Abraham who were both rich and faithful.

Nor is he saying that the poor are automatically saved because they are poor. Each person must believe if they want to be saved. Jesus is saying that for most people riches provides too great of a hindrance to following Jesus for them to overcome. The rich tend to depend upon their riches and have a difficult time placing their trust in God alone. And the rich tend to be proud and have a hard time being humble which is a prerequisite to coming to Jesus in saving faith. The rich also tend to make their riches the priority of their lives rather than serving God and helping others. So Jesus is saying that wealth, rather than being a blessing from God or making it easier to trust God, actually works against saving faith and a life of discipleship. How different is God's thinking to ours!

Jesus was teaching his disciples that he demanded radical discipleship for a person to be saved. To Jesus the issue was not just having a lot of money, but having anything that hindered a full obedience to Jesus. "That is impossible," his disciples responded. Jesus agreed that by himself, no one can lower himself and do away with his selfishness and submit to the Lordship of Christ over his life. But rather than despair, this should cause us to honor God even more. It helps us know that any time anyone places their faith in Jesus Christ, God has done an "impossible" miracle in their lives.

Q. 21. a) Contrast Jesus' attitude towards wealth to how we often view it. b) What dangers do you see in how many people focus upon material blessings in the church?

We often present the Gospel by focusing upon material blessings. Could it be that we are actually causing people to think that they are saved whereas, because they have never come to Jesus with the commitment to put him absolutely first above their wealth, they are still lost like the young man? And could it not be that the reason we face so many problems in our churches today is because we encourage selfishness by telling people to come to Jesus in order to gain material blessing? How different was Jesus' call to discipleship from what we often say in our churches! But the Bible teaches we "reap what we sow" and by sowing a selfish Gospel which causes people to look for healing or material blessing, we are reaping those who only serve Jesus out of selfish motives for what they can gain. Such an attitude goes totally against the heart of Christianity, which is about serving God and others, not about what we can gain for ourselves.

3. The disciples ask Jesus what they will receive since they have chosen to follow Jesus at great personal cost (Mt. 19:27-30)

a. Jesus promised to reward the disciples. The disciples had left everything to become disciples of Jesus. Peter, James and John left their profitable fishing business and Matthew his lucrative tax collecting business. The Bible teaches that a just God will always reward those who are faithful to him. So what reward is there for those who choose Jesus over all other things on earth? Peter wondered. Jesus' answer is very interesting.

First, Jesus told his disciples that their major reward will be in eternity. Jesus tells the disciples that rather than earthly blessings, they are to keep their eyes on eternity. That is the blessing that matters. (Note: In Eph. 1:3-14 Paul also reminded believers that they had special blessings "in the heavenlies." And in 1 Pet. 1:4 Peter reminded persecuted Christians that they had a treasure in heaven that no one could ever take away from them. The New Testament always points to rewards after the grave, not before the grave. Not once does the New Testament ever promise material rewards or healing from disease as a guaranteed blessing coming from salvation.) Daniel 7:14-27 foretold a time when the Son of Man and the "saints of the kingdom" would receive from God the Father, called the Ancient of Days, an eternal kingdom

and rule forever. Scholars debate what Jesus meant when he told the 12 disciples that they would sit on 12 thrones and rule over Israel. There are three major thoughts.

1) Jesus is talking literally. When Jesus returns to reign on the earth, Jesus will give the 12 apostles the authority to be the major rulers (under him) of the Jews. The Jews might reject Jesus and his disciples, thinking that they are insignificant and wrong. But one day the apostles will be given authority over the Jews, and reign over them.

2) Jesus is talking symbolically. The 12 disciples represent all true believers. And Israel represents the non-Christians. Jesus is saying that although his followers rarely have authority to rule now but are among the downtrodden and persecuted, it will not always be that way. When Jesus returns and sets up his kingdom, believers will be the honored ones. (See 2 Tim. 2:12) This is the most likely interpretation.

3) Jesus is talking symbolically about the church. Jesus was giving the apostles the authority to be the leaders of the spiritual Israel, the church.

b. Jesus promised a better family to his followers. Jesus said that his followers would have a much better family than the ones they had left to follow Jesus. Often following Jesus comes to a choice between following Jesus and obeying one's family. Should a person choose Jesus, they are often expelled from their family. Or they go against the wishes of their family or have to leave the area where their family resides in order to minister as an evangelist. Family means a lot to us. It is where we have our security during times of trouble. Jesus is saying that when a person follows Jesus, they become part of a great spiritual family. God is their Father and every believer is their "*father, mother, brother, sister*." This spiritual family is not just for here on earth, but will be our "family" for all eternity. One of the sad truths, however, is the often the church does not function as a family. Lonely people come to our churches as strangers, and they leave feeling that no one cares for them. Many of us still focus upon our earthly family, our immediate and extended family, and our tribe. But few of us focus upon looking at all believers, no matter what tribe or denomination, as part of one great family. How far we have fallen from the ideal Jesus has for his followers!

c. Jesus promised that those choosing to follow him will be rewarded greatly. No follower of Jesus should ever worry that he will not be rewarded for faithfully serving God. God always rewards us more than we ever sacrifice for him. The phrase "*one hundred times*" is a Jewish expression that we will be greatly rewarded for whatever the cost of following Jesus on earth brings us. Sometimes those rewards do include material wealth. But usually the rewards wait for us in heaven. It will be worth the wait as we remain faithful to Jesus now even if it means lack of earthly riches or we face persecution and death.

d. Jesus told his disciples that when he returns, all of the values of earth will be turned upside down. On earth the "*first*" are the rich who are honored and enjoy the benefits that money can buy. But the "*last*" are the poor believers who often have no glory on earth. (e.g., The "*first*" are the government leaders who often despise and persecute followers of Jesus.) But in heaven earthly riches will mean nothing. There the selfish rich and powerful leaders will find themselves "*last*" when God punishes them. Instead, Jesus' followers will be rewarded and honored, becoming the "*first*."

So which do you want to be, part of the "*first*" now, honored because of your riches which you got often by wrong manners like lying, cheating, overcharging, or selfishness? Or would you rather be part of

the "last" now, the faithful who are often not able to gain the riches the world offers but receive eternal riches later? Or how about being the "first" or the "educated" now, those who use their education to gain riches with little desire to help those who are not educated or serve their nation or church? Or how about being the "first" as someone who is in political power, enjoying the benefits of power without using it to help others? Or would you rather be one who might be despised by others, but who has given your all to serve God and others and become the "first" in eternity? Choose wisely- for your choice now will determine whether you are "first" or "last" throughout eternity! (Note: It is possible to be rich, educated, and in politics and still put Jesus first. However, it is very difficult. These verses warn us to guard our attitudes and motives very carefully.)

Q. 22. a) Describe ways "wealth" has often deterred people you know from wholeheartedly following after Jesus. b) Describe ways many Christians seek to be among the "first" now rather than being contented with being "last." c) If followers of Jesus were more concerned about being "first" in eternity, how do you think that would change how they live now?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) From Lk. 16 and Mt. 19:16-30, make a list of major truths Jesus taught about discipleship and wealth. b) List ways that Christians today often focus more on material wealth than on the wealth in heaven. c) Discuss how attitudes towards wealth change when we remember that life on earth is temporary and life in heaven is forever. d) How would the invitation we give to non-Christians to believe change if we are to apply what Jesus taught the rich young ruler?

2. Read Lk. 17:1-10. a) List the two teachings about a believer's relationship to other disciples. b) Choose two situations you know of in your church and discuss how these teachings guide Christians in how they should act in those situations. c) List the two teachings about a believer's relationship to God. d) Illustrate from real life situations how these two teachings apply.

3. a) List principles about a Christian's relationship with death that are taught in the New Testament. b) Make a list of cultural practices that take place at a funeral. Which of them would be acceptable to God? Which of them do you think Jesus would not like because they do not reveal the truth of the resurrection? c) How would you change the funeral customs to better reflect the assurance we have in Jesus being the resurrection and the life?

4. a) From Lk. 17:20-37, make a list of truths about the return of Jesus. b) When was the last time someone preached about the return of Jesus in your church? Why do you think few people preach about it today? c) Why is it important for believers to understand these truths? d) If Christians really believed that Jesus could return at any time, how do you think they would live differently?

5. a) Review the teachings about God's ideal for marriage. Which of them do believers usually apply? Which are often not applied? b) What cultural changes would need to come to most marriages for them to be more truly Christian? c) List the guidelines Jesus gives about divorce and remarriage. Are

these being followed in your church? If not, what practices about divorce and remarriage need to be changed to follow Jesus' teachings?

LESSON TWENTY

FIRST DAY

Bizunish was a prostitute. From the time when she was 13 when her parents threw her out of her home she had worked as a prostitute. Her life bore the scars of many sins. Zerihun was a respected man in the community and lived a moral life. So which of the two did God love more and is more acceptable to God?

Q. 1. a) How would you answer the above question? Explain your answer. b) Read Mt. 20:1-16. 1) Explain what the landowner did which was perceived as being unfair. 2) What do you think this parable seeks to teach?

THE PARABLE OF THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD (MT. 20:1-16)

During the days of Jesus, the Jews, like most of us, thought God wants people to change their lives and become respectable before he allows them into his kingdom. The Jews taught "do good and God will accept you." And they had a long list of rules which determined what was "good." As a result, many Jews were busy obeying these rules hoping that God would accept them. But that attitude also led to pride as some who had a more moral lifestyle compared their lives to others who did not have a good lifestyle and thought that they were better. A great danger to Christianity is the attitude of thinking that people can earn their way into God's favor. Christianity is based upon the belief that we can do nothing to make ourselves acceptable to God. Rather, acceptance by God comes as a "gracious gift," something we don't deserve at all. We don't become saved by giving up drink, no longer dancing, going to church every Sunday, or putting away extra wives. We can never become good enough for God to say "I will accept that person as my child." Rather, if anyone is to be acceptable in God's eyes, he has to accept the gracious gift of salvation provided for him by God through Jesus Christ.

In Mt. 19:16 the rich man had asked Jesus what he had to do to be saved. Then in Mt. 19:25 and 27 the disciples asked Jesus two questions. The first question is "Who can be saved?" after they heard Jesus tell a rich man to give away all of his wealth before he could gain eternal life. The second question was "What do we get since we are following you?" Although Jesus promised them that they would be rewarded, he wanted to make sure that the disciples did not view their relationship with God and his kingdom as something earned, but as something received by grace. Jesus gave this parable to make sure the disciples did not misunderstand his demands to the rich man to give away his money before he was able to be saved to mean that salvation is earned by good deeds rather than received by faith.

Q. 2. Write a definition for the word "grace." If you have a Bible Dictionary, copy the definition it has for grace in your notebook.

Many wealthy Jewish landowners grew grapes from which they made wine. The grapes ripened in September just before the rains came. It was important for the grapes to be gathered quickly before they spoiled or before the rains ruined them. So when grape harvest time arrived, the landowners would often go into the nearby town to hire extra workers. Poor farmers who owned small farms, those who had lost their farms to wealthy landowners and town people who did not have work would gather just inside the gate of the city. (Most cities had large walls made of rocks and stones to protect them from wild animals

and thieves who would attack them, similar to the older city of Harar.) Just inside the city gate was the market place where the elders would gather to hear court cases. But it was also where people looking for work would come. Those looking for work would bring their tools (like sickles or carpentry tools) and wait for someone to hire them.

The Jewish workday started as soon as it was light, usually at 6 AM. And the work day ended when it started getting dark around 6 PM. The normal wage for a day's work was 1 denarius which is what the landowner offered these workers. One denarius was just enough money for a man with a small family to buy food for a day and many poor families relied on this daily wage just to live. Those who were hired help were often in the worst economic position of society. Servants and slaves had a guaranteed income and knew that they could eat at the end of the day. But these hired hands were absolutely dependent upon work every day.

In his parable, Jesus tells of a rich landowner who went to the town and hired workers at 6 AM. He made a contract to pay these men 1 denarius for a day's work. Needing more workers, he returned to the town at 9 AM, then at 12 PM, then at 3 PM, and finally at 5 PM (the eleventh hour), just one hour before work ended. For all of these late workers the landowner just told them that he would pay them what was right. These workers would have been desperate for work so were willing to receive anything so that they could have at least buy something to eat that night. No doubt each group of workers assumed that they would be paid a portion of the 1 denarius.

The parable focuses upon those who were hired "at the eleventh hour" or 5 PM, just an hour before the work ended. Why had the landowner gone back to the market place and hired them when there was only one hour left? The answer is probably that the landowner was "*compassionate*," knowing that if they did not get work, they and their families would not have anything to eat that night. Isn't God the same to us, seeking us out in our sins and showing compassion to us? Why had the last workers not been hired earlier? Were they lazy and did not come out on time? Or did they have the worst reputations and so few landowners were willing to hire them? We don't know, but some scholars think that these final workers symbolized those like the prostitutes (like Bizunish) and tax collectors whom most people thought were beyond God's willingness to accept into his kingdom.

The Old Testament law commanded that all workers be paid their money at the end of the work day so that the hired hands could buy something to eat when they went home. (Deut. 24:14-15) The landowner started paying his workers from those who had come last. When he paid them 1 denarius (more than 10 times what they were expecting), the rest of the workers expected more money. But no matter how long they worked, one hour, three hours, six hours, nine hours or twelve hours, they each received the same pay.

Those who had worked all day complained when they only received as much money as those who had worked for one hour. But the landowner told them that he had a contract with them; he had agreed to pay them 1 denarius and he had fulfilled that. He had been "just" to all. The landowner also stated that he had the "right" to generously pay the other workers what he wanted.

Q. 3. How would you have felt if you had worked all day and only received as much as the one who had worked for one hour?

What was this parable teaching about Jesus' kingdom?

1. The landowner represents God or Jesus. On one hand, God is always just. God never takes advantage of people or punishes them for what they don't deserve. But when it comes to our relationship with God, it is based upon God's character of "grace," not justice. We are all like those hired at the eleventh hour. God relates to us by graciously blessing us much more than we deserve. If God only treated us as we deserved, since we are all sinners, none of us would have the right to salvation. And since we never serve our Master Jesus as well as we ought, none of us should expect any rewards. It is God who gives us the health to work. He gives us the spiritual gifts or physical abilities, which allow us to witness, sing, or work. It is even God who puts the desire in our hearts to serve him. (See Phil. 2:13). And he changes our lives so that we can be saved and live in godliness. (Eph. 2:1-10) From beginning to end, God plays the major role by helping us live in a God-honoring way. If we are to have any hope for salvation and rewards, it is only because of "grace." Grace means that God gives to us what we do not deserve. We don't deserve salvation, but God gives it to us when we believe on Jesus. We don't deserve any eternal rewards since God is the one who gave us everything so that we could work, and yet he does promise to reward our faithfulness. So followers of Jesus must always remember that they do not and cannot "earn" anything from God. It is all based upon God's gracious gift to us.

2. We must be careful not to view our relationship with God as a "contract" and that we deserve salvation. Many of us have the idea that if we work hard, we deserve the most pay. If we don't work hard, then we should not be paid as much. But this attitude is dangerous when it comes to our salvation. Jesus taught that salvation (being part of the kingdom) is his gift to us. It is not something that we get by being good enough, being born into a Christian family, or by being from the right tribe. Our salvation always rests upon God's grace. All we can do is to trust in God's gift of salvation in Jesus to receive the "gift" of eternal life.

3. The last workers represent all of us. The New Testament shows how all of us were dead in our sins. We were all in a hopeless situation and slaves to sin. But then God in mercy saved us. (Rom. 9:13-18; 11:32; Eph. 2:4-5) We must never approach our relationship to God and the kingdom of God like the first workers thinking we "deserve" more or have earned our position from God. Because God is the source of all blessings, we must remember the following:

a. God has the right to give any blessing he wants to different Christians. To some he gives material wealth but not to others. He gives some physical health but not to others. To some he gives powerful spiritual gifts but not to others. He gives some people the ability to be musical and sing in the choir but not to others. God is not obligated to give us anything, so any gift and ability he gives us is based upon grace.

b. No Christian has the right to complain that he is being treated unfairly. God has no obligation to us. If he does anything for us, even sending rain so the crops will grow, it is his sovereign choice and because of his grace and mercy.

c. No Christian has the right to be jealous about God treating others differently than he has been treated. Many Christians get jealous of someone else's spiritual gift, or the fact that others have received a chance for education which they did not receive, or have more money than they have. When we get jealous, it puts us in the position of the first workers who complained that God was not "fair." Jesus wanted his disciples to remember that in our relationship to God, he has the sovereign right to give us what he

wants- and it is always "grace" to us. Rather than being jealous, we should be like the workers who only worked for one hour who would have been thankful for the gracious gift from the landowner.

d. We must be careful that we don't view some people as too sinful for God's grace and others as being more worthy of God's grace. Jesus told the disciples that in his kingdom, the last (the extremely sinful like Bizunish) were as honorable as the first (those like the Pharisees and Zerihun) who seemed most acceptable to God. (Many scholars think that in the early church there was a struggle between the Jewish Christians thinking they were better than the Gentiles since they were the recipients of God's covenant through Abraham and the Gentiles had come "last" and were now entering the church. They think this parable was a reminder to the Jews and us that in the eyes of God there is no favored person or tribe or race. All stand as equals before God.) To God there is no difference between rich and poor, educated and uneducated, white or black, Amhara or a "black man" from southern Ethiopia, prostitute or morally upright person who does not know Jesus. All are sinners and must come to God asking for "grace" so that they can be saved.

Jesus gave this teaching to the disciples and to us because each one of us struggles with this attitude. If we are not careful we can think that God owes us special favors because we are from a certain tribe or church denomination or because we are sacrificially serving God as an evangelist. We may think we are better than other people. But the Gospel teaches that in our relationship with God, he owes us nothing. We deserve eternal death in hell because of our sinfulness. But we are accepted by God, made his children, and given spiritual gifts simply because, out of love, Jesus treats us with grace.

Q. 4. a) List things that you have received from God because of "grace" for which you need to thank God. b) List things that you are tempted to be jealous over which God in grace has given another Christian. Ask God to forgive your attitude.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS COMING DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR THE THIRD TIME (MK. 10:32-34, MT. 20:17-19, LK. 18:31-33)

Q. 5. Read Mk. 10:32-34. a) Describe what Jesus predicted would happen to him. b) Read Mk. 8:31 & Mk. 9:31. What is similar and different between these earlier prediction and this third prediction of Jesus' death?

Jesus and the disciples were getting closer to Jerusalem. The disciples must have sensed that something major was about to happen. They had been following Jesus because they wanted to be part of the great kingdom of the Messiah. But they also knew about the growing animosity of the religious leaders towards Jesus and that the leaders wanted to kill Jesus. So the disciples worried about what might happen. The crowds which also were always around Jesus were "afraid." It is not clear what they were afraid about. Perhaps they too were afraid of what the religious leaders or Romans would do to Jesus. They had often witnessed how Rome punished severely any who tried to lead a rebellion.

Several months earlier Jesus had told the disciples that he was going to Jerusalem where he would die. But now, just a week before his death, he gave his third and most specific prediction of what is about to happen to him. Jesus was going to be arrested by the Jewish religious leaders. They would condemn him to death. But because the Jews did not have the authority to execute a criminal, Jesus would be turned over to the Gentiles (Romans) who would torture and kill him. But Jesus ended with a clear promise of his

resurrection from the dead. It is doubtful that the disciples understood what Jesus was saying. As we will see, his death on the cross took them by surprise. And none of them expected Jesus to raise from the dead.

There are three major truths hidden in this short story:

1. The death of Jesus was not an accident, but was the plan of God. Jesus was not surprised by what happened to him in Jerusalem. Nor was it an unfortunate accident. Rather, it was the plan of God and Jesus knew about it. And yet he willfully obeyed God and went to his death on the cross. In the same way, nothing that happens to us is a surprise to God. Nor is it an accident. It is all within the plans of God. When we get sick, or when someone we love or who seems important in the church dies, our comfort is that God knows all about it and is controlling it according to his purpose.

2. Jesus wanted to model for his disciples how they are supposed to face persecution. Followers of Jesus should also expect to face persecution and yet realize that that too is part of God's plan. Scholars think that when Mark wrote this, it was a time of great persecution from the Roman government and from the Jews. It was common for Christians to be beaten, imprisoned, and even condemned to death. The human tendency was to run from such an event or to view it as a tragedy when it happened. But Jesus is saying that rather than run, when it is clear that it is part of God's plan, Christians are to calmly face their persecution and death just like Jesus did. It is all controlled by God, not by their persecutors.

3. God's way of leadership is often the "cross" before the "glory." One scholar has written "It is doubtful that God will ever use a man greatly until he has caused him to suffer severely." God wants us to learn total dependence upon him first before he entrusts a fruitful ministry into our hands. So rather than seeing troubles as something to flee from, we are able to embrace problems as God's tools to help us grow to more fruitful ministry. (See Rom. 5:3-5, 2 Cor. 4:16-17; Jms. 1:2-4)

JAMES AND JOHN ASK JESUS TO APPOINT THEM TO HIGH POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP IN HIS KINGDOM (MK. 10:35-45, MT. 20:17-19, LK. 18:31-33)

Q. 6. Read Mk. 10:35-45. a) What request did James and John make to Jesus? b) What do you think Jesus meant about the "cup" and "baptism"? c) From what Jesus taught about leadership, summarize the difference between how the world understands leadership and what Jesus intends leadership in the church to be.

In the book of Mark, after each of the three predictions that Jesus made about his coming death, Jesus also taught about leadership. (See Mk 8:34-9:1; 9:33-37; 10:32-45) Like most of us, the disciples viewed leadership from the perspective of the world. As the disciples were following Jesus, they were looking forward to the coming kingdom of Jesus with the expectation that they would be given great positions of power. Jesus had just promised the disciples that they would sit on the twelve "thrones" over the kingdom. (Lk. 22:30)

It seems that Salome, the mother of James and John, together with her sons decided to approach Jesus and ask him to appoint James and John to the top two positions in his kingdom. Like all Jews, James and John believed the Messiah would start a glorious political kingdom in which Israel would be the center of the whole world. James and John believed that Jesus was that Messiah and were confident that he

would soon start that kingdom they so longed for. So they decided to make their requests for top leadership positions before the other disciples so that they would be assigned the best places of leadership. Why did Salome, James and John approach Jesus? Some scholars think Salome was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. So she would have been Jesus' aunt (which means that James and John were Jesus' cousins), and she was asking Jesus to do what many worldly leaders do, which is to give the best leadership positions to his relatives. James and John were already part of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples along with Peter, so perhaps they thought "as your closest disciples and friends, honor us with leadership positions." Or it could be that James and John were from a more well-to-do family than the rest of the disciples (you will remember that their father had a thriving fishing business), so they were thinking "We are better than the other disciples, so we should be given the better leadership positions." (Notice how often ministry or leadership in the church follows these same reasons. Often leadership positions are given to those who think they are better than others because they are more wealthy or more educated or given to relatives (and members of one's tribe, or given to close friends.)

In ancient societies, where one sat in relationship to the king indicated his authority. So ministers in the government were seated closest to the king. His prime minister sat on the right side of the king and had the most authority in the kingdom under the king. And the one sitting on his left hand was next in power. (1 Ki. 2:19; Ps. 110:1) James and John knew that the position of king belonged only to Jesus. However, their ambition for power led them to request the next positions of leadership available to them. Isn't that same type of "ambition" found in the church today?

Q. 7. a) Describe how you have seen leadership chosen in the church based upon being related to the leader, or of the same tribe, or given to a friend. b) Explain how you have seen such actions in the church cause division and jealousies.

Jesus did not reprove James and John. Rather, he taught them and us three important truths about leadership in the church.

1. Godly leadership in the church brings added trials and temptations and usually comes after great personal sacrifice and suffering. It should not be the reward because someone has finished some degree, is related to a leader, or is their friend. Rather, true godly leadership only comes after deep suffering. Jesus asked the disciples if they were willing to drink the cup and experience the baptism that he was about to experience. In Jewish thought, the "cup" given from God could either be a cup of blessing (see Ps. 16:5; 23:5) or more frequently a cup of judgment (see Ps. 11:6; 75:8; Is 51:17,22). In just one week Jesus would be praying to God "Please remove this cup from me; yet not what I will." (Mk. 14:36) So the cup which Jesus was referring to was the cup of suffering he would experience when he died on the cross. And the cup which Jesus' disciples will experience is the cup of persecution as the world resists those who live in obedience to Jesus. The word "baptism" in Jewish thinking did not just refer to being covered with water as we normally use this term. Jesus was not talking about his being baptized by John the Baptist or the disciples going through the rite of baptism. Rather, the word baptism was an expression referring to completely experiencing something. The Jews talked about someone who had suffered greatly as being baptized in sorrow, or someone who was greatly persecuted as being immersed in persecution. Jesus was asking the disciples: "Are you ready to suffer greatly for the kingdom just like I am about ready to suffer?"

Jesus asks us the same question today before we become leaders. "Are you willing to suffer greatly to be a leader in my kingdom? Will you suffer by giving up your personal time to serve others? Are you

willing to suffer by accepting the misunderstandings and insults of those you seek to serve? Are you willing to suffer persecution since as leaders you will be the first to be attacked?" Unless we say "yes" to these questions, we should not seek to be leaders in the church. We are not ready for the cup and the baptism Jesus asks of us.

James and John quickly responded that they were willing to suffer for Jesus and his kingdom. It is doubtful that they fully realized what Jesus meant. In just a week's time they would run away rather than suffer with Jesus. (Mt. 26:56) But Jesus knew the future, and so he agreed that James and John would suffer greatly for him. About 14 years later (44 AD) James would be the first apostle to be martyred. (Acts 12:1-2) Towards the end of his life, John would be exiled on Patmos and greatly suffer for being a follower of Jesus. (Rev. 1:9)

2. Leadership positions are not something we should seek since God gives them to whomever he desires. Jesus next told James and John that assignment of leadership positions was not his responsibility, but belonged to God the Father. Jesus was telling the disciples that leadership in the church (kingdom) is not Jesus' choice or the individual's choice. Rather, God the Father is the one who oversees selection of leaders. Many years previously, God taught King Nebuchadnezzar that God gives leadership positions to whomever he desires. (Dan. 4:17) Although James and John did play important leadership roles in the church, they were never given the major leadership positions in the early church. For a time Peter was the major leader in the early church. But it was not long until another James, the brother of Jesus, was appointed key leader over the Jerusalem church, which was the most influential church at that time. (Acts 15:13; 21:18) This too is an important truth for us to learn. The world encourages us to do all we can to advance until we are in a leadership position. But the Bible tells us to be faithful in service to God. And we are to leave the selection of leadership up to God. In his time, if he desires, he will advance us. Any attempt to grow in leadership position is usually a selfish decision on our part. We must learn to "submit" to God by allowing him to choose anyone he wants for leadership. And we submit to God by agreeing with his choice of leaders and by submitting to them. (Rom. 13:1-5; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 2:13-14) Any rebellion against church leaders is actually rebellion against God who has permitted them to be in leadership. There is no indication in the Bible that church members should work to get people out of leadership who have not committed flagrant sins. God used their vote to get the person into leadership, and now they must wait until God will later use their vote to get the person out of leadership.

3. Leadership in the church must be defined by service for others, not ruling over them. As soon as the other disciples found out what James and John did, they started arguing among themselves. A wrong attitude towards leadership in the church always causes fights. One of the most important truths that Christians, especially ministers and leaders in the church, must learn is the difference between leadership according to the world and leadership according to Jesus. At the root of godly leadership is a very different attitude towards leading. The Jews thought that the more "power over" people a person had, the greater the leader he was. The disciples were used to this. Under the Greeks and now under the Romans, the Jews had been controlled by Gentile nations who were very cruel to them, often abusing their power over the Jews.

Jesus insisted that leadership in the church must be radically different, especially in its motive. Rather than seeing leadership as a position of being "over" others and having others serve them, Jesus taught that Biblical leadership is always about serving others. Jesus used two words to describe this type of leadership. It is like being a "servant." A servant is hired to do what his boss wants. His time and ability

are given to benefit the boss. But Jesus also said that being a leader is like being a "slave." A slave has no rights of his own. He belongs to his Master, and he is supposed to serve his master, even if he does not personally benefit from the service or if it is displeasing to him. Neither the Jews nor the Gentiles saw being servants and slaves as being honorable positions. No one wanted to be a servant or slave, they wanted to be the master. However, Jesus said that as we minister in the church, we must make sure our motives are right. We must serve with the desire to help others. We should not be planning how we can get better pay. Or we can't be looking for ways to help our family or friends or tribe advance. We can't look for ways to manipulate things so that we are elected into leadership or struggle to stay in leadership when we are voted out. A "servant" and a "slave" only have one thought in their minds, and that is to do all they can to help others.

Q. 8. a) Describe ways the world's attitude toward leadership is often seen in the church. b) Describe what would change in your church if the ministers and elders saw themselves as "slaves" of the members of the church rather than "leaders" of the church. c) Examine your own heart and motive for ministry. Does it reflect a world's understanding of leadership or Christ's type of leadership? Explain your answer.

Jesus did not only teach about Biblical leadership, he demonstrated it. He was the "*Son of Man*." You will remember that this expression from Daniel 7:13-14 is a reference to the Messiah who is given authority to rule by God the Father (called the Ancient of Days.) We know that before he came to earth to live, Jesus lived in heaven in eternal glory. But as Paul said, Jesus took on the form of a slave. (See Phil. 2:6-7) Jesus said that he had come to give his life as a "*ransom*" for others. The word "ransom" has the idea of paying the price to release someone. So it was used for slaves when someone paid the price for the slave and then released him or of people captured in war who were released when someone paid money to their captor. Jesus said that the main reason he had come to earth was to release people. It was not to heal or provide temporary physical release from the world's problems. Rather, it was to release people from their slavery to sin. Most likely behind Jesus' expression was the teachings about the Messiah found in Is. 52:13-53:12. Isaiah foretold the time when the Messiah would give his life for the sins of others. Before the time of Jesus, the Jews did not comprehend what this passage meant. They understood the Messiah to be a conquering king. They used animals that died for the sins of others. But the Gospel message is based on the idea of substitutionary sacrifice. In just a week's time, Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, would give his life for you and me. God's judgment upon our sins was that we die for them, but Jesus died in our place. "*Many*" refers to all who accept Jesus' death on their behalf and enjoy the ransom from sin that Jesus purchased for them. What good news- that we now have no judgment upon us since Jesus took that judgment in our place! [Notice that Jesus said that he would "*give*" his life. Jesus' life was not taken from him. He did not die because the Jews or Romans overpowered him, took him captive and crucified him. Rather, Jesus knowingly allowed the Jews and Romans to capture and kill him. He was in control his death. As he said, he had the authority to lay his life down and take it back up again. (Jn. 10:17-18) He could have called down thousands of angels to release him if he had wanted to. (Mt. 26:53-54)]

Q. 9. a) Summarize in your own words what Jesus taught about leadership in the church. b) What do you think would change in your church if more leaders understood Jesus' type of leadership rather than following the world's understanding of leadership?

One scholar summarizes servant leadership like this. Leaders who have a servant heart a) seek to help others; b) are willing to do any job and don't think it is beneath their dignity; c) work with others with

no attempt to be the one in charge; d) seek no recognition of who did something and who gets the glory; and e) is not jealous of another person's gifts, but willingly follows those whom God has gifted. And the reason we should lead like this is because that is how our Master and example led. Are you a servant leader?

JESUS HEALS TWO BLIND MEN OUTSIDE OF JERICHO (MK. 10:46-52, MT. 20:29-43, LK. 18:35-43)

Q. 10. Read Mk. 10:46-52. a) What miracle did Jesus do? b) What can we learn about Jesus' heart of ministry in this story?

Jesus has been traveling down the eastern side of the Jordan River, steadily heading toward Jerusalem where he would die. Crossing the Jordan River, Jesus comes to the outskirts of the city of Jericho. The city of Jericho was an ancient city with a famous history. It is believed to be one of the oldest cities in human history. It was totally destroyed by God under the leadership of Joshua. (Josh. 6:20) Centuries passed without it being rebuilt. Eventually it was rebuilt in a new site about 2 kilometers south of the original city. Herod the Great greatly enhanced the city, building a large palace there where he would stay when it was too cold in Jerusalem that was about 30 kilometers away. It became a major center for priests and Levites; it is estimated that over 20,000 priests lived in Jericho when not working in Jerusalem. It was also a major trading town, so compared to most other towns in Judea, it was rich.

Mt. 20:29-34 tells us that Jesus healed not one, but two blind men at this time. Perhaps because the church knew one of the blind men as Bartimeaus (which in Hebrew means "son of Timeaus"), Mark and Luke focus the story upon one of the blind men. There was a great crowd surrounding Jesus and his disciples as he walked towards the city. Since the Passover was close, there were many pilgrims. Every Jewish male living within 20 kilometers of Jerusalem was required to attend this celebration, but many thousands of Jews traveled several days to attend as well. Often those who could not attend the Passover would line the street to welcome the pilgrims and bless them. In the middle of this crowd sat the two blind men begging. Hearing the uproar of the crowd, one of the blind men asked what was causing the uproar. People in the crowd told him that the famous teacher/healer, Jesus, was walking by. The blind man had no doubt heard about Jesus' power to heal, so he cried out "*Son of David, heal me.*" It is interesting that he used the expression "Son of David." To the Jews, this was a name reserved for the Messiah, not just for any ordinary descendant of David. This indicates that this blind man, unlike most of the Jews around him, had already believed that Jesus was the Messiah from what he had heard.

The people around tried to stop the man from crying out. But the more they tried to stop him, the louder he called out for Jesus to help him. Some scholars think the disciples viewed Jesus' journey to Jerusalem to be like a king walking towards his enthronement and did not want him to be distracted for someone they thought was not important. Jesus never considers anyone, not even a lowly beggar, as being too unimportant to help. Although he was heading toward Jerusalem where he would die for our sins, Jesus was never too busy to help people. So he stopped and healed the blind beggars, telling them that God had honored their faith.

But it was what happened next that was most important. It was a great miracle to heal a blind person. Since there was no story in the Old Testament of a man born blind receiving sight, the Jews saw this as one of the greatest miracles. Isaiah foretold a time when the Messiah would open the eyes of the blind. (Is.

29:18; 35:5) But what good is a physical miracle or receiving physical sight without receiving spiritual sight as well? Healing of the body is always less important than healing of the soul. The blind man not only received his sight that day, but he also received his spiritual sight. We are told that he became a disciple of Jesus and followed Jesus.

Q. 11. a) List people whom we too can think as not being important enough for our attention. b) Describe how we often think physical healings are more important than spiritual healings. c) Explain why you think spiritual healing is more important than physical healing.

SECOND DAY

Suppose you were the pastor of this large church in one of the major cities of Ethiopia. One day an elder of your church saw you eating in a restaurant with one of the most well-known prostitutes from your community. She had asked you to meet with her to share about how Jesus would forgive her of her sins, but the elder did not know that.

Q. 12. a) What reaction do you think this would cause among the elders? b) Read Lk. 19:1-10. 1) What was Zaccheus' work? 2) What was the crowd's reaction to Jesus eating with Zacchaeus? 3) How is this similar to what the elders thought about you as the pastor? 4) What did Zacchaeus do which demonstrated his change of heart? 4) What did Jesus say had come to Zacchaeus? 5) Summarize in your own words what Jesus said his purpose of coming to earth to be.

JESUS' LAST WEEK ON EARTH AND CRUCIFIXION: APRIL 30 AD

SATURDAY

JESUS BRINGS SALVATION TO ZACCHAEUS, THE TAX COLLECTOR. (LK. 19:1-10)

Having healed the blind men, Jesus drew closer to Jericho. Jericho was located at a major crossing point of the Jericho River and was one of the most wealthy towns in Judea. Merchants traveling from Herod's region of Perea into Judea which was under Roman control were required to pay taxes on their produce much like merchants are sometimes required to pay when taking goods like charcoal from one province to another as they come to Addis. Jerusalem was located 30 kilometers away up a steep windy road.

In the town of Jericho lived a very wealthy man named Zacchaeus who was a "chief tax collector." This probably means that he had a contract with the Roman government to collect taxes from merchants and also the yearly tax from individuals living in the community. He would have had other tax collectors similar to Matthew working for him. You will remember the Jews hated tax collectors like Zacchaeus for two reasons. First, they were considered to be helping the Romans whom the Jews saw as a conquering nation much like Ethiopians viewed those helping the Italians when they invaded Ethiopia in the 1930s. Second, tax collectors were known for cheating people, taking more taxes than they were supposed to.

Word about Jesus and his message of forgiveness for all, including tax collectors, must have reached Zacchaeus long before Jesus arrived in Jericho. So when Jesus entered the city, Zacchaeus wanted to see

Jesus. With large crowds from the city and pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem surrounding Jesus, Zacchaeus could not get close to Jesus. It is likely that people who knew him as a tax collector verbally and physically abused him as he tried to get close to Jesus. And he was short so he could not see over the crowd. So Zacchaeus found a tree to climb so that he could see over the crowd. For a rich Jewish man to climb a tree was culturally inappropriate, but Zacchaeus was desperate to see this one who was called "a friend of sinners and tax collectors." We are not told why Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. It was not just curiosity but seems to indicate the deep longing in his heart to accept the message of forgiveness that he had heard Jesus had offered others.

When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, he told Zacchaeus to quickly get down from the tree so that Jesus could eat with him. How did Jesus know his name? This is an indication of Jesus knowing things because he was divine. In the Jewish culture, it was very impolite to invite yourself to someone's house for a meal like this. It was also viewed as wrong to eat with someone who was classified by society as a sinner because this meant that you approved of them and supported their actions. To show that they did not approve of a person and his actions the Jews would often refuse to speak to that person or have anything to do with him. The crowd was shocked that Jesus was willing to eat with an enemy of the Jews and a very corrupt person. But Jesus was not concerned with what people thought, but about the salvation of an individual. As he said to Zacchaeus, he "*must*" eat with him. God the Father had instructed Jesus to bring salvation to Zacchaeus.

When we meet Jesus and are saved, our actions change. And one area of our life that is supposed to change is our view of money. Whereas the rich man who was honored by society had earlier refused to give away his money and follow Jesus (Lk. 18:18-30), Zacchaeus whom others despised as a sinner, without any prompting from Jesus, immediately determined to give away half of his money to the poor. And from the other half of his money, he agreed to reimburse anyone whom he had cheated. The Old Testament said that if a person stole from someone and returned it, he had to add 20% to what they stole when he returned it (Lev. 6:5) or he was to pay back double. (Ex. 22:7) If he stole oxen or sheep and slaughtered them and could not return them, then he had to reimburse the person four or five times their value. (Ex. 22:1) Although Zacchaeus was only required by law to return the money plus 20%, he stated that he would reimburse the person 400% of what he cheated them, something no Jew was expected to do.

Seeing his change of heart, Jesus declared that Zacchaeus, who was one of the lost sheep of Abraham, had now received salvation. Jews thought they were saved by right of being physical descendants of Abraham. But Jesus was saying that no one is saved just by being born into a certain family or tribe or denomination. Rather, it is a personal choice each person must make. Only then did he really become the spiritual descendant of Abraham. (Rom. 4:12; Gal. 3:7) Jesus was also teaching the Jews that no matter how evil a person might seem, he is also a "*lost sheep*." Therefore, as the Messiah, it was his responsibility to find the lost sheep and return him to God's family. (Many scholars think Jesus had Ezek. 34:15-16 in mind when making this statement.)

It is important to understand what Jesus is teaching in this section. He is not saying that Zacchaeus was saved because he gave away his money to the poor as if he were buying his salvation. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation; it is always a gift by God as he forgives us of any sins we commit. But Jesus was saying that when we choose to follow Jesus as a disciple, our lives change. And one area of our lives where changes must be seen is in our attitude towards money and towards those who are struggling

economically. We are supposed to change from selfishly looking for ways to become rich to looking for ways we can help those around us with the resources God has given us. We turn from being stingy to being generous. This story also reminds us that if we have stolen money from another individual or the church, true "*repentance*" includes returning all of the money that we stole. It is doubtful that we have truly repented if we do not return what we have stolen.

Q. 13. a) Look at your life. How has your attitude towards riches changed since you decided to follow Jesus? b) Would people in your community classify you as a generous person since you liberally help people, even if they are not your relative or a member of your church? c) Do you think churches today teach enough about how the use of our money is an indication of our spiritual lives? Explain your answer.

Scholars believe that Lk. 19:10 is one of the clearest statements in the Gospels describing why Jesus came to earth. Jesus' major purpose was not to bring physical healing. Nor did he come to bring material wealth. Rather, he came to look for those who are lost in sin and bring them back into God's family. As disciples of Jesus, this is to be our primary purpose in life as well- to look for the lost and help them return to God.

Jesus is also teaching in this passage that there is no one too sinful for God's grace to forgive. A great or "chief" sinner like Zacchaeus can be forgiven. A well-known prostitute can also be brought into God's family completely forgiven of her past. And as those whom God has forgiven, we too much accept these forgiven "chief" sinners and include them into our fellowship. Just like Jesus was now encouraging the Jews to accept Zacchaeus as one of the true sons of Abraham, so also we must accept all who come into our churches seeking Jesus' forgiveness. To not do so makes us like the Pharisees and the crowd who always complained that Jesus was the friend of sinners. Jesus is also teaching us that we are to continue to relate to those whom society views as "sinners." We must learn to keep ourselves holy but show others that they can receive forgiveness from Jesus without feeling that we hate them or judge them as being evil.

Q. 14. a) List types of people in Ethiopian society who are viewed as being so "evil" that good Christians do not relate to them. b) How do you think Jesus would relate to them if he was living in Ethiopia? c) Describe ways that we can show love to those who are viewed as sinners but still maintain our reputation of holy living as followers of Jesus.

JESUS TEACHES THE PARABLE OF THE TEN MINAS (LK. 19:11-27)

Q. 15. Read Lk. 19:11-27. a) Summarize the parable that Jesus taught. b) Who do you think the man of noble birth, the ten slaves, and those who resisted the man of noble birth represent? c) Describe what this parable teaches about Jesus, the Jews, and followers of Jesus.

No doubt the Jews listening to Jesus express God's forgiveness for the sinners were not pleased. "How could a righteous man like Jesus eat with and then forgive such a man!" they wondered. But others, hearing the word "salvation," would have understood it to mean political salvation, the coming of the Messiah. Jesus sought to correct their expectation that he was bringing the political Messianic kingdom at that time. Over the next couple of days, both through parables and in action, Jesus would illustrate the change that was about to come and how it would negatively impact the Jews. For the first time Jesus taught that his kingdom would be delayed. He would go back to heaven, but when he comes a second time, then his formal rule will start. Jesus knew that the time of crisis had arrived and the nation of Israel would formally

reject him as the Messiah. Jesus would die and shortly afterwards return to heaven. He would leave behind "slaves" who were to manage his affairs while he was in heaven.

The first teaching about what would soon happen came in the form of a parable. Behind Jesus' parable was a well-known historical event familiar to all of the Jews. In 40 BC, Herod the Great wanted to become king of the Jews, taking the rulership away from the Hasmonean kings. Because Palestine was under the authority of Rome, he had to travel to Rome and was crowned by the Romans as king of all of Palestine. When he died in 4 BC, he divided his kingdom between three of his children. But this had to be ratified by Rome. His oldest son called Archelaus traveled to Rome hoping to be crowned king of the Jews living in Judea. The Jews in Judea did not like him, however, so they sent a delegation to Rome saying that they did not want him to rule over them. Rome upheld Herod the Great's desires, but lowered his position from king to governor over the provinces of Judea and Samaria.

In his parable, we can see the following truths:

1. Jesus is symbolized as the "*man of noble birth*." He was similar to Archelaus. He was now coming to the time when he should be rightfully crowned king. He was therefore returning to have his title authorized by God the Father. Jesus was telling the Jews and especially the disciples that the kingdom which they thought would come immediately (see Acts 1:6), would be delayed. Jesus was about to return to heaven. And the eternal messianic kingdom which all of the Jews expected and which was prophesied in the Old Testament would be consummated in the future when he returns.

2. The delegation that resisted his right of kingship symbolized the Jewish nation. Jesus had been born king of the Jews. (Mt. 2:2) But in a week's time, the Jewish nation would formally reject Jesus' right of kingship over them when they crucified him. Therefore, Jesus insisted that he would punish the nation. Most likely this referred to events which took place 40 years later when, in 70 AD, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and disbanded the Jewish nation. But its final fulfillment will be when Jesus returns to reign as king. (Rev. 19:11-21) Just as Herod the Great and Archelaus had quickly killed all who threatened their kingdoms when they were approved by the Romans, in the same way, before Jesus comes to initiate his eternal reign over all people, he will destroy those who resist his rule. (Note: Paul said that one day God's favor would return to the Jews and the nation would experience salvation. See Rom. 11:26) But this story also provides a warning against any person or any country that takes a stand against the King of kings. They might be able to persecute the Christians and seem to defeat believers just like they were able to cause the death of Jesus. But Jesus will one day return and destroy all who stand against him.

3. The "*ten slaves*" to whom the man of noble birth entrusted money symbolizes the disciples who had chosen to follow Jesus. As these disciples waited for King Jesus to return, what were they to do? They were to realize that Jesus had entrusted the matters of the kingdom into their hands, and they were to work hard to increase the wealth (kingdom) of Jesus.

It was this part of the parable that Jesus focused upon. Jesus taught that being a disciple of Jesus is similar to being at first given a little money over which the person demonstrates his ability and faithfulness before major responsibility can be given. A "*minas*" was equivalent to about three months of wages for the ordinary Jew, so 10 minas would be more than an ordinary worker earned in two years. Although a large amount of money, it was not a great fortune. Jesus gave each of ten slaves (representing all of his followers) the same amount of money, and he told them to "*put the money to work*." In his parable, Jesus

only tells about what three of the slaves did. One slave doubled the money and earned 10 more minas. The second earned 50% return, gaining 5 minas. But the last slave hid the money in a piece of cloth and buried it in the ground. This was a normal way for Jews to hide their money from thieves.

Jesus explained what happened when the owner returned, symbolizing his return one day to start his kingdom. At that time he will evaluate and reward his faithful disciples with greater honor and responsibility.

a. The man who had gained 10 minas was given rulership over 10 cities. What Jesus is symbolizing is that if we demonstrate faithfulness service for his kingdom now with our natural abilities, spiritual gifts, financial resources, and with our time as we wait for Jesus to return, in heaven we will eventually be greatly rewarded. To be given 10 cities to rule over is a symbol of great honor and blessing.

b. The second man gained 5 minas and so was given control over 5 cities. His diligence was less than the first man's, so his reward would be less. However, he would be rewarded for his faithfulness far beyond what he had been able to do for Jesus while on earth.

c. The third man who had only hid his money was severely reprimanded by the owner. At the minimum he could have given the money to those who lend money so that the money would gain interest. This was better than doing nothing. The man tried to make excuses saying he was afraid of the owner whom he complained demanded a great return from his money and was not generous. This was clearly not a true picture of the king who had already generously given to one servant 10 cities. Jesus did not agree with his perspective of the owner, but simply said that if he thought that the owner was concerned with his resources being used wisely and profits made, he should have worked to gain interest from the money. The king (Jesus) demanded that the 10 minas that he had given the man be taken from him and given to the one who had worked the hardest and proved the most faithful. This did not seem right to people because they thought that this man had already been rewarded enough. But Jesus taught that in his kingdom, it is important that we faithfully use all of the gifts God has given us wisely and faithfully. If we waste them, we will be disgraced in eternity. But if we are faithful, then we will be rewarded beyond what we can imagine.

Jesus was warning his followers that just because he was not going to be on earth with them did not mean that they could do nothing. Rather, it was a time when the matters of the spiritual kingdom (the church) was being entrusted to them. They must faithfully and diligently work for Jesus' kingdom. It might bring them little reward while on earth. But when Jesus returns, and throughout eternity, each one will be rewarded for her service of Jesus far beyond anything she will have done for Jesus now. The hard work and sacrifice will be worth it then.

Unfortunately there are many Christians who rarely think about the return of King Jesus. Jesus has given them natural and spiritual gifts as well money and time, expecting them to be used for the work of the kingdom. But instead these Christians focus upon their own lives, seeking to build their own "kingdom" by earning lots of money and becoming wealthy. They might seem to benefit now, but they will be severely reprimanded by their king when he returns.

Q. 16. a) Do you think most Christians live their lives remembering that their king Jesus has entrusted them with his "minas" and will one day return and ask them what they have done with his resources? Explain

your answer. b) How would the perspective and ministry of Christians change if each one remembered that King Jesus was returning and would evaluate how they used his gifts?

Jesus probably spent the night in Jericho and on the next day traveled up the steep road to Jerusalem. However, rather than go into Jerusalem to stay, he used Bethany as his base. (See Jn. 11:44-12:1) He likely stayed with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. As the Passover approached, people's questions about what Jesus would do increased. People were hoping that Jesus would now formally declare himself as the Messiah. But the religious leaders were determined to kill him.

Q. 17. Read Lk. 19:28-44. a) Where did Jesus get the donkey to ride into Jerusalem? b) What did the disciples praise God for? c) What was the reaction of the religious leaders? d) What prophecy did Jesus give concerning the city of Jerusalem?

SUNDAY

JESUS RIDES AS KING INTO THE CITY OF JERUSALEM (LK. 19:28-44, MT. 21:1-11, MK. 11:1-11, JN. 12:12-19)

It was Sunday, just six days before the death of Jesus. Every day Jesus would go into Jerusalem but return at night to Bethany. On his first appearance in the city, Jesus rode in on a donkey. This was an event filled with great symbolism. Centuries earlier, in Zech. 9:9, the prophet said that one day the king of the Jews would come riding humbly into Jerusalem on a donkey. That day had arrived.

Whereas people in Ethiopia use donkeys to carry heavy loads, Jews often rode their donkeys. Riding a donkey had great symbolism to the Jews. In their culture, whenever a leader came riding on a horse, it was a symbolism of his ability at war, demonstrating his power and authority. So Roman generals would ride in their war parades on horses followed by their captors. But when a king came in peace, he would ride on a mule (e.g. Solomon in 1 Ki. 1:33, 44) or a donkey. The Jews thought that the Messiah would come as a great military leader and overcome the Romans. But Jesus is showing that he was not the war-like messiah which they expected, but the king of peace. A donkey that had never been ridden also had symbolism. Animals which had not been used in work were often chosen for special religious ceremonies. (e.g. Num. 19:2; Deut. 21:3; 1 Sam 6:7) So the coming of the king into Jerusalem to die required a donkey not previously ridden.

The Roman leaders had the right to demand the use of someone's horse whenever they needed it. Now the King of kings needed something to ride into the city. But he was so poor that he had no horse or donkey of his own. Instead he had to borrow it from others. As Jesus prepared for his kingly procession into Jerusalem, he sent two disciples to get a donkey colt that had not been ridden. Probably the donkey was located in the adjacent town of Bethpage. Scholars debate how Jesus could know about the donkey. Perhaps he knew about the donkey through prophetic vision or divine foreknowledge? More likely, he knew that he had to fulfill the prophecy of riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, so he arranged with someone beforehand to use his donkey. That is why those who watched his disciples take the donkey did not argue with them.

The two disciples brought the donkey back to Jesus. In great honor of Jesus the king, the disciples gathered around him. They took off their outer coats. Some put them on the donkey to serve as a

temporary saddle for Jesus to sit on. Others put them on the ground in front of Jesus. This was a Jewish way of seeking to honor the king. (e.g. 2 Ki. 9:13) Those with Jesus who had seen his many miracles took palm branches and waved them in the air in celebration, a common way to celebrate the arrival of a political leader. Filled with joy, they began to shout aloud Ps. 118:26. Psalm 118 was a song of welcome to the pilgrims as they neared Jerusalem. But the Jews knew that it was also a song welcoming their king, the Messiah, into Jerusalem. That is why they changed the words of the song and added "the king" to it. Everyone would have recognized this procession towards Jerusalem as the coming of the Messiah.

When the religious leaders heard the disciples shouting joyfully, they demanded that Jesus stop them. They knew that the act was a declaration that Jesus was the Messiah and they were not prepared to accept this. Plus it was dangerous to do it because the Romans would quickly retaliate against anyone who pretended to be a king. And often the Romans would punish the religious leaders if the Jews did not remain loyal to Rome. But Jesus refused, saying that if his disciples would not honor him on this day, all of creation, even the stones, would cry out in his honor.

Jesus was aware, however, that things would not turn out like the disciples thought as they welcomed their king into Jerusalem. As he arrived at the Mount of Olives, a hill to the east of Jerusalem overlooking the Temple, Jesus began to weep. Jesus knew that in just a few years Jerusalem would be destroyed. Thirty-six years later, in 66 AD, the Jew rebelled against Rome and entered a bitter war when thousands died. Finally, in 70 AD, the Romans defeated the city, killing thousands of people. The Temple and much of the city wall was destroyed. The Jews rebelled again in 135 AD. This so angered the Romans that they commanded that no Jew could live in Jerusalem. This event put an end to the Jewish nation. When the Romans conquered Jerusalem many Christians viewed the event as God's judgment upon the Jews for crucifying their messiah.

Jesus knew that the acceptance of him as king would not last long. In five days, the same crowd that was shouting in celebration would be shouting for Jesus to be crucified. This time Jesus had not come as the conquering king. That would wait until Jesus returns to reign. (Rev. 19:11-21) How it broke Jesus' heart and the heart of God to punish his people this way. (See Hos. 11:8-9) But it also saddens God when he has to discipline us when we are wayward. Our loving God not only sends blessings but disciplines His children as well. (See Heb. 12:5-11)

Jesus continued his journey and went into the Temple area. There he healed people who were blind and lame. (See Mt. 21:14-15) This caused the people to become even more excited and they loudly praised God for his blessing through Jesus. Jesus then returned to Bethany for the night.

MONDAY

JESUS CURSES A BARREN FIG TREE AND EXPELS MERCHANTS FROM THE TEMPLE (MK. 11:12-19, MT. 21:18-19, LK. 19:45-48)

Q. 18. Read Mk. 11:12-19. a) Why did Jesus curse the fig tree? b) What happened to the tree? c) What did this event teach the disciples about faith? d) Why did Jesus expel the merchants from the temple?

Monday morning Jesus and his disciples walked the three kilometer road back into Jerusalem. On the way, Jesus saw a fig tree that was full of green leaves. Jews liked fig trees. Not only did they provide shade

on a hot day, but the fruit was good to eat. In fact, in the Old Testament, fig trees were a symbol of God's blessing. (Hos. 2:12; Joel 1:7, 12; Mi. 4:4; Zec. 3:10) Like the wanza, the fig tree loses its leaves every year. Before the leaves come back, it will begin to make fruit. But the majority of its fruit is when its leaves are fully out. Although Jesus knew that it was not the main time to eat figs, seeing the leaves on the tree, he went to the tree hoping for some of the early figs. Disappointed when there was no fruit, he cursed the fig tree, no doubt declaring that it would not bear any more figs.

Although Jewish religious leaders often "cursed" something that they did not like, this is the only time Jesus is recorded as cursing something. Because it seems so out of character for Jesus to curse something just because he was hungry, scholars have debated the purpose of this story. Most scholars think it was an acted out prophecy. Many times in the Old Testament, when the Jews would not listen to spoken prophecies, God had his prophets act out their prophecies. So Jeremiah carried a wooden yoke (Jer. 28:10-11 and Ezekiel shaved his head and divided the hair up into three piles (Ezek. 5:1-4). In the Old Testament, the fig tree sometimes represented the Jews and the lack of fruit emphasized the Jews not living according to the covenant laws. (See Jer 8:13; 29:17; Hos 2:12; Joel 1:6-7, 12; Mic 7:1,) The fig tree represented the nation of Israel. Like the fig tree had a lot of leaves and looked like it should bear lots of fruit, in the same way the nation of Israel looked like it was righteous because the people kept many laws. But on close examination, their lives were not following God's desires and they would soon reject the king God sent them. Because of their lack of spiritual fruit, the time of judgment (cursing) was about to come. God would turn his back to the chosen people of the Old Testament and offer salvation to the Gentiles. And God would allow the Romans to destroy the Jewish nation in 70 AD. In the book of Acts, the apostles expressed their turning from witnessing to the Jews to the Gentiles as being God's judgment for their hard heartedness. (Acts 13:46-49; 18:6; 28:24-29)

Q. 19. a) Describe ways that many Christians can appear to be good Christians, but like the Jews, have little spiritual fruit. b) What warning do you think this passage gives them?

Often churches are filled with those who claim to be followers of Jesus. They sing with great emotion on Sunday as they gather for worship. They love to shout out "Jesus is Lord." But a careful examination of their lives shows little spiritual fruit. They don't pray, don't read God's Word, don't witness, don't help those who are suffering, or work in the church. Some even clearly live outside of God's moral standards. God is patient with them, encouraging them to repent and bear true spiritual fruit. But there is a day when the "curse" will fall. This story should be a warning to each one of us to make sure we are living our lives in obedience to Jesus and bearing fruit. As Jesus will later teach his disciples, he will eventually cut off every branch that does not bear fruit. (Jn. 15:1-2)

Having cursed the tree, Jesus traveled from the Mount of Olives, crossed a valley called the Kidron Valley and entered into the Temple area. You will remember that the Temple was divided up into different areas. In the Old Testament, there was only two areas, the Temple building and then the worship area. All Jews and Gentiles were allowed into the Temple area, but only the priests could go into the Temple building. But during the years before Jesus, the Jews added other areas. So the area around the Temple was called the Court of the Priests and this was where the priests could go and serve, but not the ordinary Jews. Then there was the Court of men where Jewish men were allowed to go. Next, there was the Court of Women for the Jewish women. Finally, there was the Court of Gentiles, an area far away from the Temple building where Gentiles were allowed to come and worship. So the Temple became a place of

separation and segregation, giving the impression that God loved men more than women and Jews more than Gentiles. (See the diagram of the Temple complex at the back of the book.)

Jesus and his disciples came into the Court of the Gentiles. As he looked around, Jesus noticed that rather than a place of worship, the Court of the Gentiles had become a market place. The Old Testament commanded that each Jewish man pay a yearly tax for the upkeep of the Temple. (Ex. 30:11-16) The Jews decided that two weeks before the Passover was the best time to do this, and in all of the towns in Judea and Galilee, small booths were set up for the Jews to come and pay their tax. However, those traveling to Jerusalem to attend the Passover preferred to pay their tax money directly in the Temple. The religious leaders decided that this tax could only be paid with a certain "*shekel*" coin that came from the city of Tyre, not money from Rome, Greece, Syria, or Egypt. When Jewish pilgrims arrived at the Temple, they often had other types of money, so the religious leaders allowed merchants to set up booths in the Court of the Gentiles for the exchanging of money. These moneychangers were very corrupt, charging people a lot of money to change their money into "*shekels*."

Most Jewish men also wanted to offer a sacrifice in the Temple as part of their worship. They were allowed to bring into the Temple their sheep, goats or pigeons that they brought from home or bought at a cheaper price. There the priests would examine the animal to make sure it had no defect. Sadly, many of these priests were corrupt, so the priests would declare the animal as having a defect and not worthy of being sacrificed. This meant that most people were forced to buy from the merchants selling sacrifice animals in the Temple that the priests had pre-approved as being without defect. The merchants, working with the priests, whom some scholars think were controlled by the former high priest Annas, would charge high prices for these animals making a lot of money off of those seeking to worship God. (This is similar to how merchants make a lot of money at Christmas or Easter when they increase the price of chickens or sheep.) Rather than seeing themselves as serving people and asking "What can we do to make it easier for people to worship God?" the priests were only thinking about themselves and saying "What can we do to get more money from the people?" How easy it is for those who lead or minister in the church to fall into this same trap! We begin to think that the members of the church are supposed to serve our needs rather than we should serve their needs.

Quoting from Jer. 7:11 Jesus called this practice "*a den of robbers*." They were thieves for two reasons. They were financially abusing those who had come for worship. And they were pretending to be spiritual, encouraging people to worship God, but their personal lives were not what God's desires. They were robbing true worship from God.

But what especially angered Jesus was another thing. This was the only place that a Gentile could come into the Temple and worship; however, no Gentile could enter into the spirit of worship with the noise of buying and selling going around him. Through the prophet Isaiah, God had told his people that the Temple was not to be their exclusive property. Rather, it was to be a place of worship for all people. (Is. 56:17) But by setting up various courts which excluded the Gentiles and then turned the only place where Gentiles could worship into a noisy market place, they were going against God's desires.

In anger, Jesus turned over the tables filled with coins of the moneychangers. And he drove the sacrifice animals out of the Court of the Gentiles. As our example, Jesus, demonstrates that there are times when it is right for us to get angry. We shouldn't stay angry when people hurt us, but we should get angry when those claiming to follow God hurt others and hinder their worship of God. Some scholars also

believe that this was a "drama" prophecy as well. They think that Jesus' actions was a sign that God would soon turn his back on Temple worship and the use of animal sacrifices and turn to the church where people of all nations and all sexes could enter as equals. And there would not be any animal sacrifice because Jesus' sacrifice on the cross would put an end to the need for animal sacrifices. (Heb. 10:11-18)

(Note: Scholars debate whether Jesus cleared out the Temple once or twice. John 2:12-25 indicates that Jesus cleared out the Temple at the beginning of his earthly ministry, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke only mention clearing out the Temple at the end of his earthly ministry. Most scholars think it was the same event and John places it earlier in his story for another reason. However, it could be that Jesus cleared the Temple twice, which is what the author of this study guide has chosen to portray.)

Q. 20. a) List some times when it is right for Christians to get angry. b) Why do you think few Christians get angry about these things? c) Describe ways that some of our practices hinder people from coming to worship God or feeling a sense of equality in the church. d) What do you think Jesus would have us do about these practices?

Jesus' actions greatly angered the priests for several reasons. It impacted them financially since they were making a lot of money from changing money and selling animals. It also challenged their authority. They had set up the system of exchanging money and selling animals, so who was Jesus to go against what they approved? Often these two reasons cause conflicts in our churches today between the members of the church and the church elders! The leaders get angry because people challenge their authority or decisions, and they get angry when people do not allow them some financial or leadership benefits. The priests became even more determined to get rid of Jesus by killing him.

Having cleaned out the Temple, Jesus returned to Bethany.

THIRD DAY

Tuesday would prove to be one of the busiest days for Jesus. Scholars disagree what events happened on which day, so this is one idea of what took place on Tuesday.

Q. 21. Read Mk. 11:20-25. a) What amazed the disciples? b) What did Jesus teach about prayer and its power? c) Why do you think Jesus also talked about forgiveness?

TUESDAY

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT PRAYER (MK. 11:20-25, MT. 21:18-22, LK. 19:45-47)

Tuesday morning as Jesus and his disciples were walking from Bethany back to Jerusalem, they passed the fig tree that Jesus had cursed the previous day. The disciples were amazed that in just one day the tree had dried from its roots up. Usually when trees die, first their leaves start to change, and eventually the tree dries up over many weeks. So this was a miracle. Jesus used this opportunity to teach several truths about prayer to the disciples.

First, Jesus reminded his disciples of the power of prayer combined with faith. Faith is not a way that we force God to do things for us. Rather it is an expression of our absolute trust that God who has all power and therefore can do anything, who has all wisdom and so knows what is the best answer to our prayers, and who is filled with love and will only do what is the best for us, will work out all things for good. (See Rom. 8:28) When we confidently place our trust in God and express that trust in our prayers "mountains move." To move a mountain was a Jewish expression referring to doing what is humanly impossible. As we pray with a spirit of trust to our loving Father, we can be confident that he will graciously answer us. But this teaching must be balanced with what Jesus would soon model at Gethsemane, that the spirit behind all prayer of faith is our attitude of "Not my will but yours be done." (Mt. 26:39; 1 Jn. 5:14)

Second, Jesus quickly added that effective prayer flows out of lives who have forgiven others who have sinned against them. To have an unforgiving attitude breaks our fellowship with God, and without that fellowship we do not have the promise of God to answer our prayers. But even worse, God does not forgive our many sins against him when we refuse to forgive those who have hurt us.

Q. 22. a) What is the difference between demanding that God do something for us and praying in faith? b) Jesus said that prayer in faith must be based upon forgiveness of others. Do you think many Christians understand this truth? Explain your answer. c) Read Mt. 21:23-27. 1) What question did the leaders ask Jesus? 2) What question did Jesus ask the leaders? 3) What was their response and why?

THE JEWISH LEADERS ASK JESUS WHERE HIS AUTHORITY CAME FROM (MT. 21:23-27, MK. 11:27-33, LK. 20:1-8)

One of the major responsibilities of the Jewish court, the Sanhedrin, was to determine who was a false prophet. Even without a trial, they had already determined that Jesus was a false prophet and needed to be killed. Now they were looking for an excuse to act on their decision. Although Jesus knew that the religious leaders were seeking to kill him, he did not hide from them. Instead he went to the Temple and began to teach the people. The religious leaders had a problem with arresting Jesus. Jesus was very popular with the people, so they did not dare arrest Jesus without sufficient cause. So the Sanhedrin decided to trick Jesus into saying or doing something which would decrease his popularity with the people so that they could kill Jesus without the people turning against them.

As church leaders and ministers, we must be careful we do not become like the Jewish religious leaders. They were not asking "What is right?" but "What is convenient for us?" They were willing to punish an innocent man because it would protect their leadership over Israel. Many times church leaders and ministers fall into this same error. Even though they know it is wrong, they tell lies to the government or to their members because it can gain them some benefit. Or they manipulate their church constitution so that they do not have to step down from leadership. If we truly seek to honor Jesus we will ask "Is this the right thing to do? Is this what Jesus would want me to do?" And once we know what is true and right, we act on it even if others do not agree with us.

The day before Jesus had driven out from the Temple the moneychangers and those selling sacrifice animals and now he was teaching with authority. So these delegates came and asked Jesus what was the source of his authority to do these things. Probably because they were not sincerely interested in knowing the truth, Jesus did not answer their question. He had already told them that he had come from God and his authority to teach and heal was from God, but they refused to accept this. (Jn. 5:36; 7:16-18) He also

knew that if he said he was from God, the leaders would have accused him of blasphemy and had the authority to demand his death. But it was not his time to die. Later when asked if he was the Son of God, Jesus told the high priest that he was. (Mt. 26:63-64) His time to die had arrived, so he had no reason to keep his identity a secret.

It was a normal Jewish debating practice when asked a difficult question to respond with a question that put the accusers in a difficult position. Jesus asked the leaders his own question and told them he would answer them if they first answered his question. Jesus asked them "*Where did John the Baptist's authority to baptize come from- from God (heaven) or from men?*" Now the leaders were in a trap. The Jewish leaders did not come out directly against John the Baptist, but they did not accept his message or put up any resistance when he was imprisoned and killed. Clearly they did not believe that he was a prophet sent by God. However, the majority of the people did believe that John the Baptist was a true prophet of God. Fearing the anger of the people, these Jewish leaders refused to answer the question so Jesus refused to answer them in return.

Here is a good lesson to learn from Jesus. We are often confronted by people of other religious groups who do not want to know the truth but only seek to defeat us through arguments. What should we do? There are times that we should patiently and lovingly answer them with the truth. However, most times it does little good to argue with them. If their minds are already made up that we are false, our arguing will not convince them otherwise. So what can we use to defeat them? There are two weapons. First, there is prayer. Jesus told us to pray for our enemies. So we should pray that God will open their eyes to the truth. Second, there is love. Most resistant people who become believers do not accept Jesus as their Savior because we overcome them with the truth, but because we show love to them. There are some well-meaning Christians who walk by the home of the leaders of other religions and shout "Believe on Jesus or you will go to hell." Such actions are not effective. But if those Christians would openly show love, people would become more open to listening. In an area of Ethiopia where Christians had been recently killed and burned churches, when Christians were doing a development project, the religious leaders of the other group expressed their amazement at the loving and forgiving attitude of the Christians. They were now ready to listen to the Gospel.

Q. 23. a) Describe how you have seen Christians antagonize non-believers through argumentative words they speak. b) Give an example of how you have seen love soften the hearts of people so that they are willing to listen to the Gospel. c) Read Mt. 21:28-22:14. 1) Summarize the three parables Jesus told the religious leaders. 2) List the major truths Jesus was teaching through these parables.

JESUS REPRIMANDS THE JEWS USING THREE PARABLES (MT. 21:28-22:14)

It was now Jesus' turn to demonstrate to the Jews the implications of their attitude towards him. He did this using parables, one of his favorite teaching tools.

a. The parable of the two disobedient sons. (Mt. 21:28-32)

The Jews thought they were God's favored children for several reasons. Many boasted in the fact they were God's children through Abraham. Others boasted in the fact that they were God's children because they kept God's laws and therefore God would reward them with eternal life. But their hearts were filled with pride and they looked down on others whom they classified as "sinners." Above all, they refused to accept the Messiah whom God had sent to them.

In his story, Jesus compared two sons. The Jews placed great emphasis on children obeying their parents. A disobedient child was seen as a curse and would often be punished by the parents and ostracized by society. In one way neither son was good, just like none of us are holy. Both sons sinned against their father. But what made one son acceptable and the other not acceptable was what the two sons did with their disobedience.

1. The first son, representing the sinful people like the tax collectors and prostitutes, initially openly refused to obey the request of his father to go work in the fields. Such an action in Jewish society would have been seen as a great insult to the father. But later the son changed his mind and obeyed his father's desire for him to work in the field. The word for "*changed his mind*" is the word repent. Whenever we repent, it involves a change in our understanding about something that then leads to a change in our actions. Jesus did not debate whether or not the sinners were disobedient to God. But they had changed their minds and accepted Jesus as the Messiah and had changed how they lived. So in the end, they were the obedient children.

2. The second son, representing the religious leaders like the Pharisees, who thought they were righteous because they obeyed certain laws, also disobeyed his father. He said he would work in the field but then did not do what he said he would do. He even spoke politely to their father, calling him "sir" much like we openly say that Jesus is Lord while living in disobedience to him. The religious people claimed that they obeyed God, but in their refusal to accept John the Baptist and Jesus, they were "*rebellious*" against their God their Father. Even while the sinners whom they despised were repenting and following Jesus, these religious leaders were making plans to kill Jesus.

The Jewish leaders were trusting in their personal righteousness, which was not in line with God's desires. But the sinners were following the "*way of righteousness*" which God approved. This phrase refers to two things. First, it refers to the fact that the tax collectors and sinners were aligning themselves with God's way of being right with God, repenting and believing in Jesus Christ. This was different from the externally righteous who sought to earn their good standing with God by keeping laws without changing their hearts. Second, the phrase refers to aligning our lives to God's desires so that we do things in a way that glorifies Jesus. We do not just acknowledge God, but change our actions through repentance, belief, and obedience.

This parable contains a strong warning to us.

First, there is the warning that we should not become proud as believers in our "righteousness" as we look at others who do not live as we do. It is easy for us to become like the Pharisees, looking at certain external actions like not drinking beer or not chewing chatt and think that we are good. This is a form of pride that God detests.

Second, we are warned that the proof of our being followers of Jesus is not what we "say" but what we "do." Jesus said that the religious leaders openly said they would obey but in the end they disobeyed God. It was those who had repented and changed their lives who were now acceptable to God, doing what he wanted. In our days we often focus upon saying the right things. So we shout "Jesus is Lord." And we enthusiastically sing songs about the power of Jesus in defeating the enemies. But once we are out of the church, we disobey God. Many who sing with fervor live in sexual sin throughout the week. Or they fight

with the elders or the elders with the youth. Churches divide, and they refuse to help the poor in their community. The proof of the reality of our repentance and faith is the obedience we have afterwards.

Q. 24. a) Describe how many Christians can be like the second son. b) Describe how those we don't expect to follow Jesus are often like the first son. c) Illustrate ways that Christians can "say" things which indicate they are obeying God, but in fact live in a disobedient way. d) Examine your life- what are things you say to reflect your spirituality but which you are not living out in your life. Repent of these things and look for ways to change.

THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS OF THE VINEYARD (MT. 21:33-46, MK. 12:1-12, LK. 20:9-19)

Rather than hiding difficult truths like we often do, it is sometimes better to be open and show people the evilness of their ways. If he was seeking to be popular with the people Jesus could have hidden the implication of the Jews' rejection of him as the Messiah. But doing so would not give the Jews a chance to repent and change their actions. So in his second parable, Jesus reveals to the religious leaders and the Jews the implications of rejecting him as the Messiah.

There are only a few places in Ethiopia that grow grapes so for many of us grapes are unknown. But for the Jews, grapes and making wine was one of the major ways farmers made a living. Grapes do not grow on bushes or trees, but on vines similar to passion fruit. The Jews would plant grape vines about three meters apart. As the branches grew, they would guide the branches so that it created a hedge. In order to protect the grapes from wild animals like wild pigs and from thieves, farmers would often build stone walls or plant a hedge made out of thorns. And they would build stone towers that could be from three to 15 meters high. During the season when the grapes were ready for harvest, people would sit in the towers to guard the fruit and the owner would often sleep there while the harvesting of grapes took place. Grapes were usually planted in large plots of ground. In the middle of that plot, there were two large holding tanks dug out of stone or built of bricks. In the top one the fruit would be placed and then workers would walk on the fruit with their feet crushing out the juice. The juice would then run down into a smaller stone gathering place where it would be placed in new leather bags or clay storage jars where it would be stored as wine.

Throughout the Bible God's relationship to his people is often compared to grapes. God is viewed as the one who owns the grape vines, the grape vines refer to the people of God, and the grape fruit represents the actions of God's people. (Is. 5:1-7) The making and drinking of wine is often a symbol of salvation and all of God's blessings. (Prov. 3:10; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13) But the crushing of grapes with feet is a symbol of God's judgment upon the rebellious. (Is. 63:1-6; Rev. 19:13)

Often wealthy farmers would rent out their grape farms to tenants and then move to a big city. Many rich landowners did not like to live in Palestine since they thought it was a backward place. They preferred to live in Syria, Greece, or Rome. The tenants could either pay the owner in cash or they could give them a percentage of the crops, often about 25% of the crop.

Most likely Jesus based his story upon Is. 5:1-7. In his parable, Jesus told how the landowner, representing God the Father, carefully planted the best grape vines and protected the vines with walls. This symbolizes how God carefully choose the Jews, protected them from their enemies and took care of them. But God went to live in a distant land, or heaven. He gave the watch care of the grape farm (Jewish

people) into the care of "*tenants*" who symbolized the leaders of the Jews. Jesus was reminding the Jewish leaders that the nation belonged to God and not to them. (Jer. 23, Ezek. 34) They were to lead for the glory of God by taking care of God's people. God the Father looked for the fruit of righteousness and obedience that was due him, but the leaders of the Jews and the Jewish nation as a whole never gave him good fruit. And he looked for the fruit of their belief and acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, but instead found rejection.

Legally the landowner could do whatever he wanted with those living on his land, but this landowner was very tolerant, showing mercy and patience. So he did not quickly expel the land tenant farmers. Perhaps because of this patience, the tenant farmers began to think that they were in charge and the land belonged to them. This is a common problem for church leaders. When chosen as leaders at first they understand that they are supposed to serve the people. But it is not long until they begin to think that the people are meant to serve the desires of the leaders and ministers. They become abusive and often are more concerned with what they can get out of ministry and leadership or from the church members than what they can do to help God's people.

Q. 25. a) Describe how you have seen the attitude of leaders change towards why they are ministering the longer they are in positions of leadership. b) Why do you think this change happens?

God sent "*servants*," representing the prophets of the Old Testament as well as John the Baptist, to his people. But the Jews abused these messengers and even killed some of them. In the end, the landowner sent his "*son*," Jesus, thinking that they would honor him. Perhaps the fact that Jesus was sent last indicated that Jesus is the final and greatest revelation from God. (Heb. 1:1-3) In Jewish law if the landowner died without heirs, those living on the land can sometimes claim it as their own. So these tenants killed the son, thinking they could take over the land for themselves. Jesus was indicating how these religious leaders had rejected God's Son and would soon kill him. (This was a clear indication that Jesus was claiming to be God's Son. And it answered the previous question of the religious leaders about the source of Jesus' authority to cast people out of the Temple. In this parable Jesus also indicated that he was greater than John the Baptist and all of the Old Testament prophets. They were "*servants*" but he was the "*son*.")

"*What do you think the owner will do to the tenant farmers?*" asked Jesus. The leaders responded that the owner would punish the tenants and give the grape farm to others. In this statement, there are hidden two truths.

First, God was about to punish the first tenants, both the religious leaders and the Jews. Just 40 years later, the Romans would kill many of the chief priests and elders, holding them responsible for the rebellion of the Jews. The Jews would be scattered and for over 1900 years would not enjoy their own land until it was partially given back to them in 1948 (European Calendar).

Second, Jesus meant that the special position of being God's grape farm was going to be given to others. The church, made up of people from all nations, would replace the Jews as the recipient of God's gracious blessings. The question we must ask ourselves is "Are we like the Jews, enjoying God's blessing but not bearing the fruit of righteousness and spreading the Gospel like he wants?" If so, we too will experience the anger of the landowner, God the Father.

Jesus next reminded the religious leaders of prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the "rejected" stone. "If Jesus is the Messiah, why was he rejected by his own people, especially by the religious leaders who knew the Old Testament?" was a question many Jews asked throughout the first century. Jesus quoted from one of the songs the Jews had just sung as they were coming to Jerusalem for the Passover, Psalm 118:22-23. When this song was written, it referred to how God took the despised Jewish people and made them the recipients of his special care. The Jews later interpreted this prophecy of the rejected stone to refer to famous people like Abraham, David, and even to the Messiah.

Scholars debate which "stone" Jesus referred to. It could be the "cornerstone," the largest foundation stone in a building like the Temple. The first stone builders would lay was the stone that was at the corner of the building. It had to be large so that it would be able to carry the weight of the whole building, and it had to be well designed so that the rest of the building was straight. The image is of builders looking at a stone and saying it was not good enough for the building (representing the people of God.) But God then took that stone and placed it in the major piece of his new building, the church. Or it could be the stone was the "capstone" or the final stone put on an arch at the top of the building holding the rest of the arch in place so it would not collapse. Either way, the idea is the same. The Jews looked at Jesus, the poor man from Galilee and said "This is not the Messiah." But God would take the one they rejected and make him the foundation of a whole new people of God. Jesus is the foundation of the Church (1 Cor. 3:10-11) and he is the one who holds the people of God together. (See Act 4:11-12; Rom. 9:32-33; 1 Pet. 2:4-8 for how the early church applied this verse.)

Jesus' last words must have shocked and angered not only the religious leaders but the rest of the Jews. The Jews thought that their relationship with God was guaranteed by rite of them being the children of Abraham. But now Jesus says that in judgment for their rebellion, God is giving the vineyard to others. No doubt, Jesus had in mind the church that would consist not only of Jews, but of Gentiles as well. But those in a church are not guaranteed God's blessing either, for as Jesus said it is given to those who would bear fruit. Jesus does not emphasize being a member of a certain church. Rather, he desires that people have a vibrant faith in Jesus that is characterized by obedience and the bearing of fruit such as love for people, taking the Gospel to those who are lost, and helping those who face injustice.

Jesus then combined two other Old Testament prophecies to show the result upon those who refuse to accept him as a Messiah. Using Isaiah 8:14-15, Jesus said that he would be a stone that would cause people to stumble and fall. The Jews and many people throughout history would stumble over how a simple carpenter who was crucified could be the Messiah, God's divine Son. From the prophecy of Daniel 2:34, 44 Jesus foretold how he would be the "stone" who would fall from heaven and destroy the kingdoms of the earth and become the eternal mountain. People might struggle against Jesus and his followers and seem to overcome them. But in the end, Jesus and his kingdom alone will stand. Jesus ends his warning that although God allows each person to determine how they will react to Jesus, those who are indifferent to him or fight against him will find themselves "crushed" by Jesus. There are times this happens in history. Three hundred years after Jesus gave these promises the Roman Empire was forced to acknowledge the power of Jesus and the church. But ultimately this happens in eternity when each individual will stand in judgment before Jesus and will be forced to kneel in honor to Jesus, admitting that he is Lord and then face eternal condemnation. (Phil. 2:10) He will "crush" them.

Unfortunately the leaders did not humble themselves before the rock. Rather, they walked away and continued their plans to kill Jesus. Normally the chief priests, who were Sadducees, and the Pharisees

were bitter enemies; but in their hatred of Jesus, they began to work together, looking for ways to kill Jesus. Three days, later on Friday when Jesus died on the cross, their desire was fulfilled and the stone "rejected" by mankind. But upon his resurrection from the dead on Sunday, Jesus became the cornerstone of the church which will last throughout eternity.

Q. 26. a) Describe how Christians often talk about Jesus and his Lordship more than they seek to live in obedience to him. b) List some of the "fruit" that Jesus is seeking to see in our lives and in the church. How well do you think believers are evidencing that fruit? Explain your answer.

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET (MT. 22:1-14, LK. 14:6-24)

One of the popular parables Jewish religious teachers liked to tell was about God's wedding celebration for the Jews at the end of time. (See Is. 61:10; 62:5; Hos. 2:14-23 for the Old Testament imagery of God's people being God's bride. The New Testament also pictures our relationship with God in a similar way in Rev. 19:7-8; 21:9-10). So Jesus tells a similar story, but with a much different meaning. The Jews thought that enjoying God's blessing as symbolized by a wedding celebration was guaranteed to them because of the covenant they enjoyed with God. Most Jews also thought that because they kept the laws of the Old Testament they were better than people like the tax collectors. But Jesus shocked the Jews by showing how at the marriage celebration when eternity starts, those who are expected to be at the celebration will not be there, but those whom people did not expect to be present would be there.

A king, symbolizing God the Father, planned a wedding celebration for his son, symbolizing Jesus Christ. That wedding celebration symbolized the eternal blessings that the people of God will enjoy when eternity comes. In Jewish culture, there were two invitations to a wedding. The first was given to the honored guests months in advance. It informed the guests what day the wedding would be held on, but did not state the time. Guests were obligated at that time to inform the host whether or not they would come. Since a wedding celebration of important people often lasted for a week, it took a lot of peoples' time, and they were not allowed to come and go as is common in our weddings. The king sent out invitations to all of the important, respectable people in his kingdom and they accepted the invitation.

The second invitation was given when the wedding celebration was ready to begin. So the king sent out his servants to all of those who had agreed to come to the wedding. Amazingly, every invited guest refused to come, claiming to be busy. The Jews would have seen this as a rebellious act of the people against the king. But the king was patient with them and sent servants again telling those invited that the banquet was prepared. Jews rarely ate meat, so to have oxen and cattle to eat was a special privilege. But still the guests refused to come. In fact they became abusive to the messengers sent by the king and even killed some of them. Jews believed that a messenger represents the one sending him and how one treats the messenger is how one treats the sender. So to abuse the messenger of the king (God) was an act of rebellion against the king. These "*servants*" is a reference to the prophets in the Old Testament and to John the Baptist. As God's messengers, throughout the history of the Jews they had called upon the Jews to prepare themselves for God's eternal kingdom. But the Jews abused them physically (e.g., Jeremiah [Jer. 38:4-13]) and even killed some (e.g., [Uriah, Jer. 26:20-23]). God's patience has a limit, so Jesus told of the day when the king killed all of those who despised him so much. This could be a reference to what would happen in 70 AD when the Romans defeated the Jewish nation and thousands died and the rest were scattered across the world. But it no doubt includes a warning of what will happen at the end times to all who seek to rebel against God and the King of kings, Jesus Christ. They too will be destroyed. (Rev. 19:15)

God did not want to host a wedding celebration for his son and not have anyone to come. In fact, he wanted eternity to be filled with people enjoying his blessings. So he sent out his messengers (representing the disciples, including us) to go through the city and invite anyone they saw. It did not matter if they were "good" (respectable in the eyes of people) or "bad" (terrible sinners like the tax collectors and prostitutes). All were invited to come to the wedding feast. God's call to salvation reaches out to all who want to listen. It is given in grace to those who don't deserve it. It does not matter whether we have grown up in a respectable Christian home or have fallen into deep sin, we all have received the invitation to come to the wedding celebration of enjoying God for eternity. No doubt Jesus is hinting here that even the Gentiles whom the Jews despised were also invited. The religious leaders and Jews who should have accepted God's invitation of salvation and believed in Jesus, insulted God by rejecting Jesus. But the tax collectors, sinners, and later the Gentiles who never expected to be invited to God's eternal celebration suddenly found themselves being accepted by God because they repented and accepted Jesus. What amazing grace!

But then Jesus' parable changes from joy and celebration to judgment. Often the Jewish host of the celebration would arrive after the celebration had begun. And so the king arrived at the place of celebration later than the guests and found one of the guests who was not dressed in wedding clothes. Scholars debate what exactly happened here. Often rich hosts would give proper clothes to the guests as they arrived. So it could be that this person refused to put on the clothes which the king had given him. More likely, however, it was expected that the guest put on his best clean clothes to attend the wedding. But this person was dressed in regular clothes. To not have on good clothes to attend the celebration was an insult to the king and to the son. To the Jews, wedding clothes symbolized a pure and righteous life. (See Rev. 19:7-8) So what Jesus meant was that there was something wrong with the life of this person. There are two possible sources of righteousness:

First, there is the righteousness that is given to us by God when we believe on Jesus. (Is. 61:10; Rom. 3:21-26; 4:22-25) This righteousness finds its source in the holiness of Jesus, and when we believe, God gives it to us. So when God looks at believers, we are covered with the righteousness of Jesus and therefore God declares us righteous. It could be this parable is teaching that this person claimed to be a follower of Jesus. But he was trusting in his own works, being good enough to please God, rather than trusting God to give him the righteousness needed for God's acceptance. As Paul says in Eph. 2:8-9, we can do nothing by ourselves to have God declare us righteous. Salvation is always a gift from God that we receive by faith.

Second, there is the righteousness of a life lived in obedience to God's desires for our lives. (Rev. 19:8) Although salvation is a gift of God that we get by faith, authentic faith changes how we live. It brings upon us the responsibility to walk in obedience to God's desires for our lives. We live in moral purity, don't lie, are kind to others, and we share with people about the Gospel. We might sin, but upon sinning we confess our sins and seek to live once again in obedience to God. It seems that Jesus was referring to this type of clothes that the man did not have on. Jesus is warning those who want to be his followers that although he joyfully accepts all who come to him for salvation, their lives must change so that they live in obedience to him. There is no such thing as a believer who makes a decision to believe and then lives in open and ongoing rebellion against God. Jesus warned that if we do that, our faith was not real. We haven't repented of our life of sin and submitted to God. And like this man not dressed properly at the wedding, we will face the eternal judgment just as severe as those who openly rejected Jesus.

The king told the servants to take the man, tie him up, and throw him into "darkness." Jesus pictured eternal judgment through different symbolic images. One of the images is darkness. We have all found ourselves on a dark night with no ability to see things and have been frightened by it. Some are so afraid of the darkness that they keep a light burning all night. Jesus shows us a picture of a place where there is no light or nothing that brings us joy. Imagine what the world would be like if God were to take away all of the things he gives us out of grace- no more rain, no houses, no lights, and no food. So Jesus is saying that eternal damnation will be a place where none of the blessings of God will be found. Eternal judgment is also described as a place of "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*." This symbolizes great pain and agony. We might not know exactly what hell will be like, but Jesus warns that if we do not have righteousness, then we will live forever without any of his blessings and experience agony forever.

The Jews often used the expression "*many*" to refer to all, and so Jesus ends his parable with the statement that "many" (all) have received the invitation of salvation and eternal blessing. Anywhere the Gospel is being preached, it is an invitation to people to be reconciled to God and enjoy eternity with him. They have the right to accept or reject that invitation. But to reject the invitation is to rebel against the king and receive his eternal judgment. In the end it does not matter if someone totally rejects Jesus as their Savior or pretends to be a Christian but does not live a changed life. Both types of people will face the same judgment by God. But Jesus ends by saying that those who are truly saved [called the "*chosen*" because they have revealed through their lives that God has chosen them for salvation. (Rom. 8:28-30)] are "*few*" in number. Most likely this word "*few*" does not mean that there will only be a few believers. Rather, it was a Jewish expression that there will be a lot fewer people who are part of God's eternal celebration than have received his invitation. Will you be part of that celebration?

Q. 27. a) Describe people you know who have reacted to God's invitation to salvation like the first group. b) Describe people you know whom no one would expect to be saved, but will enjoy eternal life because they accepted God's invitation. c) Describe people you know who claim to have accepted the invitation to the celebration but are not living as if they have the wedding clothes of righteousness on. d) List things from your life that reveal that you are wearing the right wedding clothes and are ready for God's wedding celebration.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. Read Mt. 20:1-16. a) Describe what this parable teaches about God, salvation, and people. b) Review the list of truths that the study guide says this parable teaches. Which ones do most Christians struggle with?

2. Read Mk. 10:35-45. a) Contrast leadership according to the world and leadership according to Jesus. How are they similar or different? b) Describe how the world's understanding of leadership is frequently seen in the church. c) List examples of how Jesus' type of leadership is seen in the church. d) Make a list of ways church leaders would act differently if they were to apply Jesus' teaching about leadership to their ministry in the church.

3. a) How did Jesus treat Zacchaeus and what does this teach us about our relationship to people of disrepute? b) How did Jesus describe his purpose for coming to the earth? What does this teach us about our purpose for ministry? c) Compare the reactions of the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus to the Gospel. How did money indicate their repentance or lack of it? d) Discuss ways that our attitude toward money indicates our spiritual life.

4. Read Lk. 19:11-27. a) What does this parable teach about the faithful use of ability and time God has given us? b) Describe ways that Christians can show faithfulness like the slave who gained 10 minus or lack of faithfulness like the one who gained nothing. c) Discuss which slave most Christians in the church resemble and what church leaders can do to help them become more faithful servants.

5. a) What does the story of cursing the fig tree teach us about Israel and us today? b) What does the parable of the two sons teach us about the nature of God's true children? c) What does the parable of the tenants of the vineyard teach about Israel? d) What does the parable of the wedding banquet teach us about God's kingdom and the necessity of righteousness? e) Make a list of important lessons these parables teach for believers today.

LESSON TWENTY-ONE

FIRST DAY

Getahun and Gebre were brothers who owned a store. They also had a coffee export business. When people came into their shop and wanted a receipt for what they bought they would ask "Do you want me to make a receipt out for VAT tax or not?," giving them a cheaper price if VAT was not included. And although the government taxed all coffee going from their area to Addis Ababa, they often looked for ways to get the coffee to Addis without paying this tax by hiding it under other produce. "Others are doing it. It isn't hurting anyone. Plus we need the extra profit so that we can give more to the church" they would rationalize.

Q. 1. a) Describe how you have seen Christians look for ways to not pay their taxes. b) Do you think this is right? Explain your answer.

Should Christians pay taxes, especially when not paying taxes helps them have more money to give to the church? What if they don't like the government, do they have to obey the laws which are not convenient? Like us, the Christians during the days of the early church had to understand God's desires on this issue. If the government worked to hinder their worship and still demanded they pay taxes, should they try to avoid paying the government? Hidden in Jesus' discussion with the religious leaders is an answer that guides us in knowing how to respond.

Q. 2. Read Mt. 22:15-22. a) What question did the Pharisees and Herodians ask Jesus? b) How did he respond? c) How do you think Jesus' response provides guidelines to what Getahun and Gebre were doing?

1. Jesus answers the leaders' question about paying taxes to Rome (Mt. 22:15-22, Mk. 12:13-17, Lk. 20:20-26)

The Tuesday of the week when Jesus died was a day filled with conflict between him and the religious leaders. Using parables, Jesus had just taught the people that his reign upon the earth was to be delayed as he was soon to return to the Father. And the Jews who rejected him as their king would be punished by God. The religious leaders were looking for ways to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people so that they could arrest Jesus without the people getting angry at them. So the leaders of Israel and different religious groups asked Jesus trick questions which they hoped would force Jesus to say something that would cause him to lose his popularity or get him in trouble with the Roman government. Last week we studied the first question that originated with the Sanhedrin. The leaders asked Jesus "Where did your authority come from for your actions and teaching?" Jesus escaped their trap by asking them to tell him first where John the Baptist's authority came from. Because they refused to answer this question, Jesus refused to directly answer their question.

The second group to ask Jesus a question was an unusual group of Pharisees and Herodians. Normally these two groups were bitter enemies who had very different political views. The Pharisees, although willing to submit to the Roman government, longed for Jewish independence from Rome. The Herodians were a small group of Jews who wanted to see the leadership of the whole Jewish nation restored to the Herods under Herod Antipas who was ruling in Galilee. They knew that they must have the

support of the Roman government for this to happen, so they wanted to keep Rome happy by paying taxes and submitting to the Roman authorities. There was another group that was popular especially with Galileans called "the Zealots" who taught that Jews were not to pay their taxes at all. Jesus clearly did not support their view, although some of his disciples might have. (The disciple Simon's name indicates that he might have been a Zealot before he began to follow Jesus. [Mt. 10:4])

The group asked Jesus the trick question "Should we pay taxes to Rome?" For over a hundred fifty years the Jews had functioned almost independent of the Gentile nations and did not have to pay taxes. But in 6 AD, just 27 years earlier, the Roman government had taken over direct leadership of Judea requiring the Jews to pay three types of taxes. First, there was tax on produce from the land. One fifth of everything grown was to be paid to Rome either in cash or by giving them the crops. Second, there was income tax and the Jews were required to pay 1% of all of their income to Rome. Third, there was a tax on all adults. Men between the ages of 14 to 65 and women between the ages of 12 to 65 had to pay one denarius (equivalent to one day's wage) to the Roman government every year. It was probably this tax which Jesus would have had in mind by asking for a one denarius coin. Merchants also had to pay between 2-5% of the value of their goods when they entered into Roman territory.

The Jews hated paying taxes for two reasons. First, to pay tax was to admit that they were under the authority of a foreign power. Many Jews believed that God was their rightful king and believed that paying taxes to Rome was to admit that there was another king ruling over them. Second, on the coin was a picture of the Roman emperor Tiberius Augustus who ruled over Rome from 14 AD to 37 AD. The Jews believed that it was wrong to have pictures like this believing it broke the second commandment about not having any graven images. Also under the image of the emperor was written "god and high priest." Tiberius Augustus was encouraging people in the Roman Empire to honor him as a god. This of course went against the Biblical teaching that only God is the true God. So the Jews did not like to pay taxes in honor of a false god and those taxes were often used to sponsor temples for the gods.

The Pharisees and Herodians thought they had Jesus in a difficult position. If he supported the view of the Pharisees and said that Jews should not pay taxes, the Herodians would report Jesus to the Roman government as rebelling against the government since paying taxes was a symbol of being subject to Rome. But if he supported the Herodians and told people to pay taxes, the Pharisees and the people would turn against Jesus.

The Pharisees and Herodians told Jesus that he was *"a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are."* It is doubtful that the Jewish leaders were praising Jesus. Probably they were thinking that by flattering Jesus, he would not see the trap in the question they were asking.

Although they were trying to trick Jesus, this statement reveals the character of Jesus. As a man of integrity, Jesus was always consistent in how he acted. He had no part of his life that he was ashamed to show to others. And Jesus did not change what he said depending upon whether the person was a friend or not, or whether he was rich or not. Often church leaders today lack integrity, giving the impression to people that they are spiritual when in fact they do not read God's Word, pray, give their tithe, or help people. And what they say is often not what they feel is right, but what they think people want to hear. They do something good for a rich or educated person but ignore and even despise a poor person. But these Jewish leaders knew that Jesus treated all people the same.

Q. 3. a) Describe ways church leaders and ministers can lack integrity. b) Describe ways church leaders and ministers often "favor" one group of people over another. c) Why do you think these two characteristics are important for godly leadership?

Jesus knew that this was a trick question, so he asked for one of the Roman coins used to pay taxes. Jesus told them to give to Caesar what belongs to him and to God what belongs to him. In Jesus' reply there is an important principle about how Christians are to respond to earthly governments. Christians are in a difficult position. On the one hand, we are citizens of heaven and are answerable to the ultimate king of the universe. (Phil. 3:20) So we must long for and support our heavenly nation. But we are still living on earth and therefore citizens of the country in which we live. Since we have two citizenships, Jesus said that we are answerable to the two leaders of the kingdoms:

First, as citizens of earth, we are "*to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.*" As people living in the Roman Empire, the Jews were supposed to pay the taxes. Jesus taught that while on earth and citizens of a certain country, we must contribute what is asked of us to the things that help a country function. All countries get their money for roads; paying teachers, soldiers and police; and building schools and clinics from the taxes of its people. If citizens are to receive the benefits of living in a country, they should contribute to that nation. When a person refuses to pay his taxes, he is stealing from his country. The New Testament insists that all believers are to obey the nation in which they live in all things that are not prohibited by God's laws. (See also Rom 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17) The Bible also teaches that it is God who establishes all authority; so the Jews should not feel that they are supporting an oppressive regime when paying taxes since ultimately they are paying taxes to the government God has ordained and were therefore honoring God.

Second, Jesus said that the Jews were to give to God what was due him. As citizens of the heavenly kingdom, we are to give to our heavenly king everything that is due him. The disciples were to give their obedience, their tithe, their worship, their service, and their love and honor. The Bible teaches that we owe God our whole beings as citizens of his kingdom. Our lives are not our own, they have been bought with a price. (1 Cor. 6:20) Our whole life is to be lived with the spirit of submission to Jesus. Perhaps Jesus was indirectly accusing these leaders. They were arguing about a simple thing like paying taxes to a human government. But the most important question in life is about one's relationship to God. And they weren't honoring God because they were not submitting to Jesus Christ and accepting him as the Messiah.

As believers, it is our responsibility to obey all leaders, whether they be political leaders or church leaders. We are to do whatever they ask of us **as long as what is being asked of us does not go against the commandments of our eternal king, God.** It is when the earthly king tells us to do something we know God does not want us to do that we then should say "We must obey God and not man!" (Acts 4:19; 5:29)

Q. 4. a) List examples of regulations of the government that many Christians choose to ignore or disobey. What do you think Jesus would say about such actions? b) List examples of things we can give to God that is due him as our heavenly king. c) List some examples of where human regulations go against commandments of our heavenly king. d) Read Mt. 22:23-33. What question did the Sadducees ask Jesus? What did they misunderstand about God?

2. The Sadducees ask Jesus about the resurrection (Mt. 22:23-33, Mk. 12:18-27, Lk. 20:27-40)

When the Herodians and Pharisees were defeated by Jesus, another religious group decided to test Jesus as well. The Sadducees were a religious party consisting of the chief priests and many of the heads of wealthy Jewish families, and they controlled Jewish politics. Although they did not like the fact that Rome was ruling them, in order to stay in power, the Sadducees would do all they could to not offend the Romans. They were threatened by Jesus' popularity and knew that if Jesus would lead a rebellion against Rome, the Romans would punish the leaders. Religiously the Sadducees believed that only the books written by Moses were inspired by God, not the books of history and prophecy. The Sadducees also did not believe in spirit beings or in the resurrection of the dead. There was a long-standing theological disagreement between the Sadducees and the Pharisees over the possibility of a resurrection. Because the Sadducees did not believe the rest of the Old Testament books were from God or that the many oral laws of the rabbis were binding, they were the bitter enemies of the Pharisees. The Sadducees were also willing to adapt Greek culture, much to the anger of the majority of Jews. Very few Jews respected them.

The Sadducees sought to get Jesus involved in a useless theological argument that they thought would reveal the fact that Jesus was not trained theologically, lessening the respect of the people. Even though they did not believe in the resurrection since it was not mentioned in the Pentateuch, they asked Jesus a theological question dealing with the resurrection from the dead. The basis for the question which the Sadducees asked Jesus was an Old Testament command that if a married man died without any children, his brother was required to marry his brother's wife and produce a child. (Deut. 25:5-6) The child would be considered the son of the dead man and carry on his family line and inherit his property. The Sadducees made up a story of a widow who married seven brothers without ever producing an heir. Then they asked Jesus when the resurrection took place, whose wife would she be?

The Sadducees sought to embarrass Jesus with his lack of knowledge of Scripture, but Jesus embarrassed them with their ignorance of what the Bible, even the Pentateuch, taught. Jesus said that the Sadducees had two problems. First, they did not know the Pentateuch that hinted of the reality of a resurrection. Second, they did not comprehend the power of God to raise the dead. In their trying to rationalize how impossible it was for a decayed body to raise from the dead, they forgot how God can do all things. The one who created the first body out of nothing could also raise a dead person and give him a new body. Jesus then explained why the Sadducees were wrong in their understanding of the resurrection:

First, they were wrong in thinking that the resurrected body is just the same as the body as we know it now. So if being human now involved getting married and having sex with a woman, the Sadducees assumed that when a body resurrected it would be the same. But Jesus insisted that the resurrected body will be different. Just as angels do not have sexual intercourse and procreate, so also the resurrected body will not procreate. Therefore, it will not be important to figure out whose wife the woman will be. The New Testament teaches that when we rise from the dead, in some ways our bodies are similar to our current bodies, but in other ways greatly different. (1 Cor. 15:42-44) Most details about life after death are hidden from us so we must be careful not to speculate much about it. Nor are we to put much trust in those who claim to have seen what life is like after death.

Second, the Sadducees were wrong in thinking that there was no reference to a resurrection in the Pentateuch. Jesus referred the Sadducees back to the time God met with Moses in the wilderness and identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Ex. 3:6) God did not use the past tense and say that he had been the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Instead, he used the present tense as if

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still alive. So the Pentateuch did teach that when a person died physically they did not cease to exist as the Sadducees taught. Rather, they continued to live, and if they continued to live, it was logical to assume that God would give them a resurrected body.

(Notice how Jesus said that the writings of the Pentateuch was "God said to you." This is a reminder to all of us that every time we read the Bible, it is not the writings of man. All the books are the writings of God, just as if God was speaking to us. To not read God's word is an insult just as if we were to turn away and leave as God was speaking to us face to face. To not do what it says is as evil as disobeying a command God were to give us in a direct meeting. Every follower of Jesus is expected to treat the Bible as the words of God, to be accepted and obeyed, not to be ignored or disobeyed.)

Much to the delight of the Jews, the Sadducees left defeated by the wisdom of Jesus. Later Christians would make the resurrection of the dead one of the most important theological truths of the Bible. Paul said that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then all of Christianity is false and we might as well live for temporary pleasure. (1 Cor. 15:32) As Christians faced persecution and death, it was this truth that they would rise from the dead that gave them hope and courage. We must be careful that in our seeking the temporal blessings of the earth that we don't live as if there is no resurrection from the dead and eternity which is forever.

Q. 5. a) Although Christians believe in the resurrection from the dead, describe ways we can live as if that resurrection is not going to happen. How does living with an awareness of the coming resurrection change how Christians live? b) Read Mk. 12:28-34. 1) What question did the scribe ask Jesus? 2) How did Jesus answer? 3) What did the scribe say was more important than sacrifices?

3. The scribe asks Jesus which commandment is most important (Mk. 12:28-34, Mt. 22:34-40)

A scribe was listening to the conversation between Jesus and the Sadducees and was impressed with Jesus' response. So he decided to ask Jesus his own question: "*Which command is the most important?*" The scribes were the theological experts during Jesus' time, similar to graduates from the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology or Trinity College. Many of them were Pharisees who sought to define how the Old Testament laws applied to specific situations Jews found themselves in and were therefore those who originated many of the oral laws that the Jews were asked to follow. During the days of Jesus, there were two tendencies for these scribes. First, the scribes kept adding oral laws as they kept looking for new ways to apply the Old Testament laws. Second, knowing how complex all these laws were, the scribes began to try to summarize the Old Testament laws under fewer laws. So they often divided the many laws and traditions into the "heavy" commandments which all were to follow and the "light" commandments which they did not seek to apply as strictly.

The scribe who was listening to Jesus asked him if there was one "law" that was the heaviest law of all, a law that would include all other laws. Scribes often debated this and came up with similar responses to what Jesus made. But Jesus' response is unique in two ways. First Jesus combined love for God and love for others into one inseparable command. He taught that you cannot love God without also loving others, and you cannot truly love others without also loving God. Second, Jesus expanded who the "neighbor" was from being someone of the same tribe (Jew) or living in the immediate vicinity (alien in Israel) to include all people anywhere with whom we come in contact or can help. In his answer, we can see the following:

a. The most important commandment is to love God with all of our beings. By mentioning heart, soul, mind, and strength Jesus is saying that we are to love God with every part of our being; our minds and what we think, the choices we make, and how we serve God. For the Jews, love was not primarily an emotion we feel towards someone. Rather, love was defined by how one acts and to love God is to submit to him in all areas of life, to totally obey him in all of his commands, to honor him through worship, and to serve him.

Jesus took this commandment from Deut. 6:4-5. As part of their traditions, every day the Jews would recite this twice as well as every time they worshipped. It is part of what is called "The Shema," which in Hebrew means "Hear" taken from the first word of the passage where God tells everyone to "Hear." It was usually written above the door of their home and written on a piece of paper which they then put in a little leather box to be worn on the forehead. Every Jew would have affirmed that this was the most important commandment. They knew that life does not revolve around us and our desires, but God and his desires. One of the most important lessons a Christian must learn is to change the orientation of his life from thinking primarily about himself or his family and living to please himself to living to please God. All sin finds its roots in seeking to please ourselves more than we please God.

b. The second commandment is to love others. This was taken from Lev. 19:18. It is important to note that Jesus did not say that it is enough for us to focus our attention upon our relationship with God. Jesus knew that the only way that we can really honor God is by properly relating to those around us. The Jews would have understood the "*neighbor*" in Leviticus to either be a fellow Jew and perhaps an "alien" living in Israel. (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:18-19) But no Jew would have imagined that God wants us to love all people, even enemies like the Romans. Jesus had earlier taught that in God's eyes the "*neighbor*" is anyone, even those from another tribe or religion. Again, "love" here is not defined by good feelings about others, but by how we act towards them. Jesus knew that naturally we show love towards ourselves by not doing things that hurt us and we usually look for ways to meet our desires. Jesus says that we are to have that same type of thinking for others, doing for them what we would want them to do for us if the situation was reversed. (See Mt. 7:12; Phil. 2:3-4)

We often make following God complex with a long list of what we should and should not do. But Jesus encourages us to focus our lives upon two commandments- loving God with our whole beings and loving others in practical ways. Almost every thing that God desires of us is included in these two commandments.

Quoting 1 Samuel 15:22 and Hosea 6:6, the scribe agreed with Jesus' summary of all of God's desires. Although scribes placed great emphasis upon sacrificing animals in the Temple, this scribe understood God's heart by showing how the fulfillment of these two commandments is more important than any sacrifice or ritual in the church. We often think that God is most pleased when we sing songs of praise (which is easy for us to do) rather than studying in a Bible study (which requires more effort). Or he is more pleased with us when we fast and pray rather than helping someone in our community who is struggling financially. But Jesus insists that life cannot be separated out like that. The command to love God with all of our being can only be fulfilled when all of our lives (what we think about, who we have as friends, what we do with our money) seeks to honor Jesus. But it is also fulfilled when we forgive others when they hurt us, especially those of other religions who may do evil things against us or when we help the widows and orphans in our community.

Most of the scribes resisted Jesus and his teaching. But Jesus commented that this particular scribe was near to the kingdom of God. This would have shocked the scribe, for with his knowledge of God's Word and his seeking to please God, he would have thought that he was already in God's kingdom. But it takes more than being "good" to become acceptable to God. What would finally make this person part of God's kingdom would be for him to repent of his sin, accept Jesus as his Messiah, and follow him. No Jew, no matter how zealous in following the Old Testament, could enter the kingdom of God without this.

Q. 6. a) List things we can do in various areas of our lives to demonstrate our love for God. b) List things we are expected to do for others that demonstrate our love for them. c) Describe how Christians often think God is primarily concerned with our "worship" more than other things in our lives. d) Read Mt. 22:41-46. 1) What did Jesus ask the religious leaders? 2) What do you think he was teaching in this question?

4. Jesus asks the religious leaders about the identity of David's Son (Mt. 22:41-46, Mk. 12:35-37, Lk. 20:41-44)

Jesus escaped every attempt by the religious leaders to humiliate him by their trick questions. Jesus next asked the religious leaders his own question. Rather than trying to trick them, Jesus was seeking to expand their understanding of who the Messiah was. (You will remember that the Jewish word "Messiah" is the same as the Greek word "Christ" and both mean "The Anointed One" to refer to the Jewish practice of anointing a king with oil. In the Old Testament, this name eventually referred to a special king after the line of David who would rule over the Jews.) Jesus was telling the Pharisees that the major question in life is not what is life like after death, or taxation, but to determine "Is Jesus the Messiah?" So he asked the religious leaders whose son the Messiah was going to be. They must have thought this was a simple and foolish question since almost all of the Jews agreed that the Old Testament prophesied that one day one of the descendants ("son") of David would come to rule over the nation of Israel and the world in a spectacular way. (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Jer. 23:5; Is. 9:7; 11:1; Ps. 2, 89:4, 132) In fact, the phrase "son of David" was the most common title for the Messiah which was one reason why the religious leaders got angry when people called Jesus the "son of David." They knew that Jesus was the physical descendant of David and they were afraid that the people were also going to make Jesus their king.

But Jesus wanted to demonstrate to them that the Old Testament in fact showed that Jesus was going to be more than human, but divine as well. Jesus reminded the Jews of one of the Psalms which David wrote, Psalm 110. Later the Christians would quote this Psalm more than any other Old Testament passage to demonstrate the deity of Jesus. (Acts 2:34-35; Heb 1:13; 5:6, 10; 7:17, 21) In this Psalm David reflected two "Lords" talking to each other. The first "Lord" (Yahweh in Hebrew) was God the Father and the second "Lord" (Adonai in Hebrew) whom David referred to as "my Lord" was the son of David. This second "Lord" was distinct from God the Father, but was honored by God the Father and given authority over the nations, ruling as second in command over God's kingdom from his right hand. The Jews believed that this was one of the prophecies about the Messiah, but they had never questioned why he was called "Lord." Hidden in this prophecy was an indication that the son of David would be more than human. No father would ever call his descendant (son) "Lord." In Jewish society the son honored the father, not the father the son. So in his prophecy about the Messiah given to him by the Holy Spirit, David knew that his son was going to be somehow greater than him and worthy of the title "Lord." (This Psalm also contains another amazing prophecy that the Messiah would also be an eternal priest, something the Jews never expected. The book of Hebrews makes much of this prophecy about Jesus being of the line of Melchizedek. [See Heb. 7:11-28])

It wasn't until after Jesus rose from the dead that the disciples began to realize that Jesus was more than a great human, he was divine as well. For a Jew to admit that anyone except God the Father was divine was a great change in their understanding (similar to how some religions might consider Jesus a prophet, but to call him "Son of God" is difficult). But the Jewish disciples knew that Jesus was more than a human and was in some unexplainable way divine. That is why Paul would stress that anyone wanting to be part of God's kingdom must admit that Jesus is Lord. (Rom. 10:9-13) And the Apostle John would insist that anyone claiming that Jesus is just a human is not saved, but is an agent of the antichrist. (1 Jn. 2:20-23) Amazed by Jesus' knowledge, after this none of the enemies of Jesus were willing to challenge Jesus by questioning him.

In this amazing prophecy is a warning we must all think about. Jesus the Messiah will one day have all of his enemies under his foot. In ancient times, when one king conquered another king, they would be forced to come and kneel down in front of the conquering king who would then take his foot and place it on their neck to demonstrate that they are now humbled and subject to him. Jesus is warning the Pharisees who were choosing to be his enemies that they too will be forced to submit to him. Paul reminds us that Jesus has been given a position of great honor and everyone will one day be forced to acknowledge him as Lord. (Phil. 2:9-11) It often seems that most people do not suffer by not following Jesus. Many stand as enemies of Jesus and his followers. Others, even Christians, might acknowledge that Jesus is God, but refuse to submit to him in obedience. These people might seem to not suffer for their rejection of Jesus and his authority now, but one day the king will return. At that time all enemies and disobedient people will be forced to humble themselves and acknowledge his lordship. Of course, by then it is too late to be a "friend of the king" and enjoy eternity with him. Instead they will be punished by him for eternity.

Q. 7. a) Describe how many have decided to fight against Jesus and suffered for it. How do many others seem to not suffer for their resistance of the Gospel? b) Describe how many Christians might claim that Jesus is their Savior, but they don't seek to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus over their lives. How do they many times seem to not suffer for their actions? c) What warnings does this passage give us to prepare for Jesus' reign over our lives now rather than have his foot on our necks later?

SECOND DAY

Ghirma was a gifted young man who came from one of the less developed parts of Ethiopia. He had limited education, but God had used him powerfully in ministry. But much of what he did was different from what church leaders were used to. For instance, often he did not wait for their permission before going to a new area to start a church. And he openly met with people of other religions and those whom the church did not consider as being "respectable." Despite warnings from the church leaders, he continued his practices. What angered the church leaders the most, however, was that Ghirma challenged them on some of the ways the church was being led along ethnic lines and the leaders' attitude of pride rather than humility. Their resistance of Ghirma grew until they expelled him from the church and wrote a letter to all evangelical churches to not allow him to minister, accusing him of teaching false doctrine.

Q. 8. a) Describe why there was a conflict between Ghirma and the church leaders. b) How is that conflict similar to the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders? c) Read Mt. 23. 1) List the different

things of which Jesus accused the religious leaders. 2) How are evangelicals sometimes guilty of similar things today?

It is very difficult for church leaders in established churches to remain attentive to the voice of God as he speaks and challenges them to change how they act. Church leaders, if they are not careful, seek to maintain the status quo and often do not recognize their sins, just like the Pharisees could not recognize their hypocrisy as they sought to carefully obey God's laws. And often God has to bring someone from outside of the existing leaders to challenge the leaders to change. But unfortunately the leaders often seek to protect themselves rather than humbly ask God "What of this is true and from you?" Like the religious leaders turned against the very Messiah they were waiting for, so also church leaders can turn against those God sends to bring revival and change. On the other hand, it is difficult because there are many false "prophets" attacking the church and church leaders just like the false prophets in the New Testament times caused the apostles difficulty. (e.g. 1 John, Jude) We are living in times where on one hand we need humility to listen to the voice of God as he seeks to speak to us through unexpected people and change us. But we also need wisdom to know what is from the enemy Satan as he seeks to confuse us through his false prophets.

JESUS WARNS AGAINST THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES (Mt. 23, Mk. 12:38-40, Lk. 20:45-47)

What sin disturbed Jesus the most? It wasn't ones we often talk about- drunkenness, adultery, polygamy, or immodest dress. Rather it was hypocrisy, the sin of pretending to be spiritual when we aren't. Just like this sin was most obviously found among the Pharisees, the most "religious" of the Jews during the days of Jesus, this sin most easily finds a place to grow in the lives of church leaders and ministers.

The religious leaders had sought to challenge Jesus and cause him to lose his reputation among the people. They had no desire to listen to him since what Jesus taught and did often undermined the authority of these religious leaders and what they taught. Jesus overcame all of their trick questions. And when he asked them his own question, they walked away unable to answer. In Matthew 23, we have Jesus' last known public teaching to the crowds. His message was a severe accusation against the religious leaders. After this, Jesus would focus his final teachings upon his disciples, those who had committed themselves to follow Jesus as their Messiah. Although Jesus was not speaking directly to the religious leaders but to the crowd and disciples, no doubt the religious leaders heard about what Jesus taught, solidifying their determination to kill Jesus.

Jesus warned the crowd and disciples against the "*teachers of the law*" and the "*Pharisees*." The teachers of the law were called "scribes" since they had the formal training in the Old Testament laws and the traditions of the fathers much like church ministers today go to the Evangelical Theological College or Makene Yesu seminary. Many of the scribes were Pharisees as well and sought to carefully follow the Old Testament teachings and the oral traditions of the elders. Jesus said that these men "*sat in the seat of Moses*." This expression has two meanings. First, it comes from the practice of the Jews who often sat the rabbis on a special seat, called the "seat of Moses," in the synagogue on the platform close to where the holy scrolls were kept. Second, the word "seat of Moses" could reflect the religious leaders' belief that they were the inheritors of the authority of Moses to protect and explain the Old Testament laws. They believed that God gave the authority to Moses who passed it on to Joshua and it was passed on throughout the generation until it came to them. So they thought that they were the only ones who knew what was right and wrong, not the common people.

1. Jesus tells those listening to do what the religious leaders say, but to not imitate how the religious leaders live (Mt. 23:1-2)

Jesus knew that there were many good things that the Pharisees and scribes taught. They were not going against the Bible, and much of what they taught was helpful. Plus, Jesus did not support a spirit of rebellion against leaders as is common in our churches today. Rather, he encouraged people to be able to distinguish between what is true and good and according to the will of God that the religious leaders were teaching and the attitudes and actions of the Pharisees that went against the will of God. Spiritual maturity is seen when we are able to evaluate things, keeping what is good and rejecting what is wrong.

How are we to handle things in the church when there are church leaders and ministers who do not live in a godly way? Should we rebel or stop listening to them? Jesus knew that there is some hypocrisy in all of us and if we look hard enough we will find it in all church leaders. The answer is not to stop listening to them. Rather, we are to listen to the truths that our leaders teach that are based upon the Bible. But we are to protect ourselves from resembling them if they act in an unbiblical way. None of us should think "I don't need to listen to them, they are hypocrites." Nor should we think "Because the church leader is doing it, I will do it as well." God expects us to be able to listen to the truths the church ministers teach and align our lives to it, rather than just copy what others have done. Jesus could also be saying that God, in his sovereignty, had allowed the religious leaders to be in authority, so except where their teachings violate the teachings of the Bible, the people were to submit and obey. A spirit of rebellion in the church is rarely helpful for that church.

2. Jesus lists various things religious leaders did which his followers were to make sure they did not copy

a. They were not supposed to copy the way religious leaders were burdening the people without helping them. (Mt. 23:3-4) Churches struggle in two ways. First, there are some churches who so focus upon the "love" of God that they do not teach about Biblical standards and the need to obey Jesus. This is currently one of the major problems facing the western church. Second, there are other churches who add to the commandments of the Bible regulations which they think help its members define what is "Christian" and what is not Christian. The scribes and Pharisees were guilty of this. They thought that in order to keep people from disobeying God, there should be lots of laws which defined a "good" Jew.

Over the years, however, several things happened to these rules.

First, the number of rules kept growing. In determining what is "good" and what is "bad" today, well-meaning church leaders fall into the trap of thinking they are the ones who are to clarify all of the specifics of a Christian's life (e.g. men not wearing braided hair, men not wearing ear rings, or how short a skirt a girl is allowed to wear). But we cannot determine for others all of the specifics of how people should act as followers of Jesus.

Second, the rules became more important than the original commandments. The Pharisees got more upset over Jesus not washing his hands in a proper way than they did over someone not helping a widow. In some churches, church leaders are more tolerant to a church leader who beats his wife and children than of a church member who has taken a drink of alcohol. One of the sad results of trying to control members through rules is that people stop focusing upon what is really important. They stop looking at their jealousy, pride, tribalism, cheating, or lying and no longer seek to change these actions. Instead, because they are not drinking, some people think that they are good Christians.

Third, double standards grow in the lives of church leaders who teach people to obey some of their laws but they and their children do not obey these laws. They teach people to come to the work day, but they don't come, or pray every day but they don't pray, or say they must attend a Bible study but the leaders themselves don't attend. They tend to be more tolerant of their own children when they fall into sin than they would tolerate in an ordinary member of the church.

Fourth, the religious leaders began to focus more upon impressing people through their "religiousness" than seeking to honor God. How the religious leaders dressed or prayed was done with the desire to impress people. This is similar to how choir members can begin to focus upon having the best choir robes or singing in a way that shows off their spirituality rather than just singing to honor God through their words.

Fifth, church leaders become judgmental and distance themselves from others who don't meet their standards of Christianity rather than draw close to them and lovingly seek to help them grow spiritually. This is what Jesus accused the religious leaders of doing. They added thousands of oral laws (burdens) which they taught the people to obey. But when the people tried and failed, the religious leaders would stand there pointing their fingers at them saying "you sinners." They did not help the common people grow in their ability to obey. How easy it is for us to point our fingers at those who do not live up to our standard of Christianity! How difficult it is for us to lovingly help people grow in their desire to honor Jesus by living in holiness!

Q. 9. a) Describe ways Christians often add rules that they think define spirituality. b) List ways you have seen the above five things grow out of such an attitude.

b. The religious leaders were primarily concerned with the impression they had on people by their religious actions. (Mt. 23:5) In Deut. 6:8 God told the people to attach his laws to their foreheads, hands, and write them on their walls. God was seeking to symbolically teach his people that in every way possible, they were to be thinking about and seeking to obey his commandments. But the Jews in Jesus time took this command literally. So they would take special verses out of the Old Testament (e.g., Ex. 13:1–10; 13:11–16; Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21) and put them in a small leather box which they then tied on their forehead and on their hands. They usually wore these when praying. But the religious leaders wanted to show off their spirituality. So they built large boxes to wear to impress people. And rather than wearing these boxes only when praying, they liked to wear them any time they were in public to show how "holy" they were. All Jews also wore small tassels on the four corners of their robes. (Deut. 22:12; Num. 15:37–41) They also had a special prayer shawl which had tassels which some people used as reminders when they prayed to make sure they prayed for all things they should, much like some Catholics have a string of beads which they go through when praying. These religious leaders made these even larger to impress people with their zeal for God's law.

c. The religious leaders loved the honorable greeting of being called "*rabbi*." (Mt. 23:6–12) The word *rabbi* means "my master." Jewish society was very careful in how they greeted people and they made sure in their greetings they paid special honor to religious leaders. It is one thing for people to seek to honor people by calling them "*rabbi*." Jesus accepted that title for himself. But it is another thing for rabbis or church leaders and ministers to seek to be called "*rabbi*," "*evangelist*," or "*pastor*" which caused them to think that they were better and more spiritual than the others. Jesus insisted that such an attitude should not be found in the church. He told his followers not to use honorific titles like "*rabbi*," which the scribes

enjoyed since it showed them to be the "scholars" of their people; or "father," which was what some disciples liked to call their leaders; or "teacher," another favorite term used by those studying under a rabbi. Jesus taught three major truths:

1) None of our titles should distract from the honor that is supposed to go to God and to Jesus. When we focus too much upon leaders (as reflected in the titles we give them), we take the glory we should give only to God and give it to them instead. Jesus insisted that only God the Father should be called "Father," not a teacher. And he insisted that only he as the founder of Christianity should be called "Teacher." Jesus is not talking about using a descriptive term to describe the work people do. For instance, if asked, a person can say "I am an evangelist." Rather, he was concerned with saying "I am Evangelist So-and-So.", which usually evidences pride.

2) The community of believers is a community of equals, similar to a family. No matter if we are the pastor or elder or ordinary members, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. There are no levels of Christians, with some being important and others less important. Anything that seems to create these levels, how ministers dress, the titles they are given, or the special honor certain people (rich, educated) receive goes against what Jesus taught.

3) A title earned by education (e.g., Dr. So-and-So) or given to us by people (e.g., Pastor So-and-So) mean nothing in the kingdom of God. What is important is the attitude of serving others selflessly. Rather than focusing upon the honor we receive, or the benefits we deserve, greatness lies when we keep asking "How can I help others, both in the church and outside the church?"

So what does this mean about our tendency in the church to call people doctor, elder, evangelist, or pastor? I believe Jesus would want us to remember the following:

1) It is not wrong to use a title to describe what a person does. So it is not wrong to say that person is an evangelist, doctor, or pastor. Throughout the New Testament we see people being described as a teacher. (Acts 13:1)

2) No person who is a doctor, pastor, or evangelist should focus upon the title and require people to use the title in a way that brings him honor. Those of us who are ministers and leaders in the church must do all we can to make sure people honor God alone, not us. If a title brings the honor to us, that is a sin.

3) Although not a "sin" if someone calls us "pastor" or "evangelist," we must be careful of two things. First, we must be careful of the pride that can grow in our hearts and cause us to think that somehow we are special and more spiritual than others. Second, we must be careful that the title does not cause a gap to develop between us and others in the church so that they think that we are special. Often the titles "priest" or "pastor" cause members of the church to think that we are more holy and more acceptable to God, which is a lie.

4) If you have a title or others call you by a title (e.g. "Evangelist Tesfaye"), pay no attention to it. Instead, focus upon how to serve others as a "servant." This is the role that God honors.

Q. 10. Think about how the church uses titles today. a) Describe how it is often used in the same way that the Pharisees used it. b) What practices in using titles would need to change to reflect more what Jesus taught here?

3. Jesus pronounces seven "woes" of judgment upon the religious leaders (Mt. 23:13-36)

The word "woe" comes out of the Old Testament prophets and was a strong word of condemnation. (Is. 5) It is the opposite to the Jewish idea of blessing, almost meaning "cursed." It is the combination of two emotions; the emotion of anger and judgment upon the sins of people, and the emotion of sorrow over people refusing to repent and therefore receiving God's punishment. Jesus pronounces seven "woes" against these religious leaders. The basic problem that would bring God's judgment upon them was because the religious leaders were overcome with "*hypocrisy*." The Greek word hypocrisy was often used of actors in a drama, people who pretended to be someone they weren't. It then became used for those who a) said one thing but acted in a different way, or b) who put on a show of their spirituality before others.

a. God's judgment will come upon those who hinder people from placing their faith in Jesus (Woe #1 and #2) [Mt. 23:13-15]

It is a serious matter to be in the position of teaching God's Word and leading God's people. We can be used by God greatly to help people. But we can also be used by Satan to hinder the spiritual life of people. Although the Jewish religious leaders were supposed to teach the people God's ways, but they actually hindered people from entering into God's kingdom. Jesus the Messiah had arrived. But they refused to enter into God's kingdom by believing on him. But even worse, because they were actively working against people following Jesus, they were stopping people from entering God's kingdom.

There are two ways we can "*hinder*" someone from coming into the kingdom and living as God desires.

First is to teach something that is unbiblical. There are many who think that they are followers of Jesus, but in reality they are placing their trust for salvation in being born into a Christian home or following rules and regulations established by the church. Legalism, the tendency to add to the Gospel by adding requirements for salvation turns it into being a non-Gospel. That is why Paul got so angry at those who were corrupting the message of the Gospel to the Galatians and said that whoever perverted the Gospel so that people believe what is false should be punished with eternal condemnation. (Gal. 1:6-9)

Second, we can hinder people from entering God's kingdom by adding so many rules and regulations that people give up trying to live in a way that pleases God. This is what the Pharisees did. With their many rules, many Jews stopped trying to obey God's desires. "I can't live like that. It is too hard to follow God. Therefore I won't even try" was what they thought.

(Note: In the old translation, the Bible includes another woe of Jesus at verse 14. However, since this verse is not found in most ancient manuscripts, it is doubtful that Matthew wrote the verse. It is believed that a scribe later included it from what was written in the book of Mark (Mk. 12:40). If you have the NIV translation look in that. Also look at what is written in the NIV study Bible if you can.)

It is unlikely that the Pharisees sought to work as evangelists to win Gentiles over to Judaism. But they became very excited when they were able to find a Gentile and turn him into a Jew by getting him to be circumcised. During the first century, there were many Gentiles who were attracted to the teachings of the Old Testament and decided to worship the God of Abraham and not the many gods of their culture.

The New Testament calls these Gentiles "god-fearers." (Acts 10:2; 13:26, 50) But just because they worshiped the one true God was not enough for the Pharisees. They would look for these Gentiles and tell them that they had to become circumcised and to obey all of the laws of the Old Testament plus the many oral laws which the Pharisees taught. Jesus (and later Peter) called these "yokes" which neither the Pharisees nor the Jews were able to keep perfectly. (Acts 15:10) Amazingly, those Gentiles who would decide to become full Jews through circumcision would often become even more zealous for the added regulations than the Pharisees were. Jesus said that they and the Pharisees were a "*son of hell*." By this he meant that their focus on working to earn salvation and getting others to try to earn their salvation not only caused the Pharisees to be spiritual lost and going to hell, but their converts remained on the way to hell just as if they were still pagans. A result of focusing upon human laws, the Gentiles coming to Judaism focused so much upon keeping the rules of the Pharisees that they did not seek to develop a relationship with God. Often focusing upon keeping rules can keep people from realizing that following Jesus primarily involves entering into a loving, vibrant relationship with Jesus.

b. God's judgment would come upon the religious leaders when they seek to deceive people by manipulating the truth (Woe #3) [Mt. 23:16-22]

God is the God of truth and he hates it when any of his followers tell lies by not doing what they agree to do. That is one reason why Jesus said that those who are habitual liars won't be found in heaven. (Rev. 21:8) The Old Testament taught that anyone who made a promise to do something using the name of God must fulfill his oath. (Num. 30:2) During the days of Jesus, the Jews were so afraid of using God's name and disobeying the third commandment to not take the Lord's name in vain that they no longer spoke aloud God's name. Rather they used other words like "*heaven*" to refer to God. That is why Matthew used "kingdom of heaven" instead of "kingdom of God." There were many laws about what constituted an oath or promise which a person had to keep or not to keep. It became a game that people played in trying to deceive each other. The Pharisees taught that if in the oath a person used words like "heaven" or "offering" or "gold" that they had to fulfill their promises to God or others. But if they used other words like "altar" then they did not have to do what they promised. Why? Because heaven was where God lived and the offering and gold on the temple belonged to God. But someone using words like "temple" or "altar" did not have to fulfill their promises because these man-made things did not have a direct link to God. So people were pretending to make promises to God (e.g. "I promise by the temple that I will give 500 birr if God heals me") but then claiming that since they did not use the name of God they were not obligated to do it. Or they were making a promise to another person (e.g. I promise by the altar in the temple to repay the money I borrowed in one month's time.) but then say they did not have to repay the money since they did not mention heaven or one of the words which were thought to be binding.

Jesus showed how foolish (spiritually blind) such reasoning was. The leaders were saying they were leading people to the truth, but they were like blind guides who did not know where they were going and were therefore leading people away from the truth. It did not matter what someone said and whether or not he used certain words, all promises are made in the presence of God. He listens to what we say we will do and knows the motives of our hearts. Every promise we make (e.g. I will meet you here tomorrow.) is heard by God and is a promise made in his presence and should be kept. And we must never use our words to manipulate God or others. As Jesus said earlier, as followers of God we are to be so honest that a simple "yes" or "no" is enough. (Mt. 5:37)

Q. 11. a) List ways that Christians often manipulate truth to try to trick others. b) If we remember that we are making such statements in the presence of God and he is listening not only to the words but also sees the motives of our hearts, how do you think we would change what we say?

c. God will judge those who focus upon less important laws while forgetting what is most important in God's eyes (Woe #4) [Mt. 23:23-24]

The Old Testament law commanded that every farmer tithe (give 10%) from all of the produce from the crops and fruit of his farm. (Lev. 27:30) This tithe was used to pay the priests and Levites. (Note: This seems to teach that the major use of the tithe in the church should be to adequately care for those ministering in the church, and only after this need is met should we use the money on the church building or choir robes.) But the Old Testament never mentioned that farmers were to tithe from the small plants the farmers grew for spices like mint, dill, and cumin. Most people did not tithe this. However, the Pharisees wanted to show off their spirituality by carefully counting out each leaf on the plant and giving every tenth leaf as a tithe. God was not interested in such exaggerated concern on small issues. What bothered Jesus was that although the Pharisees carefully practiced unimportant things like tithing one leaf, they were neglecting what was most important in God's eyes- justice (treating others fairly), mercy (helping those who were in need), and faithfulness (maintaining a relationship of obedience and submission to God.)

It is easy for us to become unbalanced in the same way. We can get very upset when a person disobeys one of the church practices (e.g. does not fast on a certain day) but think nothing of cheating someone in the market place or walking by a beggar who has nothing to live on. This type of distortion concerned Jesus. As an example of how unbalanced the Pharisees had become Jesus made a joke. The Pharisees were very concerned that they did not become ritually unclean in some way. The Old Testament taught that all insects were ritually unclean. Often small flies (gnats) would fall into the wine. In order to not become ritually unclean from these small flies, the Pharisees would carefully take a cloth and pour the wine through the cloth to get out the gnat. The Hebrew word "camel" sounds similar to the word "gnat." A camel was the largest domestic animal and was also classified as an unclean animal. So Jesus said that their focus upon the details of laws was like carefully getting rid of a gnat. But they were still ritually unclean, for it was as if they were eating an "unclean" camel by not doing the most important things God desires from his people.

Q. 12. a) List examples of "gnats" or unimportant laws which evangelical Christians often focus upon today. b) List examples of "camels" or the major things of God's word which many Christians neglect.

d. God's judgment will come against those who only focus upon external rituals and not the inner spiritual hearts (Woe #5 & 6) [Mt. 23:25-28]

The Pharisees were very concerned about ritual cleanness. The Old Testament taught that certain things caused a person to be ritually unclean and therefore not allowed to worship. (Lev. 5:2-3; Lev. 11, 13, 15; Num. 19) The Pharisees became so concerned with this that they made up thousands of rules over what was unclean and what was clean and what to do with something that was unclean. For instance, some taught that if a bowl was made of wood or clay and became ritually unclean it had to be broken. But if it was made of iron it could be kept as long as it was washed in a certain way. One of the debates which the religious leaders had was what to do with a cup to make it ritually clean. One group taught that it was important for people to just ritually clean the inside of the cup since that is what touched the liquid. The

other group taught that both the inside and outside had to be ritually cleaned. Such arguments tired Jesus. He was not interested in the physical cup and whether or not it was clean. Jesus used this foolish debate to teach a spiritual lesson. The outside of the cup symbolized the external rituals that the Jews were going through in seeking to become ritually clean. The inside of the cup symbolized the heart of a person that was where God focused. Jesus says that if we can clean up the heart of man, all of his external actions will change to follow God's will. But it does not do any good to try to clean up the externals of people's life (e.g., whether or not they drink) without first changing their internal heart and character.

The greatest way Jews could become ritually unclean was by touching a dead body (Num. 19:11). If they touched a dead body, they were ritually unclean for a whole week. The Pharisees taught that even if a person's shadow touched a grave, that person would become unclean, so they were afraid of walking on an unmarked grave. To protect themselves from stepping on a grave the Jews had a practice of painting the hidden graves with whitewash so all could recognize them as graves and not get close to them. (Or Jesus could have been referring to a common practice of painting a tomb to make it look good in honor of their relatives.) But no matter what they did to the outside of the graves, hidden underneath was still the decay and bones of the dead person. In the same way, the Pharisees, like many Christians, were thinking that they were clean because the outside of their lives looked respectable. They kept the many laws that the elders had defined as being necessary to please God. They wore special clothes and made themselves look spiritual. But in the hidden parts of their hearts there was still "sin." In the eyes of God, the sin in their heart was what made the person unclean.

Jesus is again concentrating on the wrong emphasis of the Pharisees. They were focusing upon external rituals that they thought were important. But they neglected a person's heart where the hidden root of sin and true uncleanness was located. It is possible to look spiritual in the eyes of people by not drinking alcohol, singing songs with great emotion, wearing special choir clothes, carrying our Bible to church, and going to prayer meetings and yet not be "clean." It is the sins of the heart that God is concerned about. As we do these religious practices, we often have "*pride*" that we are more holy than another group that has a different standard than us. Or we lust, covet someone who has more than us, or are jealous at how another person is honored. How easy it is for us to be like the Pharisees, focusing upon externals rather than the heart. We can build beautiful churches and the church ministers and choir members can dress up in beautiful robes, but that church can be as polluted in God's eyes as a grave filled with dead bones.

Q. 13. a) List some of the "externals" which Christians stress in defining what it means to be spiritual or good Christians. b) What are some of the "hidden" sins that Christians often do not address even though externally they appear spiritual? c) Examine your own heart. Check to see if you also resemble this sin of the Pharisees. Repent of this and seek to be spiritual inside and outside.

e. God's judgment will come against those who honor spiritual people of the past while continuing the attitude which caused those same people to be despised in their generation (Woe #7) [Mt. 23:29-39]

During the century before the birth of Jesus it became popular for religious leaders to honor the prophets and famous people in the Old Testament by building large monuments over their graves. Herod the Great built a large monument over the tomb of David and Solomon and others built monuments over the tomb of Jeremiah and other prophets. In building these monuments they were indicating that these

great men of the Old Testament were their spiritual heroes, and that if they had lived during those days, they would have honored them rather than join their Jewish ancestors in persecuting them.

The Jews knew that God's punishment upon the Jews had been severe because the Old Testament Jews had not listened to God's messengers but persecuted them instead. But had the Jews really changed in their attitude towards the messengers of God? Jesus insisted that nothing had changed. He was going to send the Jews "*prophets, wise men, teachers*," referring to all of the church leaders of the early church (apostles, prophets, evangelists). When they spoke God's message to the first century Jews, the Jews would turn against them. They would treat some of God's messengers like they would treat Jesus in three days time; they would crucify them. Others would be flogged in the synagogue, the Jewish way of punishing Jews who did something greatly offensive to their religion. (e.g. Acts 5:40) They would chase others from town to town persecuting them. (e.g. Acts 13:42-52, 14:1-6) Their actions of resisting God's messengers starting with John the Baptist, then Jesus, and finally the early church leaders all proved that in their hearts the Jews had not changed. They were just like the Old Testament Jews whom they claimed to be better than.

The Jews had a belief that God was waiting for his judgment until the time all of the suffering of God's people was complete. The blood of the martyrs (the righteous) throughout the generations was being collected and one day the persecution allowed by God would fill up the container. When it became full, then God would bring his final judgment upon the earth. (See Rev. 6:9-11) The Jews of course focused upon the way the Gentiles were persecuting them, but Jesus said that in fact the Jews were just as bad as the heathen in persecuting the messengers of God. The first shedding of death recorded in the Old Testament started with the Abel whose blood cried out to God for justice. (Gen. 4:10) The last book in the Jewish Old Testament was 2 Chronicles and the death of the prophet Zechariah was the last recorded murder. (2 Chron. 24:20-22) [Note: This is not the prophet Zechariah who wrote the book of Zechariah.] The Jews had a story that when Zechariah was killed in the temple, a fountain of blood started to flow that nothing could stop. These two stories illustrated the truth that throughout their history, the Jews resisted and even persecuted those whom God sent with his message. Jesus claimed that in the early church, the Jews would continue this process of shedding the blood of God's messengers. But he warned that such actions would soon bring God's retribution, just like God had punished the Jews in the Old Testament. Most likely Jesus was hinting at the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. But he was also saying that all resistance to God's messengers throughout history (when this was written there were thousands of Christians who were being persecuted and killed by Romans) never goes unpunished. God is simply waiting until the suffering of the saints reaches his predetermined level. And then the day of eternal punishment will arrive. Just because God does not quickly punish those who persecute his people (e.g. millions of believers have been persecuted in China with seeming little retribution by God) does not mean that God will not eventually punish. The day will come, and all will be held accountable for what they did to God's children.

So what lesson can we learn from this? Can believers become resistant to messengers that Jesus sends them? Church history demonstrates that when God sends messengers to bring renewal to his church, they are usually resisted, persecuted, and even killed. As church denominations grow older (and some evangelical denominations in Ethiopia approach 100 years), the tendency is to resist any new message by God as he seeks to bring renewal. How often are those who speak out against sins of apathy, materialism, and lack of concern for the lost driven from our churches? Have we become like the

Pharisees, claiming to honor the "heroes" of the past who suffered greatly to plant our churches, but now become the "persecutors" of those whom God seeks to use to bring renewal in our time?

Q. 14. a) How would you answer the above question? b) Describe ways established churches can resist those whom God sends to bring renewal.

4. Jesus expresses his sorrow over the unwillingness of the Jews to accept his watch care over them as the Messiah (Mt. 23:37-39)

Often people in churches speak out words of condemnation in harsh words similar to how Jesus spoke out against the Pharisees. But what they say comes from hearts that are bitter, judgmental, and with little compassion. In the prophetic books, we see that God sends his messages of condemnation with tears in his eyes. So Jeremiah, having predicted the destructions of Jerusalem, wrote Lamentations to express his and God's sorrow over the punishment of the Jews. Or having described the coming punishment of the Jews, God shows the anguish this punishment brings him. (Hos. 6) It was the same for Jesus. He knew that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews would bring upon them great punishment. But Jesus wished that it would be different. Probably with tears in his eyes, Jesus shared how he had come to Jerusalem longing to be like a hen who gathered her chicks under her wings to protect them from danger. (See Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4 for similar expressions of God's compassion for his people in the Old Testament.) God does not force people to believe in Jesus; he wants their love, which must be freely given. The Jews turned their backs on the Messiah they had longed for over the centuries; so punishment came. Within 40 years, Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed by the Romans. Although every year the Jews quoted Ps. 118:26 for the pilgrims as they came for the Passover, and although they knew that one day they would welcome their Messiah with those words, Jesus insisted that Jerusalem would not see him again until he would return as their conquering king. Almost 2000 years have passed and the Messiah has not returned to Jerusalem. But every year the Jews long for the Messiah. In Jesus' words, there is a hint of promise, however. He foretold a time when the Jews will respond to their Messiah and welcome him as their king. Paul later wrote that there will be a major national turning to Christ among the Jews. (Rom. 11:25-27)

As Christians, we are to warn people that if they don't believe on Jesus, they will face God's punishment. But we should never speak these words with a sense of pride or with a harsh spirit. Nor are we to speak out against the sins of the church with a spirit of prideful judgment. Rather, we are to confront people with the truth of coming judgment with tears in our eyes. Peter tells us that one reason Jesus does not return to start his eternal kingdom is because he longs for people to believe on him so that they are not judged with eternal damnation.

Q. 15. a) Describe how you have seen people speak out harshly in judgment against unbelievers or the sins of believers. b) Have you seen another person speak similar words but with compassion in his heart? What difference was there in how the message was given and received? c) Make a list of truths that Christians can apply to their lives from this chapter.

THIRD DAY

A certain church was holding a fund raising program for a church building. "Who will give to God?" asked the speaker. Some gave their coats, others the rings off their fingers, others pledged or gave money.

A well-known trader stood up and said "I just bought a new Isuzu truck. But I want to give the truck to God-take it, sell it, and use the money for the church building." The crowd clapped loudly in honor of what the man did. Then a poorly clothed woman stood up and said "I will give one birr." The speaker graciously thanked her but quickly turned to those who were giving more. Who gave more- the wealthy trader or the woman? We are likely to say the wealthy trader, but how does God evaluate giving?

Many of our churches are filled with poor day workers and we know they cannot give a lot of money. Before the offering, the program leader prays "God bless the hands of those who want to give but don't have the ability." Is this what Jesus would have prayed?

Q. 16. a) Who do you think gave "more" in God's eyes? Explain your answer. b) Do you think Jesus would have prayed like the program leader? Explain your answer. c) Read Mk. 12:41-44. Why did Jesus say the widow gave more than others?

THE WIDOW WHO GAVE TWO PENNIES IN THE OFFERING (MK. 12:41-44, LK. 21:1-4)

In our survey of the life of Jesus, we have seen that Jesus often taught about money. He told some to give all of their money away to the poor before they followed him. He warned his disciples not to think too much about money, that where their thoughts are, there their "hearts" would be also. (Mt. 6:21) Tithing is one way that disciples honor God. All of their money belongs to God anyway, so giving back some of the money God has given us is one way we honor him. But what did Jesus teach about tithing? And what does the New Testament add about this important way to serve God?

Jesus had been teaching in the outer court of the Temple. Between the Court of the Gentiles and the court of Women were large porches where people could sit. Jesus went and sat down and watched people around him. In the Court of Women were 13 places where people would give their offerings. Because the openings were shaped in the form of ancient trumpets with wide opening on one end and narrow on the end near the collection box, they were called the 13 trumpets. Some of these offering boxes were used for specific offerings for the upkeep of the temple or to pay for the sacrifices offered daily. Others were boxes where people would give a general "free will offering" as a sign of their appreciation for what God had done in their lives. Jesus noticed how rich people, sometimes in a showy way as they sought to impress people, would drop a lot of money into the offering box. Then Jesus saw a very poor lady, probably dressed in the black clothes of a widow, come and put the two smallest coins found in the Roman Empire into the offering box. Each coin was 1/64th of what a common laborer earned for a day's work. The money was enough to buy a little amount of flour to make a small piece of bread. So this widow lady was no doubt giving away what was going to be her meal for the evening. The disciples had two thoughts as they watched. First, some would have thought "Such a small gift is useless. God desires the gifts where people give a lot of money like those wealthy merchants." Second, others probably thought "That woman is very poor. She should not have given her money since she needs it to live on." Jesus used this occasion to teach his followers important lessons about tithing:

a. God honors not how much we give, but how much our gift hurts us. Jesus told his followers that in the eyes of God, the widow who gave two sentem actually gave more than the rich merchants who gave hundreds of dollars. Why? The merchants had so much money that giving hundreds of dollars did not hurt them. They would not go without food or clothes because they gave their money away. But the widow had almost nothing. And so when she gave, it cost her personally to give. She might not have had enough

money to buy any food for that night because she gave everything to God. This should teach us to be very careful how we evaluate and honor people when they give gifts to the church. Rather than honor those who give a lot without really experiencing economic difficulty since they have so much money, perhaps we should look for ways to honor those whom we often think have given an insignificant amount, but who gave sacrificially.

b. God expects all of his followers to demonstrate our trust in him and our appreciation for all the gifts he has given us by returning to God some of our money, even if we have little to live on. Jesus did not say that it was wrong for the woman to give of her tithe. Rather, he honored her trust in God's provisions and lack of selfishness by giving what little she had. Even the poorest person in our churches has had food to eat for that week. By excusing them in our prayers and saying they don't need to give we take away from them the privilege of showing their trust in God to meet their needs or expressing their appreciation for God's gifts to them.

c. God is concerned about the attitude we have when giving of our tithes and offerings. How often does the practice of calling out the names of those who are giving turn raising money into a competition when people try to outdo each other in giving so that they are honored by others? Does this practice caused pride that God hates? Or what does our tendency to put just a few coins in the offering plate when we have been blessed so much more show about our appreciation for what God has given to us? Are we indifferent when we give rather than use our gifts to God as an expression of our trust in him, our privilege of participating in his work, and our thankfulness for all the gifts God gives us? Followers of Jesus must learn that giving is a privilege. It is a way to express our dependence upon God to meet our needs. And it is a major way to express our thanks to God for taking care of us. It is easy to "sing" songs of praise because it costs us little. It is much harder for us to express our thanks by giving generously. If a church has to ask its members to give, it is a sign that the members do not have generous or thankful spirits. They are not like the financially poor Macedonian church, which begged Paul for the privilege of giving to the Christians in Jerusalem. (2 Cor. 8:1-5)

d. The New Testament does not emphasize careful "tithing" of counting up exactly 10% and giving that. Rather, the New Testament's focus is upon being generous, just like the widow lady was generous with what little she had. She obviously gave much more than 10%. (See 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11-13) You measure generosity not so much by what is given, but how much it hurts the giver. God loves a generous giver. So a generous "rich" merchant would have to give more than 10% in order for God to consider it to be generous.

However, it would seem that God gave the principle of 10% for a purpose. It is a good test that we can put ourselves through. No matter if we have much or little, if we are not giving at least 10% of all that God gives to us, we are probably not being generous and are allowing the love of money to become too important to us. It does not matter if we are poor or students going to school; if God gives us anything throughout the week, we should show our appreciation to God for these gifts by generously returning some of it to God.

e. We need to be careful of the common teaching that if we give to God money, he will give us more money. Although God rewards our faith and generosity, such an attitude turns giving into a selfish act, not something we do because we love God and are thankful to him. God desires pure motives when we given, not selfish motives.

Q. 17. a) Contrast the attitude Jesus had towards giving with the way we often look at giving. b) Prayerfully look at your giving over the past year. Has it become a thoughtless habit? Does it show generosity and thanksgiving? Was it at least 10%? Repent of any wrong attitudes you have towards giving and look for ways to be more like the widow woman.

Q. 18. Read Mt. 24:1-14. a) What two questions did the disciples ask Jesus? b) List the signs Jesus insisted would happen before he would return. c) List warnings Jesus gave about how his followers are to live as they waited for his return.

JESUS PROPHECIES ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND HIS FUTURE RETURN (MT. 24, MK. 13:1-37, LK. 21:5-36)

Matthew 24 and 25 summarize Jesus' predictions of the future, starting with what would happen 40 years after his return to heaven when Jerusalem would be destroyed to events over 2000 years later when he will return to the earth to establish his eternal reign. We will only have time to study Matthew 24 now and will finish up this important teaching next week.

How to interpret Jesus' prophecies in Matthew 24 has caused a lot of debate among scholars and there are many different views. Scholars disagree how much of Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled 40 years later in 70 AD when the Romans came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple and how much refers to the end of time when Jesus returns.

First, some scholars believe that all of the prophecies in Matthew 24 relate to the destruction of Jerusalem and Jesus taught his disciples that he would return at that time. Some people think because Jesus did not "know" when he was going to return, and he was wrong in his understanding of the timing of his return. This is unlikely, however.

Second, others scholar think Jesus was not talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but a future destruction of Jerusalem. They think that right before Jesus returns to the earth, the Jews will be gathered into their own nation in Israel (which took place in 1948 AD). They will rebuild their temple and restore their Old Testament style of worship (which has not yet happened.) And then a world-wide war will take place in which that future temple will be destroyed. Those holding this position claim that Jesus was predicting this distant future period. This view is unlikely as well.

Third, others believe that Jesus was talking about two events. He was answering the two questions which the disciples asked him. First, they asked him when the Temple would be destroyed. To this Jesus answered that the Temple would be destroyed within one generation. He gave general signs of that time; wars, false messiahs, false prophets, persecution, etc. Second, the disciples asked Jesus when the end of the age and Jesus' return would take place. Jesus warns the disciples that his return to reign would be delayed. He would come back but at a time people did not expect him. In the Old Testament the prophets often placed prophecies side by side whose fulfillment were thousands of years apart. So they prophesied the birth of Jesus (Is. 9:6a) and then his eternal reign (Is. 9:6b-7) together. Only now do we know that there would be thousands of years in between the prophecies. In the same way, Jesus does not give any chronological ordering to his prophecies and did not indicate how long it was between the destruction of Jerusalem and his coming.

Fourth, some scholars believe that Jesus' prediction involved a "triple" prophecy. One of the unique things about Biblical prophecy is that some things repeat themselves in history. And so Jesus quotes Daniel 12:11 which initially was fulfilled in 167 BC when Antiochus Epiphanes stopped the Jews from worshipping in the Temple and set up his own altar to worship the god Zeus. But Jesus is saying that that same prophecy will be fulfilled again in 70 AD when the Zealot Jews would invade the Temple and kill many Jews desecrating the Temple complex. And then the Romans would desecrate the Temple again by entering it to tear it down. But some scholars think Jesus is also hinting that just before his return a similar event will take place by the antichrist who will fulfill Jesus' prophecy. We won't know for sure until after the event has taken place.

So which view is correct? It is difficult to know. There is much about unfulfilled prophecy that will remain unclear to us until the events actually happen. This should teach us to be humble about our views of the end times. Usually how scholars understand what will happen at the end times determines how they interpret this passage. If they believe that Israel will be restored, rebuild their temple, and be attacked by Gentile nations, then they will interpret it one way (Views 2 or 4). But if they believe that God no longer has a specific plan for the nation of Israel, they will interpret it another way (View 3). Or if they believe that prophecies are to be interpreted symbolically and not literally it will determine how they understand some of Jesus' prophecies. (Note: See summary of views of end times in the TEE study guide on Daniel and Revelation.) Because of these pre-understandings, scholars have different ways to interpret what Jesus predicted in Mt. 24-25. To the author of this study book, it seems likely that half of the chapter predicted the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Romans 40 years after Jesus' death. And the other half of the chapter refers to the end times when Jesus returns.

1. Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple (Mt. 24:1-4)

After watching the widow give her offering, Jesus left the Temple and started his short journey to Bethany. His travel took him out of the eastern gate of the Temple, across a ravine called the Kidron Valley up to a hill called the Mount of Olives which overlooked the Temple on the eastern side of Jerusalem. No doubt the disciples looked back at the Temple and were amazed by the beauty of the structure.

Many of Jesus' disciples were from the area of Galilee and they perhaps had not had many opportunities to see a large city like Jerusalem or a fancy building like the Temple. (This is similar to a country person traveling from a very remote part of Ethiopia to Addis Ababa for the first time and looking at the tall buildings around the city.) The Temple was one of the most amazing buildings of the ancient world. Although the original building was built over 500 years earlier by Zerubbabel, in 19 BC Herod the Great began a major remodeling program. From 19 BC to 64 AD, the Jews continued to expand and improve the Temple complex. By the time of Jesus about 1/6th of the city of Jerusalem consisted of the Temple complex with the Temple building, the various courts for worship, and other buildings for storage. Some of the Temple was covered with gold, so as the disciples looked at it, it would have sparkled in the sun. Some of the stones used for foundations and pillars were over 12 meters long. Honored throughout the Roman Empire, the Jews saw this Temple as the symbol of the greatness of their religion. Because it was so large and because they thought God would protect it from all enemies, many Jews thought the Temple was indestructible, much like the Jews during the days of Jeremiah thought. (Jer. 9:11)

Standing on the Mount of Olives looking at the Temple complex, some of the disciples remarked to Jesus about how amazing the Temple complex was. Jesus shocked them by saying that the day was coming that not one stone of the great Temple complex would be left on top of the other. The Jews started

a war with Rome in 66 AD. After four bitter years of fighting, in 70 AD the Romans broke through the defensive walls of Jerusalem. General Titus was so angry that he told his soldiers to tear down all of the walls around Jerusalem and the Temple. One of the most amazing buildings in the ancient world was destroyed. The Jews did not accept their Messiah, so now they received their punishment.

Hearing that the Temple was to be destroyed caused the disciples to assume Jesus was talking about the time of Great Destruction and the beginning of the new age under the Messiah. As the Jews studied the Old Testament prophecies and also read many prophetic books which were written during the times after the Old Testament and before Jesus came, they came to believe that before the Messiah came to reign over Israel, there would be a time of great destruction called "the Day of the Lord." This period was sometimes called "the End of the Age." Only after there was great worldwide destruction would God send his deliverer to bring the whole world under the control of the Messiah. This time of blessing was sometimes called "the New Age" since the Jews believed that the evil of the old age would be totally destroyed and God's eternal righteous kingdom would start. The Jews assumed that the time of great destruction and the time of great blessing under the Messiah immediately followed one after the other. (Note: The book of Revelation does indicate that there will be great destruction before Jesus returns to reign. So the Jews were correct in their interpretation of the Old Testament. However, the Jews did not understand that there would be a delay between the destruction of the Temple and the return of Jesus.)

Perhaps being on the Mt. of Olives reminded the disciples of the Old Testament prophecy of Zech. 14:1-4. So the disciples asked Jesus two questions. First they asked Jesus "when" this period of destruction of Jerusalem would take place. Second, they asked Jesus what would be the "signs" that revealed that Jesus the Messiah would come and start the eternal kingdom. Jesus answers these two questions in Matthew 24 and 25. Much to their surprise, Jesus told them that the time of destruction of the Temple was not connected with the return of the Messiah. There would be an indefinite time between when the Temple was destroyed and he would return to start the eternal kingdom. Most of his teaching about the end times was given to prepare the disciples for the delay of his return so that they would stay faithful to him as they waited.

2. Jesus reveals the "signs" which will happen before the Messiah returns (Mt. 24:5-14)

In his response to their questions, Jesus answers the second question first. He lists different "signs" which will characterize the times before he returns. Scholars differ in their opinion as to whether Jesus is saying that these signs would take place before the destruction of Jerusalem or before Jesus returns to reign. It seems Jesus was indicating different things that would characterize history before Jesus returns. These are general things that would partially characterize the time after Jesus went to heaven and Jerusalem was destroyed. But they will primarily characterize the times just before Jesus returns to start his eternal kingdom.

a. People will falsely claim to be the Messiah (Christ). These false messiah's would come "*in Jesus' name*." This could mean that they come claiming that Jesus has sent them. Or more likely they come claiming to have the authority which belonged to Jesus. This was true during the years after Jesus. Different Jewish leaders came saying God had sent them and it was time for the Jews to rebel against Rome. This eventually led to the war with Rome. But it is also true throughout history. There have been people who claim to either be the true spiritual leader of people or to be the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies. Unfortunately history is filled with many Christians being deceived by these leaders. It seems likely that just before Jesus returns to set up his eternal kingdom, a great spiritual and political leader will arise to

deceive the world. The Bible often calls him the "antichrist." (See 2 Thes. 2:3-12; Rev. 13:1-10) Jesus warns his followers against following such spiritual leaders. He was the true and final spiritual leader. (Jesus repeats this warning in Mt. 24:23-24 to provide emphasis that as followers of Jesus, we must be very careful to not fall for Satan's trick of getting us to focus upon human deliverers of any type rather than on Jesus.)

b. There will be wars and great instability in the political world. This initially took place during the days leading up to the Jewish rebellion against the Jews in 70 AD. There were many rumors of different groups fighting and defeating the Romans which emboldened the Jews in their rebellion. But history has been filled with times of wars. A study of human history shows that it is rare that there has been peace between nations. Most likely this tendency towards war between nations and within a nation will increase the closer we get to Jesus' return. (See Rev. 6:1-8) Jesus said that these wars "*must*" happen, for they were determined by God. We all long for peace in the world. And Christians are to do what we can to encourage world peace. But Jesus warned us that such peace will be rare. Only the prince of peace will be able to bring it. Our hope for political peace is not found in our government, in the United Nations, or in the Organization of African Unity but in Jesus alone. And Jesus said that unlike the expectation of the Jews, times of war did not signal the soon return of Jesus.

c. There will be natural disasters like famines and earthquakes. During the first century there were several periods of great famine (Acts 11:28) and earthquakes. These have continued in our days. But it seems that such natural disasters will increase in frequency and severity the closer we get to when Jesus returns.

But Jesus warns that all of these things are not "*signs*" which clearly indicate when Jesus will return. They are only "*birth pains*." (See Is. 13:6-8, 26:16-18; Jer. 4:31; 22:20-23; Hos. 13:9-13 for similar expressions in the Old Testament.) Just like the birth pains of a woman only signal that the baby is about to be born but do not tell the mother the exact time when it will be born, so also these signs only indicate that the Messiah can come soon, not that he will come at a specific time.

Q. 19. a) Describe how these "signs" are seen in the world in recent times. b) How do they seem to increasing in numbers and severity?

d. The followers of Jesus will be persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus never hid this difficult truth from his disciples. They were not to expect everyone to love believers and accept them and their message. Rather, followers of Jesus should expect the resistance of people against them. They would often experience persecution and at times be killed for their faith in Jesus. People they know and love would betray them, handing them over for persecution.

e. Many claiming to be believers will renounce their faith in Jesus out of fear of persecution. Persecution almost always separates those who follow Jesus because of some selfish purpose (looking for Jesus to heal them, make them rich, because their friends are believers) from those who truly believe in Jesus as the only way of salvation and are committed to following him.

The fact that believers are often persecuted has been seen throughout the history of the church. It would not be long until the apostles would face persecution and death. (Acts 5:17-42; 8:1-3; 12:1-3) The evangelical church in Ethiopia was born in great persecution during the times of the Italians as well as

suffered under the derge government. And scholars say that more followers of Jesus have died for their faith in the past 100 years than all of the martyrs in the rest of the past 2000 years. One of the wrong teachings circulating around our churches is that God will protect us from times of persecution. "After all, hasn't he overcome the enemies?" people say. But this is a lie. From the very beginning Jesus warned that persecution would be normal for his followers. And the book of Revelation indicates that this resistance to the followers of Jesus will increase as time for Jesus' return comes closer. (Rev. 6:9-11)

Q. 20. a) Explain why you think Jesus warned his disciples about persecution. b) Why do you think many Christians today think Jesus will not allow the persecution of believers?

Jesus reminded the disciples that it did not matter whether they found themselves in a world filled with war, or famine, or persecution. They were to always supposed to remember that God controls every situation. These events "*must happen*" for they are in God's plan for the ages. And they are only signs that God's eternal kingdom is about to come. Rather than reasons to despair, the disciples should see such events as signs that their Lord is about to return and start the kingdom filled with righteousness.

Jesus warned his disciples that "*those who stand firm to the end will be saved.*" (Mt. 24:13) Jesus is not saying that we earn our salvation by staying firm in our allegiance to Jesus. Rather, Jesus is saying that we demonstrate that we are true followers of Jesus by maintaining our faith in Jesus no matter how severe the persecution is. Jesus was saying that those who seek to escape persecution by renouncing their faith in Jesus must carefully examine the reality of their faith. We must be careful to not listen to any temptation to give up our faith during the times of persecution.

f. There will be false prophets in the church who will teach false truths seeking to deceive believers. False prophets and false teachers claim to speak on behalf of God. However, what they say seeks to please people more than honor God's Word. These false prophets caused a lot of trouble for God's people in the Old Testament times. Jesus warned that large numbers of false prophets would continue and increase in the days before he returned. It was not long until the early church was troubled by false prophets. (2 Thes. 2:3-10; Acts 5:36-37, 8:9-11; 2 Tim. 3; 2 Pet. 2; 1 Jn. 2:18; 4:1-3 talk about how these false prophets were troubling the early church.) Often these false prophets work during times of difficulty. Jesus warned the disciples that as persecution increased, they were not supposed to look for deliverers who would take his place as the Messiah. Nor were they to listen to false teachers who often suggested people to compromise their faith so as to escape persecution. (Rev. 2:12-25)

g. Jesus claimed that out of fear of persecution and the work of these false teachers, the "*love of many will grow cold.*" (Mt. 24:11-12) Their love for Jesus and God will grow cold as they live for selfish pleasures or choose to protect their lives from persecution by hiding their faith in Jesus. A sign of love grown cold is lawlessness, and a refusal to live according to the teachings of the Bible. Paul would later call the coming antichrist "the man of lawlessness" because he will refuse to obey God's teachings. (2 Thes. 2:3) People's love for others will also grow cold as they become self-serving rather than giving of their lives to serve others. Has our love grown cold in our generation?

Recently in one part of Ethiopia, one false prophet encouraged believers "If you are forced to renounce your faith or die, renounce your faith. Jesus is hidden in your heart so it does not matter if you say you are not a follower of Jesus." The Bible never gives such advice. In fact the Jews taught that renouncing faith in the face of persecution was one of the worst possible sins. The Bible tells us to be

faithful until death. False prophets are active in our churches today. They claim "peace" when God has not said that there will be peace. They claim "everyone will get rich" when God does not say his followers will get rich. They claim "everyone will be healed" when God makes no such promises. Or they claim "God will not let you face persecution" when Jesus makes no such claim.

In Mt. 24:24, Jesus says that these false prophets will even have amazing abilities to perform miracles. "He is able to perform a miracle, therefore he must be from God" many believers think. So even if people teach things against what the Bible teaches, as long as there is evidence of miracles, many Christians are willing to accept these false prophets. We are frequently warned in the Bible to evaluate prophets to determine if they are from God or from Satan who also is able to give the ability to do miracles. (Deut. 13:1-5, 2 Thes. 2:1-12; 1 Jn. 4:1-3; Rev. 13:11-18) And one way we evaluate them is by determining whether what they say and do follows with what the Bible teaches. Truth is important to God, and only things which agree with God's revealed Word come from God. We live in a generation which places little emphasis on whether or not something is true. As long as it excites us and seems to be a miracle, we are willing to accept it. But Jesus warns that there will be those who seek to deceive believers. The tendency towards false prophets and false teachers will also increase the closer we get to the end times. Rev. 13 talks about not only the "antichrist" but also a false prophet who will deceive people.

When Jesus said "*if that were possible*" (Mt. 24:24) it seems that he was indicating that all those who are true followers of Jesus ("*the elect*") will never fully fall into error. Any deception they fall into will be temporary, and the Holy Spirit will soon reveal the truth to them. If someone claiming to be a follower of Jesus falls into extended deception, Jesus seems to be indicating that he was not a true believer. (See 1 Jn. 2:19 for a similar idea.) An evidence of a true believer is that he will not fall into a permanent sinful lifestyle or into a false doctrine.

h. The Gospel will be preached throughout the whole world. Often we think that persecution will limit the expansion of the Gospel. But the opposite frequently happens. During times of persecution, the Gospel often expands even more quickly. No matter how hard the Romans tried to stop the spread of Christianity, the numbers of people who became Christians grew until three centuries after Jesus, the Roman Empire was forced to give up its attempts to destroy Christianity and even began to encourage people to become Christians. This same thing happened during the derge. As the government closed churches and tried to stop Christianity, as Christians scattered throughout the country, they started cell churches. When religious freedom came, there were thousands of new churches in areas where previously there had been no Gospel witness.

This phrase would have encouraged the disciples. No matter what the world tries or how many Christians they kill, the Gospel will continue to expand. Nothing can stop it. We are living in exciting times when through the work of many missionaries and evangelists, the Gospel is reaching into areas that have never had a clear witness about Jesus. Jesus is encouraging us to never let resistance from non-Christians stop our witness. We are supposed to continue sharing about Jesus. Doing so might result in persecution or death. But the Gospel must go forth. Jesus' prophecy also was given to remind the disciples that their major ministry during the times when Jesus is gone until he returns is the ministry of taking the Gospel to all parts of the world. Every church of every nation must look for ways to spread the Gospel throughout the whole world in obedience to Jesus' final command. (See Mt. 28:19-20) Until now Ethiopia has benefitted from missionaries bringing the Gospel to us. Isn't it time for this nation richly blessed by thousands of believers to share our blessings by taking the Gospel to other nations?

Jesus said that it is only after these eight "signs" are in place that the end would come. The problem is that these "signs" have been fulfilled to some extent from the days of Paul. This means that by the end of the first century each generation of Christians could truly say "These signs have been fulfilled so Jesus could come at any time." Since each of these signs are constantly present for believers, it will always be difficult for us to know when the end is ready. That is why Jesus said that for his followers, the issue is not knowing "when" Jesus will come. Rather, it is being prepared at all times since the signs Jesus gave have been fulfilled and he can return at any time.

Q. 21. List the eight signs. Write out one example of how each sign is seen in the world today.

FOURTH DAY

Q. 22. Read Mt. 24:15-51. a) List the signs and events that must happen before Jesus returns. b) What does Mt. 24:36 teach about the return of Jesus? c) What does Jesus teach about the attitude his followers are to have because they don't know when he will return?

3. Jesus warns the disciples about the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Mt. 24:15-20)

It is very difficult knowing which predictions are about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and what concern the end times. In his explanation, Jesus seems to move from one to the other. Most scholars believe that Jesus at least had in mind the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD in this section. He lists the following predictions:

a. There would be the "*abomination that causes desolation*" in the holy place. This phrase comes from Daniel where it is used three times (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) to refer to a time of great evil where false religion would be forced upon the Jews. The first fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy took place in 167 BC as Antiochus Epiphanes stopped worship in the Temple and tried to force Jews to sacrifice pigs on an altar to a heathen god. This led to the fight for independence that we studied in Lesson One. But Jesus seems to be saying that type of event would happen once again. Probably Jesus is talking about events which took place in Jerusalem between 66-70 AD when the Jews rebelled against the Romans. However, no one is sure what event was being described here. Was it the time when some Jews called Zealots killed thousands of Jews in the Temple area and therefore defiled it with their dead? Or was it when so many people died in the Temple as a result of famine and bodies could not be buried leading to its defilement? Or was it when the Romans conquered Jerusalem, set fire to the Temple and then dismantled the Temple? Most likely Jesus is saying that through the war, the Temple about which the disciples boasted would be defiled and never be used again. Jesus is warning his followers that unlike what happened during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes that led to a successful war of independence, for the Jews under the Romans, it would lead to their defeat. Probably Matthew said "*let the reader understand*" because he wanted them to know that Rome who was ruling over the Jews during his days was the one causing the desolation. But since they were being persecuted by the Romans, he did not want to state this in case this would increase the persecution. (Note: Scholars debate whether or not there will be one more time in world history when another "desolation" will take place during the time of the antichrist when true worship is polluted as false religion is forced upon believers. [2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 13:14-15])

b. When the desolation begins, Jesus' followers are to quickly escape the city of Jerusalem since the destruction of Jerusalem was at hand. Unfortunately, during the war, the majority of the Jews fled into the

city of Jerusalem when the war with Rome started and many perished. To the east of Jerusalem, and especially across from the Jericho River there were mountains that provided hiding places during times of war. Jesus told his followers to not stay in Jerusalem. Rather, as they saw the war on Jerusalem approaching, Jesus emphasized that in several illustrations that they were to quickly get out of the city before the destruction took place. Jewish houses had flat roofs where during the hot season the family would eat and sleep. Jesus said that they were not to worry about their belongings inside their homes, but immediately leave the city before it was too late. Jewish farmers often started work in the early morning when the air was cold. They would go out to their fields wearing a coat. But as the day got hot, they would take off their coat and lay it by the side of the field. Things would be so urgent that as soon as they saw the war approaching, people should immediately flee rather than look for their coat. Church historians tell us that in about 68 AD, in the middle of the war, Jewish Christians took Jesus' advice and fled across to Jordan River to the city of Pella. In doing so they escaped the destruction that fell upon Jerusalem. To symbolize how dreadful that time would be, Jesus said they should hope that they are not pregnant or nursing small children, which would make it difficult to run away from the war. And they should pray that it is not winter when the rains make the roads muddy and the rivers impassable. They should also hope it was not on the Sabbath when Jews were not supposed to travel more than a kilometer. If the day to flee was on a Sabbath, they would not be able to flee without getting other Jews angry at them for disobeying their laws.

4. Jesus warns against the coming time of Great Tribulation (Mt. 24:21-28)

Jesus said that this time of destruction would be worse than any time in human history. Scholars debate whether or not this is talking about the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD or refers to a great time of destruction at the end times. Perhaps Jesus had both in mind. Throughout history there have been times of great killing. During the days of Jeremiah many thousand lost their lives in Jerusalem as Babylon captured it. During World War 2, over 6 million Jews were executed by the Germans. And in Russia, over 20 million Russians were killed by Stalin. So what would make the destruction of Jerusalem so severe? Probably it was because the percentage of people who would die by the Roman war in 70 AD would be greater than ever before. A Jewish historian who wrote after the war claimed that by the time the Romans entered Jerusalem, over 1 million Jews had died of famine and war. So many people died that they there was no one available to bury the dead so unburied corpses were scattered all over the city. Most likely Jesus is also describing a much greater destruction at the end of time.

Out of mercy, God promised to shorten this time of persecution so that there will still be faithful people alive on the earth. Many believers will die. Many who pretend to believe will abandon their faith in Jesus. Others will fall away because of false teachings. But no matter what comes and what the enemies of the faith try, Jesus promised that at the end, there would still be faithful followers who maintain their faith in him and continue their witness.

Jesus' provides a clear warning to his followers. There will one day come a time of great evil that will cause the death of millions of people and where many will claim to be the "Christ." If pretend deliverers openly came from the wilderness, the place many Jews thought the Messiah would come from, (like John the Baptist) believers were not supposed to listen to them. Nor should they listen to someone who is hidden away from public view claiming to have secret knowledge like was common in many religions in Asia during the New Testament times. Jesus' followers must know that the true Messiah had come. John warned that there are many false "christs." (1 Jn. 2:18) We must be careful of all who claim to fulfill the spiritual and political needs of people. And we must be careful of false teachers who seek to deceive us, causing us to wander away from the truth.

5. Jesus' return would be visible to all (Mt. 24:29-35)

One of the truths which confuse Christians would be the claim that Jesus has already come and somehow they had missed him. (See 2 Thes. 2:1-2) But Jesus used two illustrations to show that when he returns to reign in glory, it would be visible and seen by all:

a. His return would be impossible to hide. It would be like lightning in the sky, open to all to see rather than like a small candle in a room.

b. His return would be like vultures surrounding carcasses. We have all seen vultures circle in the sky. We might not see the dead body, but because the vultures are circling, everyone knows there is something dead. In the same way, when Jesus returns there will be visible signs that clearly prove that he has returned. Christians should never be afraid that somehow they have missed the return of Jesus.

It is not clear what Jesus meant by "*distress of those days*." Was he only talking about the coming destruction of Jerusalem in the preceding verses? Or was he talking about all of the signs previously mentioned in the chapter? Most likely Jesus was saying that when all of the signs and events described previously have been fulfilled, then his return to reign in glory was "*near*." But what does the word "*near*" mean? It could mean that Jesus was saying that he would come very quickly once the signs are present. Or it could mean that when all of the signs were evident, then it becomes possible for Jesus to come at any time. Or perhaps Jesus was only meaning that in the major working of God in history, the next major event to take place would be the return of Jesus. It seems that Jesus is teaching that with the destruction of Jerusalem, all of these signs are now fulfilled and it was now possible for him to come at any time. Almost 2000 years have passed since the "signs" listed by Jesus as preceding his coming have been fulfilled. Therefore, all Christians of every generation can honestly say "Jesus could come today. I must be ready." The fact that Jesus has not quickly returned has often lead people to question the return of Jesus. Peter warns us to be careful not to doubt or question that return. God's timing is not like ours, for to a God who lives from eternity to eternity, one thousand years is as short as a day. (2 Pet. 3:3-9)

Scholars differ in their understanding of the predictions of Jesus in Mt. 24:29. Jesus quotes Old Testament prophecies where such statements symbolize the coming days of destruction upon the world. (Is 13:10-11; 24:23; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7-8; 31:29; Joel 3:15-16) Some scholars think this verse symbolizes how dark and dreadful the days will be before the coming of Jesus. But other scholars insist that it is better to take these predictions more literally, especially since Rev. 6:12-14 indicates that there will be major deteriorations of the created world before Jesus returns. We are told that the sun, moon, stars will all be impacted with the judgment of God preceding his Son's return

What will happen when Jesus returns?

a. Jesus will appear clearly "*in the sky*." The Jews believed that when the end of times came, there would be a clear sign of some sort in the sky. Jesus said that the sign would be his appearance which will be seen by all. Some Christians believe that this is Jesus' return "*in the air*" to receive the church which is raptured at this time. (1 Thes. 4:13-18) However, there is little clear indication in Scripture that Jesus will come back twice, once for the believers and again to start eternity.

b. The nations of the earth will mourn. This prophecy was first given in Zech. 12:10; however then it referred to the Jews mourning when they see the Messiah come to Jerusalem. But Jesus said that not only

the Jews, but all nations will mourn when he returns in glory. But why will they mourn? Will it be because they are repenting of their sins and accepting the Messiah whom they have rejected throughout history? Or do they mourn because now they face the great judgment which the Messiah will bring upon those who have rejected him and persecuted his followers? (See Rev. 19:11-21) Most likely Jesus was speaking about the mourning over the judgment they were going to receive.

c. Jesus will come in the clouds with power and glory. This refers back to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14. There God showed Daniel a vision of the Ancient of Days (God the Father) giving the eternal kingdom to one "*like a son of man*" who came to God in the clouds. Jesus is saying that he is that Son of Man and the time will come when he fulfills the ancient prophecy. Throughout the Bible, clouds often symbolize the presence of God. (Ex. 13:21; 19:9; Ps. 97:1-2) So this statement Jesus means that as the Son of God he is returning to the earth to reign with glory. In his first coming Jesus came in humility. But Jesus warns that there is a time coming when he will return with great power and authority. Rev. 19:11-21 describes this return of the King of kings.

d. The angels will sound a trumpet to gather the elect. In Jewish culture, whenever God wanted his people to gather, a trumpet was blown. You will remember when God came down to meet with the Israelites on Mt. Sinai there was a trumpet blast. (Ex. 19:16-25) When they were to gather to worship (Lev. 23:23-24), or when it was time to gather for war they blew a trumpet. (Num. 10:7-10) This is similar to the trumpet used in the countryside calling people to a funeral. The angel's trumpet could refer to gathering God's people together for his return. The blowing of a trumpet was also a practice when a person was anointed king, so perhaps the trumpet symbolized the coming of the true king, Jesus. Isaiah 27:13 also tells of a time when the trumpet blast will announce the end. Jesus is saying that when he comes, he will gather all of his faithful followers (called "*the elect*" since they are chosen by God) into his eternal kingdom.

Jesus tells his disciples that they are to learn from the fig tree. Like the wanza tree, the fig tree was unusual in Palestine in that it was one of the few trees that would shed all of its leaves. When the new leaves came out, everyone knew that summer and the fig fruit which Jews enjoyed had arrived. Although the leaves did not indicate a specific time when the fruit would arrive, it signaled that the fruit was coming. In the same way, as the followers of Jesus watched the destruction of Jerusalem and the increase in wars, persecution, and worldwide disasters, they should see these as indications that Jesus could soon return. No one will know exactly when Jesus will return. It seems that all of these "signs" which Jesus gave are increasing in frequency and severity. Could it be that Jesus is telling us to watch the signs, for his coming is drawing near?

Scholars debate what Jesus meant that "*this generation*" would not die before all of the events prophesied took place. Some think Jesus, in his humanity, did not know when he was going to come back (Mt. 24:36), and was mistaken in thinking it would be within the lifetime of the disciples. We will see, however, that Jesus knew that his return was going to be delayed, so it is unlikely that Jesus was mistaken. Others think that the word "generation" also refers to "race" in Hebrew and so Jesus was promising that the Jewish race would not be destroyed by the Romans but survive to witness his return. Still others think Jesus is saying that once the time of great tribulation starts (the time just before Jesus returns), Jesus is saying that his return would be within one generation of the beginning of that time. Perhaps Jesus was simply telling the disciples that within their lifetime, two things would happen. First, the Temple they

admired would be destroyed. Second, all of the signs which had to be in place before Jesus could return would be fulfilled, such as taking the Gospel to the known world.

Jesus told his disciples that these predictions and all of his teachings were eternal, longer than creation itself. The Jews believed that only God and his word were eternal, so no Jewish teacher would ever dare make such a claim. For Jesus to say that his words were eternal was another indirect claim to be the eternal God.

Q. 23. Review the various signs Jesus gave concerning the end times. List them out and then describe how those signs are seen in the world today.

6. The time of Jesus' return cannot be predicted so his followers must always be ready in case he comes (Mt. 24:36-51)

Jesus strongly warned his followers against any attempt to predict his return. He said that his return was a secret not known by the angels or himself, but only known by God. This statement that Jesus did not know when he would return has confused many Christians. "If Jesus is God, how can he not know when he will return?" they wonder. Perhaps the answer can be found in Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:6-8. Paul said that when Jesus left the glory of heaven and came to earth, he took the form of a servant. In other words, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, part of becoming a human meant that while on earth, he had to lay aside some of his divine attributes like the ability to know all things. For the 33 years that Jesus lived on the earth, he was fully human. Therefore he could be tempted (Heb. 4:15); he could feel hunger and thirst (Mt. 4:1-2; Jn. 19:28); and some of his knowledge was limited. As we study the life of Jesus, we will see that there are times that he knows things that no man could know without God revealing it to him (e.g. the name of Zacchaeus in Lk. 19:5), but there are other times like here when Jesus did not know some things. Scholars believe, therefore, that Jesus is saying that if God had temporarily hidden the date of his return even from Jesus while he was on earth, it was foolish for Jesus' followers to think they would know "when" of events of the end times would take place.

Although Jesus did say there would be certain "signs" that would indicate about when he would return, Jesus insisted that his return cannot be predicted. During Jesus' days, most Jews believed that once the "end" started, there would be a major time of persecution for the Jews and then the Messiah would quickly come and start the kingdom of God. But Jesus told his disciples that that is not what would happen, there would be an indefinite period of delay. Since the "signs" that reveal that Jesus' coming is drawing near can be seen in every generation, his followers are to stay faithful and watchful at all times. The New Testament never encourages us to try to "guess" at when Jesus will return. The study of prophecy is not meant to be something we do to satisfy our curiosity about the end times or know all of the details. Rather, it is given to encourage us of the glorious future that awaits us while also warning us to stay faithful to Jesus no matter how difficult life is now. (See 1 Jn. 3:1-3; Rev. 14:12)

Unfortunately, throughout history there have been many Christians who did not listen to what Jesus taught. When the nation of Israel was established in 1948, many Christians wrongly insisted that Jesus must return within 40 years (one generation) of the event. When the western calendar changed to 2000, some Christians taught that Jesus was going to come that year. In one part of Ethiopia, a prophetess insisted that Jesus would come within two years and therefore people should leave their jobs, get married and enjoy life. "Why work if Jesus is coming?" she taught. Unfortunately, many Christians believed her. Imagine how their lives were destroyed by such a false prophecy; now they had wives and children but no

jobs. It was not long until many husbands left their wives and families to look for work in remote parts of Ethiopia. Many Christians spend lots of time trying to figure out when Jesus will return. All such efforts go directly against what Jesus taught. Jesus insists that his followers should never focus upon "when" he will return. Rather, we should focus on being ready.

The rest of Matthew 24 and most of Matthew 25 (which we will study next week) illustrate how Christians should always be prepared for Jesus' return.

a. When Jesus returns, it will be similar to the days of Noah when the flood came. People (the unbelievers) were living their lives as normal; eating, drinking, working, and getting married when suddenly disaster struck. The flood took them all by surprise. Even Noah did not know when the rains would come until the day of the flood. In the same way, people will be surprised when Jesus comes.

b. When Jesus returns, people will be in the middle of normal activities like plowing in the fields or grinding grain. Jesus illustrated life from the perspective of men (who were responsible to plow the fields) and from women (grinding grain). Two women would usually work together to grind grain on a small mill. One would turn the handle tied to the top stone and the other would pour in the grain as it was grinding. In the middle of their daily work, there would suddenly be a time of separation. One would be "*taken*" and one left. We do not know if the one taken went into the kingdom of Jesus or into judgment because they were not in a proper relationship with Jesus. Either way, what Jesus was emphasizing was that his return would be unexpected by all and cause division between those who were ready and those who weren't.

c. Jesus' return would be similar to the coming of a thief. (See 1 The. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3 for other passages describing Jesus' return with this image.) Poor Jewish farmers usually lived in houses made up of dirt blocks. When thieves came, they often dug through the dirt walls to get into the house and steal. All owners of property know that if they knew exactly "when" a thief is coming they would be ready to protect their homes. The problem is that owners do not know when the thief will come. That is why they are surprised by thieves and are robbed. All owners of a home can do is to be "*ready*" for the thief at all times and take whatever precautions they can. In the same way Jesus told his disciples that all they can do as they live in the times of not knowing when the Messiah will return is to always be ready for him. The followers are to "*watch*" for his return. The word "watch" in Greek was used for military guards who watched over a city to protect it from surprise attacks from their enemy. We too are to "watch" for Jesus' return, and we do it by continuing to serve Jesus faithfully as if he will return today.

d. The followers of Jesus show their spiritual wisdom by faithfully serving Jesus as they wait for his return. Jesus next told several parables to illustrate why it is important to be ready. (Mt. 24:45-51; Mt. 25:1-13; Mt. 25:14-30; 31-46) In Matthew 24:45-51, Jesus compared wise and foolish followers to a slave who was given responsibility as a steward over a master's farm. During the days of Jesus, it was common for rich land owners in Judea to have large properties. Since many did not like living in Palestine, they would assign one of their gifted slaves to manage the farm on their behalf as a steward and they went away to live in Rome or another large city. The landowner would come once a year to examine how his property was being managed, often arriving unannounced. Jesus compared himself to such a landowner. He would soon leave to go to heaven and his disciples were like the slave given responsibility over the affairs of the master. One of the responsibilities of the steward was to give food to the rest of the slaves every day. The "*wise*" steward faithfully fulfilled his responsibilities of taking care of the slaves. He did not have to worry that the master would suddenly return and find him neglecting his work since he was faithfully working

and doing what his master had asked him to do. In the same way, the wise followers of Jesus are faithfully working for Jesus every day. They help the poor, they share about Jesus to the lost around them, and they pray for those who are hurting. Since they are faithful, they are not worried about "when" Jesus comes. Rather, they are ready. And when Jesus comes, they will be rewarded by Jesus, just like the master gave the faithful wise steward even more responsibility over the affairs of the master.

But it will be very different for the "*foolish*" or "*wicked*" follower of Jesus. The steward who forgot that the master will return demonstrated his wickedness by abusing the responsibility God gave him. Rather than take care of the other slaves, he beat them. The Jews viewed slaves as the property of the master, and to abuse the slaves by beating them was seen as destroying the property of the owner. Rather than use the food carefully to feed the other slaves, he wasted food on his own selfish pleasures. Wine was considered the property of the owner, so to use the wine to eat and drink with friends was considered stealing.

Jesus has given responsibilities to all of his followers. But if we live as if he is not returning: if we focus on living more luxuriously, if we are leaders who abuse our authority over the church and fight each other, or if we are so busy building church buildings that we do not share the Gospel with the lost or help the suffering in our community we will be unprepared for Jesus' return and therefore disciplined. (Jesus is hinting that the major reason that his followers do not live in purity but selfishly is because they have forgotten that he could return at any moment. To not think about the return of Jesus causes us to become "*wicked*." [1 Jn. 3:2-3]) When the master, Jesus, comes his followers won't have any opportunity to change and do things which their master desires. Those who claim to be followers of Jesus but do not faithfully serve him will be judged as severely as those who openly reject Jesus. The worst punishment imaginable to the Jew was to have their bodies cut up into pieces. Jesus is saying that the "*wicked*" followers' punishment when he returns will be severe. Throughout eternity they will suffer deeply as symbolized by "*gnashing their teeth*" and "*weeping*" in regret over what they could have done for Jesus when alive but they didn't.

None of us know when Jesus will come. He can come for us as we die; none of us knows when death might strike us. But when death does come, there is no longer an opportunity to repent and live for Jesus and receive a reward. Rather, we are left with punishment. But Jesus could also come to establish his eternal kingdom. Should Jesus return today, would you be ready, or would you have regrets? Would you wish you had served Jesus better in how you used your money? Would you wish that you had used your time to serve other Christians, give the poor, or shared your faith? Remember, a spiritually wise person lives as if Jesus could come today and so he faithfully serves his master Jesus. That way he will not be embarrassed when Jesus comes. And he won't have any regrets over not being able to change how he is living and using his life for the benefit of eternity.

We live in days when few of us think about the return of our King Jesus. Unlike previous generations, few of our worship songs express our longing for his return. Church history demonstrates that when the people of God no longer look in expectation to the return of Jesus, soon their love for God grows cold. They become more selfish, looking at ways to make life more comfortable and sharing the Gospel less. Could this be one of our problems today? The wise servant was able to stay faithful because he lived with the expectation that his master would return. In the same way, one of the major ways to maintain our personal purity and the holiness of our church is to keep reminding ourselves that Jesus could return at any minute.

Q. 24. a) Describe ways Christians can demonstrate that they are "wise" servants in how they live. b) Describe how many Christians are like the "wicked" servant. c) Illustrate ways that your life (what you do, how you would live) would change if you knew that Jesus was coming today.

The disciples had asked Jesus two questions: 1) "When will the destruction of Jerusalem take place?" and 2) "What signs will tell us when your return will happen?" (Mt. 24:3) In his answer to the second question, Jesus makes three major statements that all followers of Jesus must remember:

a. Jesus will return. His return will not be hidden and silent, but visible to all. And rather than come in humility to die like he did on his first coming, he will come in great power and glory. Although it might seem like Jesus will not return, his followers must always remember that he is coming back for them and to also judge his enemies. (This is the major teaching of Mt. 24:4-35.)

b. No one will be able to know "when" Jesus returns. There might be vague signs that indicate that his return was possible, but these signs would never be clear enough for his followers to point to a date and say Jesus will come on that date. (Mt. 24:36-41) As Jesus said "*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*" (Mt. 24:36)

c. Less important than knowing "when" Jesus will return is living in a way that believers won't be embarrassed when Jesus does return. (Mt. 24:42-51) Jesus told his followers "*So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*" (Mt. 24:44)

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. a) Discuss Getahun and Gebre's practices in the first day's lesson. Were they right or wrong in what they did? Explain your answer. b) List ways many Christians seek to not pay taxes or do not fully obey the government. c) Based upon what Jesus taught, do you believe such behavior is right? d) Discuss situations when Christians must obey the government as the Bible commands (e.g., Rom. 13:1-7) and when the Bible tells us that we can disobey the government.

2. a) What did Jesus say was the most important commandment in the Bible? b) What other command did he also say was vital? c) Illustrate ways that these two commands summarize all that God desires from followers of Jesus. d) List ways from daily living situations how a Christian demonstrates that he is obeying these two commands. e) Do you think most Christians consciously try to obey these two commands throughout the week? If not, why not?

3. a) Describe ways the Pharisees demonstrated their sin of hypocrisy. b) How do Christians today, especially church leaders, show this sin in their lives today? c) Why do preachers rarely warn against this sin that Jesus hated? d) Which of the "woes" that Jesus pronounced apply to our church today? Explain your answer.

4. Read Mk. 12:41-44. a) What does this passage teach about how God determines who gives sacrificially? b) The Bible tells us that we should be generous givers. (2 Cor. 9:5-8) What is the difference

between tithing and giving generously? c) Do you think most Christians in your church are giving generously? Explain your answer. If not, what teaching in your church must change so that generosity in giving becomes part of their way of following Jesus?

5. Jesus taught his disciples that they should always be ready for his unexpected return. a) List some of the signs that Jesus said would take place before he returned. Discuss whether or not those signs are seen in the world today. b) Do you think most Christians live expecting Jesus to return soon? If not, why not? If they do, how is this expectation changing how they live? c) 1 Jn. 3:2-3 tells us that those who look for the return of Jesus purify their lives. Why do you think this is true? d) Discuss ways that church leaders could help members of their church become more aware of the possible return of Jesus and the need to be "wise" slaves.

LESSON TWENTY-TWO

FIRST DAY

Genet was an uneducated housewife with three small children. She had been a Christian for many years, but never got involved in helping out in church or witnessing in her community. "I am just a woman. I can't do anything" she thought. Tilahun was a successful businessman and had little time to help out at church. "I will give my tithe. That is the best way I can help the church" he thought.

Q. 1. a) Do you think most people in your church are like Genet and Tilahun? Explain your answer. b) How do you think people like Genet and Tilahun would change if they realized that part of being a follower of Jesus meant they were to use their time, natural and spiritual gifts, and money that God had given to them to serve Jesus?

A close look at our churches shows that most of the ministries in the church are being fulfilled by a few people. The majority of people are like Genet and Tilahun. They come every Sunday and worship and they give their tithe. But they do not get involved in ministries. Jesus was concerned that all of his followers use the abilities he gave them properly as they waited for his return to start the eternal kingdom. He did not want his followers to live from day to day with little concern about how to serve Jesus when he did not return quickly. We saw last week that Jesus taught his followers that although they thought that he was going to start his Messianic kingdom in a few days, that kingdom was going to be delayed for an indefinite period. No one would be able to predict when Jesus would return. Therefore it was important for all of his followers to be constantly ready for Jesus' return so that they not be caught unprepared when he returns. Today we will finish Jesus' teaching about how his followers are to prepare for his unexpected return.

Q. 2. Read Mt. 25:1-13. a) Summarize the parable. What does it teach about attitudes the followers of Jesus are to have as they wait for Jesus to return? b) Do you think most Christians are aware of this truth? Explain your answer. c) How would your life change if you were to apply this teaching to your life?

TEACHINGS ON BEING READY FOR THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

1. The parable of the ten virgins (Mt. 25:1-13)

Because the Old Testament pictures God as a groom and his people Israel as the bride (Jer. 2:2; Hos. 2), during the days of Jesus, Jews liked to compare the Messiah's kingdom to a wedding celebration. Jesus used this common Jewish analogy to teach his followers about what it means to prepare for God's eternal kingdom.

Like Ethiopian weddings, Jewish weddings were a time of great celebration. They did not celebrate for just one day, but often for up to a week. Especially in the countryside the whole community was involved in the celebration. The various bridal and groom groups would spend most of the day preparing for the wedding which was usually held at night. Like many country weddings today, there was little concern that the celebration start on time. It was important, however, for the bride to be ready for when the groom arrived at her home to collect her and take her to the groom's father's home. As evening approached, the bride would be at her home surrounded by her virgin friends (perhaps bridesmaids) waiting for the groom to come with his attendants. As the groom approached the bride's house, someone would go ahead and

shout "Get ready, the groom is coming." The virgins would then leave the bride's home and meet the groom and his attendants. They would all go back into the bride's house where the groom would collect her and escort her to his house.

One way people got ready for the wedding was to prepare torches for the wedding procession from the brides' home to the groom's home. These torches consisted of a wire basket tied on a stick. People would soak rags in oil which they would light. They had to carry jars of oil because the oil on the rags had to be replaced about every 15 minutes. Carrying their lighted torches, the virgins friends of the bride and attendants of the groom would escort the bride and groom slowly through the city. Invited guests would meet them with their lit torches and watch the wedding party walk by and shout words of blessing upon them. Those who were invited to the celebration would then escort the wedding party to the groom's father's house. When the wedding party arrived at the home, all of the invited guests would enter the house to celebrate. No one without a lit torch would be invited into the home, because in Jewish culture not having a torch was a sign that they were not invited guests but only trying to come in and eat the food or perhaps steal. The doors would be shut and all invited guests would start to celebrate. Guests were not allowed to come late to the celebration. These five foolish virgins missed not only the special night of celebration, but the week-long wedding feast.

In his story, Jesus compared five "wise" virgins with five "foolish" virgins. All ten virgins had gone to the bride's house to wait for the groom. But the groom was so late that all of them fell asleep and the torches which they were carrying ran out of oil and went out. When the call came announcing the arrival of the groom, each got up to meet the groom. The first thing they did was to get their torches ready once again. The wise virgins had extra oil, so they put new oil on their rags and relit them. But the foolish virgins did not have any extra oil. They asked the wise virgins if they could have some of their oil. However, the five wise virgins refused. Why? They were not being selfish. Rather they knew that if they gave away what little oil they had, their torches would also run out of oil. It would then be a great insult for all of the virgins (bridesmaids) to not have any light for the procession to the groom's house. So they told the five to buy their own oil from the small kiosks which would have been open on such a night of celebration. When the five foolish virgins went off to buy their oil, the groom's party arrived, and the wedding party was escorted back to the groom's home and the wedding celebration began. Jesus told how the father of the bride refused to let the five foolish virgins into the wedding ceremony once the doors were closed. Shutting the door was an Old Testament image of separating out the good from the evil people. (Is. 22:22)

What was Jesus teaching through this parable?

a. No one will know when the groom (Jesus) will come. All we can do is stay prepared at all times so that when he comes we will not be embarrassed like the five foolish virgins. The virgins were the same except for one thing; five were prepared and carried excess oil and five made no preparations for a delay in the coming of the groom so they did not carry enough excess oil. None of the virgins were reprimanded for falling asleep; but they were reprimanded for not being prepared for the unexpected coming of the groom. Jesus is teaching that spiritually wise people are those who are prepared for his unexpected return, but spiritually foolish people are those who do not prepare for the return of Jesus. Spiritual wisdom means that we are always ready for Jesus to come at any time and living in a way that will not embarrass us when he comes.

b. No one can give their spiritual preparedness to someone else. Just like the five wise would not give their oil to the five foolish bridesmaids, in the same way we cannot give our spirituality to others. Christian parents cannot give it to their children and church leaders cannot give it to the members of their churches. Rather, being ready for Jesus is a personal matter. Each person must take care of his own life to get ready for Jesus. This is an important lesson today. There are many churches that think that their children are spiritually ready for Jesus because they were born into Christian homes or were baptized. Many church members today think they are ready for Jesus because their parents belong to a certain church or are church leaders. But Jesus said that this is not true. Many people will be like the foolish virgins, shut out of Jesus' eternal kingdom.

Notice what the master said when the five foolish bridesmaids tried to enter. He did not say "I no longer know you" as if they were true followers of Jesus and were now being turned away because they were late. Rather he said "*I never knew you*" to show how these five foolish bridesmaids represent those who thought that they were friends of Jesus, but they had never been truly saved. They never had developed a personal relationship to Jesus. It is not enough to think that because we go to church and are part of the group that we are true followers of Jesus. And we must never think that just because we were baptized that we are one of the wise virgins. Rather, we must personally choose to follow Jesus and show our commitment to Jesus by always being ready for his return for us.

c. Jesus is also teaching that how we live in expectation of his return is an indication of our spiritual state. If we live our lives totally neglecting Jesus and his kingdom or forgetting that he is coming back, then we are probably not true followers of Jesus. We are just "verbal" followers, not heart followers. The Bible insists that true faith always evidences itself in how we live. It is not our belief that Jesus will return that is most important; it is living as if he is returning soon that demonstrates our commitment to follow Jesus.

d. When the "*door*" is closed, it will never be reopened. There is no second chance. There are two situations when the "door" can close. First, there is the closing of the door when we die. Up to the time we die, we can believe in Jesus and we can live in a way which honors Jesus. But after we die, we will not be able to believe in Jesus or serve him. Second, there is the closing of the door when Jesus returns to start his eternal kingdom. This is what Jesus is focusing upon here. If we are "wise" then we will live as if Jesus could come today. That way we won't be embarrassed by having the door closed before we can get ready.

Q. 3. Review these four major truths in this parable. Explain why you think these truths are important for people like Genet and Tilahun and people in your church.

Q. 4. Read Mt. 25:14-30. a) Summarize the parable. What does it teach about attitudes the followers of Jesus are to have as we wait for Jesus to return? b) Do you think most Christians are aware of this truth? Explain your answer. c) How would our lives change if we would apply this teaching?

2. The parable of three servants and the money they received from their master (Mt. 25:14-30, Lk. 19:12-27)

It is not enough to only be alert for the return of Jesus. While waiting, it is important for his followers to use the "talents" which he has given us for the benefit of Jesus' kingdom. In order to teach this principle, Jesus told his next parable.

In Judea there were often large landowners who did not like to live in Palestine but preferred living in Rome which was more civilized. They had educated servants or slaves whom they would place in control

of their lands as stewards. And then they would return at certain times to visit their lands to make sure the farm was well run. At times these servants were allowed to keep some of the profits which they gained. Some slaves even used working hard and gaining a lot of profit for their master as a way to obtain their freedom.

Jesus used this cultural practice for his next parable. Jesus said that a certain "landowner," representing Jesus, decided to go on to a long journey. He called in three of his slaves and gave them some money to invest for the benefit of the master. To the first servant who no doubt was the most skilled and trusted servant, the master entrusted five "*talents*." One talent was worth about 6000 denarii, or 6000 days of work. So one talent was more than an ordinary worker earned in his whole life. To be entrusted with five talents, then, was a large amount of money. The second servant was not as skilled, so the master only gave him two talents. It was still a large amount of money for a servant to control. The last servant, perhaps because he was not as gifted as the other two servants, was only given one talent.

The first two servants were trustworthy workers. Jesus said that they went "*at once*" and used the money in such a way as to earn a profit. We don't know if they used money changers to cause the money to gain interest or if they started a small business. What mattered is that they worked to the best of their ability to increase the money for the master. They did not think about themselves and do what they wanted. Nor did they cheat the master while he was away. Nor did they procrastinate, waiting until a time was more convenient. Rather, as soon as the master left, they got busy working for the master. The third servant, however, was very different. He took the money and buried it in his back yard. In rural Palestine there were no banks in which to put their money so most people would bury money for safe keeping.

A long time passed (which informed the disciples that it would be a long time before Jesus would return) and suddenly the landowner arrived unannounced. He called his three servants together and asked each of them to report on what had happened to the money he had entrusted to them. The first servant shared that he had gained five more talents and the second servant shared that he had gained two more talents. The master praised these two servants and rewarded them in two ways. First, he rewarded them with more responsibility. God does not honor us just by giving us more blessing. Rather, God rewards us by giving us more responsibility. This is a hint to us that heaven is not a place of "rest" where we sit around and sing. Rather, we have the privilege to continue to serve God, but in a much greater way than we can now. Second, he rewarded them by inviting them to share in his joy. This probably meant that the landowner had a celebration (party) in honor of the two servants in appreciation for what they did.

Jesus focused his story upon the third servant. When the third servant brought only the original talent and gave it back to the master, the master got angry. The servant had not stolen the money, but he had not used the money wisely. This servant had forgotten the major truth about being a servant. A servant's purpose is to do all he can to benefit the master. He does not work for his own benefits. In the same way, as servants of Jesus, we are to work for the kingdom of Jesus, not for what we can get.

Why didn't the servant do anything with the money? We can't be certain. Some scholars think that he was just too lazy. There are many workers, even church workers, who don't do anything unless the boss is around. As soon as the boss is gone, they rest. Or perhaps the servant was angry at the master because he did not get as much money as the other two. There are many Christians who are angry at the gifts and blessings of others but who never thank God for the gifts they have. In their jealousy and anger they don't use what they have. Or did the man just procrastinate? There are many Christians who say "OK I will do it

tomorrow." They know that they are supposed to do something, but never get around to doing it. Other scholars think that the servant was afraid to risk losing the money. So he did what was safest, he hid the money. Doing nothing is a safe way to live. But if we want things to grow and change, we must risk failure by trying new things, and many Christians are not willing to do this.

"Why didn't you at least loan the money to those who worked as money lenders?" the master asked. Jews were not supposed to loan money with interest to fellow Jews, but they were allowed to loan money for interest to Gentiles. (See Ex. 22:25; Deut. 23:19-20) There is some indication that during the days of Jesus, the Jews interpreted this rule to mean that they could not loan money with interest to Jews who were in financial problems, but they could loan money with interest to business men. Loaning money for interest was a common practice and the Romans allowed people to charge up to 12% interest on the money. The servant, looking for a way to excuse himself, responded that he was afraid of the master whom he considered unfair for demanding more of servants than was proper. (The word "*hard*" can mean strict, merciless, harsh, or cruel; which is what some people think that God is like.) It is clear that the Master was not cruel like this servant mentioned since he had just graciously rewarded the faithful workers. But the Master did not argue with the man. Rather he told the third servant that if he thought the Master did expect too much, he would have done all he could to gain money so as to please the Master. This servant was "*wicked*" or "*worthless*" not because he did something wrong, but because of what he did not do. Because he did nothing with what the master had given him, he was of no worth to the master.

The parable ends with a very serious action. The Master was so angry that he told the other workers to do two things. First, the workers were to take the money the Master had given the servant and give it to the first servant who now had 10 talents. Second, he had the servant thrown outside the kingdom, into a place of darkness and great torment. This of course is a picture of hell.

What was Jesus teaching through this parable?

a. As the followers of Jesus (servants) wait for Jesus to return, it is not enough for them to wait. They must be busy working to expand the kingdom of Jesus. Paul says that we are saved "to do good works." (Eph. 2:10) If Christians are not looking for ways to expand the kingdom of Jesus they become like the servant who hid the money and did nothing with it.

b. Jesus gives all believers "talents." These "talents" can be time with which to serve Jesus. Or they can be natural and spiritual gifts as described in Rom. 12:3-8 and 1 Cor. 12-14. Or they can be money, and property. Everything we have ultimately belongs to God. We are only stewards of it; and as stewards we are to use these things for Jesus' sake, not for our own selfish pleasures. The purpose of any of the blessings which Jesus gives us is not to bless us, but for us to use to bless others. Jesus does not focus upon the greatness of a person's talents. Rather, he looks at the person's character of faithfulness in using his talents. To not use the talents which Jesus has given to us is an insult to Jesus. It wastes his resources just like the last servant wasted the opportunity to help the master's wealth increase.

c. Jesus does not give "talents" equally to his followers. Jesus knows his followers and gives each disciple different abilities. Some have great speaking gifts or even gifts of healing. Others have simple-seeming gifts like the ability to help around the church. Some have little intellectual ability and others are very smart. Some go to university and have several degrees but others can't even read and write. Paul taught that the Holy Spirit gives to each believer spiritual gifts "*as he desires*." (1 Cor. 12:11) Some might

seem spectacular and others plain. Since it is Jesus who gives out the talents, we have no reason to be jealous of those who are more capable than we are or boast how we are more effective than others. The ability did not come from us, but from God. Jesus does not hold a person responsible for working as effectively as a person with a greater gift. Rather, Jesus asks each disciple to faithfully work according to his ability. We might not be equal in giftings to others, but all Christians can be equal in their effort to serve Jesus. And it is faithful service which Jesus looks at, not the greatness of our ability.

d. Jesus gets very angry with those who claim to be his followers but do not use their abilities for his benefit. Notice how severely the last servant was punished; he was thrown into eternal hell. Why would Jesus do this? Isn't salvation a free gift that we receive by grace? Yes, it is a free gift. But the Bible teaches that we demonstrate the reality of our salvation by a changed life. And one way we change is how our lives are orientated after we meet Jesus. We no longer focus upon living for our own benefit or our family or tribe. Rather, our heart's desire is to serve Jesus in any way possible. We turn our money over to him to be used for proclaiming the Gospel. We look for ways to serve Jesus in the church and in the community. This is a strong warning to the many Christians like Genet and Tilahun who are satisfied with coming to church to worship but do little else to serve Jesus. They are like the third servant and risk facing Jesus' severe punishment. (Note: What Jesus considers service is not limited to working in the church. Taking care of our children and raising them to fear God or serving faithfully and with justice in the government is also serving Jesus.)

e. When Jesus unexpectedly comes and his rewards and his punishments are given out, there is no ability to change. He honors those who faithfully served him in two ways. First, there is increased responsibility. That increased responsibility can be here on earth. The normal way that God causes a person to grow in ministry responsibility is by being faithful with what he has given us. If we are responsible in a low level of leadership, he uses our faithfulness to advance us to greater leadership responsibilities. It is very risky for any church to advance a person into higher levels of leadership who has not first demonstrated ability and faithfulness at lower levels of leadership, even if they do get more education. But this increased responsibility is also in heaven. In some way we don't understand, God will honor us and give us responsibility in heaven based upon our faithfulness in service now. The second reward is participating in the joy of eternal life with Jesus. Jesus called this "*my joy*." God's plan for us will come to completion in eternity, and we will be in his joyful and beautiful kingdom that is far beyond anything we can imagine now. None of our simple service of Jesus will go unrewarded.

But the opposite is also true. If we despise Jesus so much that we do not work for his benefit now, we may be revealing that the Gospel has not entered into our hearts. We are not demonstrating love for Jesus, for we willing serve the one we love. Therefore, our lack of service to Jesus could show that we have not chosen to follow Jesus as his disciple and so we will be severely punished.

Q. 5. Think about the members of your church. a) How many of them are actively serving Jesus in some way? b) Describe why this warning that we are to be busy in faithful service of Jesus or face punishment is an important truth that believers need to be taught.

Q. 6. Read Mt. 25:31-46. a) Summarize the parable. What does it teach about attitudes the followers of Jesus are supposed to have as we wait for Jesus to return? b) Do you think most Christians are aware of this truth? Explain your answer. c) How would your life change if you were to apply this teaching?

3. The parable of the separation of the sheep and goats (Mt. 25:31-46)

Jesus was teaching his followers that during the times between his first and second coming, it is important for his disciples to stay alert and faithfully serve him. But Jesus did not want the disciples to only focus upon taking the Gospel to remote parts of the world as the way to serve him. Jesus wanted to teach that faithful service is ultimately defined by simple things which all Christians can do, like befriending others, especially fellow Christians, and helping them when they suffer. It is found in giving a glass of cold water when a person is thirsty, or a meal of shiro wat when a person is hungry, or giving a poor person whose clothes are worn out one of your extra shirts.

We live in days where there is great tolerance towards people of different religions. There are many well-meaning Christians who say that because God is loving, He will not punish people who believe in different ways or who are "good" people but not committed Christians. "All roads lead to God" is a popular teaching. But if the Bible is true and it is God's Word, then we must search to find out what God says rather than what people say. And in the Bible God clearly says that just as there is an eternal heaven there is an eternal hell. Jesus frequently referred to hell using different descriptions such as great darkness, unending fire, gnashing of teeth, or being eaten by worms forever. Each of these descriptions is intended to give us a picture of what a terrible place hell is.

In his last parable, Jesus taught his disciples about a time when he will come to judge all people. The Jews believed that only God had the ability and right to judge all people at the end of times. (Is. 2:4; Mic. 4:3) Therefore, Jesus is teaching here that God has turned over to him the authority to judge all people (Jn. 5:22). At his first coming, Jesus arrived as a humble baby born in a stable to poor unknown parents. Soon he would be crucified as a rebel. But Jesus knew that his death on the cross was not the end of the story. He taught that he will rise from the dead and will return one day. But this time his return will be with great power and glory. No doubt Jesus used the title "*Son of Man*" and the description of coming with angels in glory and sitting on the eternal throne to remind his disciples of the prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14. The Jews knew that God will separate people at the end times. But they assumed that God's separation would be between the Jews and the Gentiles, or between godly Jews on one side and godless Jews and Gentiles on the other side. But in his parable Jesus shows that his separation between those who were rewarded with heaven and those who would be punished with hell would also be on a different standard than the Jews thought, for it would include how they lived by showing compassion to those believers who are persecuted or in poverty.

It was common for Jewish shepherds to have both goats and sheep grazing together. The Jews viewed the sheep as being more valuable since Jewish sheep produced wool (like the sheep in northern Ethiopia) which was used to make blankets. At night, however, the goats and the sheep had to be separated for two reasons. Goats were more aggressive than the sheep and could hurt the sheep at night when the shepherd was not watching. During the cold winter nights, the goats also had to be kept inside since they did not have the long wool to keep them warm like the sheep did. The Old Testament frequently called God's children "sheep." (Ps. 23) Perhaps Jesus had in mind the prophecy of Ezekiel 34:17 when he told this parable. However, the image in Ezekiel is the separation of good and cruel sheep, not the separation of sheep and goats.

Jesus used this practice of shepherds separating out the goats and sheep at night as an illustration of how he will separate his followers from those who were not his followers. Jesus said that one day all of the nations, or all individuals in all nations, will stand before him. This would include Jews and Gentiles,

believers and unbelievers. The focus of this parable is to show what happens between those who are true believers and those who are pretend believers. Just as sheep and goats might look similar from a distance, true and pretend believers might look the same in our churches. But Jesus knows their hearts and will separate them out. In his parable, Jesus said that those who are sheep were placed on the right side of his throne. The Jews viewed the right side as being the place of honor. The goats were placed on the left side of his throne, which is the side of punishment.

(Note: Christians differ in their understanding of when this judgment will take place. Some Christians believe that Jesus will have one judgment of "reward" for believers as described in 1 Cor. 3:10-15. This judgment is called "the judgment seat of Christ." They think this time of evaluation of believers will take place right after the believers are raptured or perhaps just before the judgment of the nations which is called the "White Throne judgment" (Rev. 20:11-15) At this judgment God will send unbelievers to hell. Other Christians believe that there will only be one time of judgment where not only are believers evaluated and rewarded, but unbelievers are sent to hell.)

What will be the standard Jesus will use to know who is true and who is a false believer? It will be how they treated *"the least of these brothers of mine."* Although some scholars think that the "brothers" refer to all people, most likely the "brothers" refer to fellow Christians. When Matthew was writing, it was a time of severe persecution for believers. Many were thrown into prison, losing jobs, and being expelled from their homes. It would be a temptation for other believers to distance themselves from those who were being persecuted by the government officials so that they would not be persecuted as well. But Jesus insisted that rather than distancing themselves, true believers will reach out to help those who are suffering for their faith. If a fellow believer is suffering, we are to help. Of course we are to help non-Christians when they are suffering too. That is what the story of the Good Samaritan taught. (Lk. 10:25-37) But here Jesus is emphasizing helping those within the family of God. (See Gal. 6:9-10) In his parable Jesus insisted that the only difference between the "sheep" and the "goats" was whether or not they reached out to help fellow believers in their times of trouble.

From this parable we can learn the following important truths:

a. Although it is faith in Jesus Christ which saves us, true faith will demonstrate itself in loving actions. Notice how Jesus did not say the goats did not "sing," or "go to church" or "read the Bible" or other actions which we usually think distinguishes a believer. Rather, he points to simple actions of helping others. Just as Jesus gave his life to help us with our problem of sin and helped the hurting around him, so also his followers will help fellow believers and other hurting people. If a believer characteristically does not help other believers when they suffer, it could indicate that they are a "goat" and not a "sheep;" they are pretend believers, not real believers.

It is important to view this passage together with other teachings in the New Testament. It is clear that no one will earn salvation and heaven by giving money or helping people. The New Testament stresses that we are saved by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. (Eph. 2:8-9) But the New Testament also teaches that true faith always demonstrates itself through actions. If a person's life does not change after they profess to believe in Jesus; if they do not live in purity and change from being self-centered to being God and others-centered, then there is reason to believe that the profession of faith was not real. As the book of James teaches, faith without works is dead. (Jms. 2:14-17) In our days we place the emphasis upon a

person raising their hands and making a profession of faith in Jesus. But we must warn people that if their lives do not change, simply raising their hands is not enough; they will be "goats" and not "sheep."

b. Jesus is closely identified with his brothers and sisters. To help a believer is viewed by God as helping Jesus. If we do not help a believer, then we do not help Jesus. And to persecute a believer is to persecute Jesus. (See Acts 9:5) Jesus told the sheep and goats that every time they helped a believer, they were actually helping him. But every time they refused to help a fellow believer, they were turning their backs on him.

It was this truth that Jesus was in the person whom they were or were not helping which surprised the people being judged. This is an important truth. In the eyes of Jesus, our actions and attitude towards other believers is how we are treating Jesus. Do we despise a poor Christian? We are despising Jesus. Do we show prejudice against a believer from another tribe? We are despising Jesus. Do we think an uneducated believer is of little value? We are despising Jesus. Jesus is teaching here that we will be punished not only for the sins we knowingly commit or the bad things which we do. We will be punished when we were able to do something good for others but don't do it. As James teaches, it is sin not only when we disobey a commandment of God, but when we have the ability to do something and don't do it. (Jms. 4:17) Jesus is saying that to not show love to other followers of Jesus is a sign that we don't love Jesus. And if we don't love Jesus, it is clear that we aren't really saved.

c. Jesus evaluates simple actions, not only what we would consider important religious actions. It might seem more important for us to give money to send out an evangelist or spend all night in a prayer meeting or sing with great enthusiasm. But when it comes to evaluating us, Jesus will also look at simple things in our lives. It might seem like a simple thing to give a glass of water to a thirsty person or to give a little food to a child who has little to eat. Or to reach out to a visitor at church and invite them to your home for a meal. Or to visit and send food to a believer who has been falsely accused and is in prison. But Jesus insisted that these simple actions will be the basis of his judging a person. Did we greet a lonely believer at church who does not have friends and relatives? Did we help the child from our church whose parents did not have enough money to send them to school? Did we help the evangelist who is receiving such a low salary that he and his family have little to eat? It is these actions which demonstrate that we are concerned for others in a way that Jesus wants of us. (Because Jesus repeated each of the six actions four times, it shows how important he thinks these things are.)

d. Jesus indicates that helping is to be a natural action. We do not help others in order to "serve Jesus" or to "get a reward." The sheep were not thinking "I will be rewarded if I give this glass of water." Nor were they thinking that "I am serving Jesus, so I will feed this person." They were surprised that they were actually helping Jesus and being noticed and rewarded. True spirituality means that we reach out to help others without any desire for praise. We don't do it so people will notice us or thank us. Rather, it is an expression of our new character as followers of Jesus. Often it is easy for us to do something good if others are looking at us or as long as people honor us, but much more difficult when no one notices. However, it is what we do when no one is looking that reveals our character. Jesus wanted his followers to know that simple acts of kindness are being noticed and is being viewed as serving Jesus as much as preaching, going as an evangelist, giving money, or being in the choir is.

e. Jesus pointed out the eternal results these actions will bring. Jesus said that those who prove themselves to be "sheep" by their actions of helping others are those who are "elect" (chosen by God) and

will be part of the eternal kingdom which God has been preparing since the beginning of the world. God's ultimate plan is to have a world where only his kingdom filled with those who have chosen to follow Jesus reside. When Jesus returns and this time of separation takes place, God's eternal kingdom will start. But for those who do not demonstrate their faith through kind actions will find themselves in a place totally separated from God and his love. That place, which we call hell, was originally designed for Satan and the angels, now called demons, who rebelled against God. It is interesting that Jesus did not say hell existed from eternity past, unlike his kingdom. Rather, it was created only after Satan and demons fell into sin. But those who choose to live their lives without God will find themselves there as well. They chose not to submit to God, so when they find themselves in hell, they have only themselves to blame. And once the separation has taken place, there is no change. No one will be able to lose their position in heaven and go to hell. And no one will be able to do something to get out of hell and get into heaven. Their eternal state will be sealed. This truth clearly goes against the teaching of some who want to believe that after this judgment, the wicked will be annihilated and cease to exist or that the wicked somehow work off their evil in purgatory. Jesus taught that just as heaven is eternal, hell is also eternal.

It is tempting for us to think that we are like Genet with little ability to serve God and therefore we do nothing. But Jesus is saying that serving Jesus is possible for all of us. We can all do simple things (like a glass of cold water) for others. And this passage warns those of us who are like Tilahun that we must never get so involved in our business and a comfortable life that we are not aware of the needs of people around us and not involved in serving them. Jesus wanted his followers to examine our lives to make sure we are were sheep and not goats.

Q. 7. Consider your life. What are things you do which demonstrate that you are a sheep and not a goat? If you have grown uninvolved in helping people around you, confess this sin and ask the Holy Spirit to point out people you can help this week.

SECOND DAY

What was the major purpose for Jesus leaving heaven and coming to earth? Was it so that he could heal people? Was it so that he could teach people the truth? We have studied the earthly life of Jesus and seen how he mercifully healed and did other miracles. And we have learned from his teaching. But as we study the Gospel story it becomes very clear that in all of the writer's minds, what was most important about the story of Jesus was three days in the life of Jesus. Every Gospel focuses upon the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the heart of the Gospel. (See 1 Cor. 15:3-4 for how Paul summarizes the heart of the Gospel.) Jesus did not come to earth to be a healer. Nor did he come to earth to be a great teacher. He did these, but that was not the purpose of his life. Rather, he came to earth to die on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. No view of Jesus is correct according to the New Testament that does not acknowledge this as the major reason Jesus came to earth.

The chronology of Jesus' death has been a matter of dispute among scholars for a long time. There are two events for which the Gospel writers present differing views.

First, there is the question of when Mary, the sister of Martha, anointed Jesus with perfume. Matthew and Mark describe the event as taking place on Tuesday or Wednesday night just before Jesus is taken captive. John describes the story as taking place earlier on Saturday night when Jesus first arrived in

Jerusalem. (Jn. 12:1-8) Scholars believe that rather than tell Jesus' story chronologically, the Gospel writers sometimes organized the stories of Jesus as a teaching tool. For instance, Matthew probably wanted to compare the betrayal of Jesus by one of his apostles who loved money so much he was willing to "sell" his Master for just thirty pieces and silver and a woman who loved Jesus so much that she was willing to "waste" expensive perfume worth a year's wage by pouring the perfume on Jesus' head and feet. In this book we have chosen to include the story of Mary on Wednesday night.

Second, there is the question of what day of the week the Lord's Supper took place. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) all describe Jesus as celebrating the Passover celebration Thursday evening. Jesus is starting a new "Passover" for his people, the church. The old Passover celebrated the deliverance of the Jews from captivity in Egypt. But the new Passover celebrated the deliverance of all people from their bondage to sin. The book of John, however, describes Jesus as dying as the Passover Lamb on Friday. (See later discussion about reasons for this differences.)

We might not know how to reconcile the specifics about the story of the death of Jesus. However, the teaching about what happened during the final days of Jesus' life is clear.

Q. 8. Read Mt. 26:1-16. a) How soon did Jesus say he would die? b) Contrast Judas Iscariot and Mary the sister of Martha in this section. What did each do and what did each one's actions show about them being true followers of Jesus?

EVENTS LEADING TO THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

1. The Jewish leaders determine that Jesus must die (Mt. 26:1-5, 14-16, Mk. 14:1-2, 10-11, Lk. 22:1-6)

For several months Jesus had been telling his disciples that he would die in Jerusalem. But he always left the timing of his death vague. But now, at the end of teaching about his eventual return to reign, for the final time Jesus warns his disciples that he was going to die, but this time he gave a specific time for his death. He said that he would die "*in two days*." Jesus also told his disciples that the type of death he would experience was "*crucifixion*." This must have shocked the disciples. Crucifixion was the most painful type of punishment that the Romans could devise. No Roman was allowed to be crucified since it was viewed as too evil of a way for a Roman to die. Instead crucifixion was used for the worst criminals, usually those believed to be murderers and rebels against the Roman government. Jesus did not only die for our sins. He died the worst possible death as a criminal. The sinless son of God was treated as a criminal for you and me!

One of the things the Gospel writers want us to know is that Jesus' death was not an accident. It was the plan of God from the very beginning. And Jesus' death was not because the religious leaders were able to capture Jesus and have him crucified by the Romans. As we will see, none of their plans worked out. Only Jesus' plans worked as he ordained. Could this not be an important truth for us to remember? The nations, the enemies of the Gospel, even Satan might make plans to destroy us. But our lives are in God's hands, and only he can determine when it is time for us to die. We are told in Psalms that our days are "numbered" even before we were born. (Ps. 139:16) What security in knowing that God is the one who controls the days of our life and our death.

The Jewish leadership became increasingly worried about Jesus and his popularity. What worried them the most was that during the time of Passover there would be thousands of Jews in Jerusalem to

celebrate the festival. And it was often during these times celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt that the Jews became determined to overthrow Rome's domination. The leaders were afraid that people would use Jesus to start the rebellion against Rome. These Jewish leaders knew that the Romans would hold them responsible for any unrest and they would lose their positions of authority. Like many politicians, and sadly some church leaders, the Jewish leaders became more concerned with maintaining their political authority than over what was right and what was wrong. Several months earlier, the High Priest stated that it was better for one man, Jesus, to die than for the nation to face the anger of the Roman government. (Jn. 11:49-50) So the Sanhedrin, the Court of the Jews made up of the chief priests and the elders, met in secret to plan how to kill Jesus. Legally they were not supposed to determine that a person should die until after they had a trial. But this group of Jewish leaders were not concerned with justice. They wanted to maintain the peace and their positions of authority no matter what they had to do, even if it meant killing Jesus without cause. But the religious leaders did not think that the Passover celebration was a good time to try to capture Jesus. They were afraid that to do so would get people angry at them and a riot against them and even Rome would take place. So they planned to quietly capture Jesus and kill him after the people had returned home after the Passover feast. But that was not God's plan, so their thoughts would soon be overruled by God.

WEDNESDAY

1. Mary anoints Jesus with perfume (Mt. 26:6-13, Mk. 14:3-9, Jn. 12:2-8)

During the Passover celebration, thousands of Jews from all over the Roman Empire gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate. It is estimated that Jerusalem's normal population was about 50,000 people, but during a major religious celebration like the Passover, over 250,000 Jews gathered. Because there were so many visitors, often people had to stay outside of Jerusalem in small towns like Bethany. That is what Jesus and his disciples did, probably staying in the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

Jesus' public ministry was now complete and the time was drawing near for his crucifixion. On Wednesday night, the last night in Bethany, Jesus and his disciples were invited out to a feast at a man's house called Simon the leper. Because people were not allowed to eat at the home of a leper, this means that Simon was a cured leper; perhaps Jesus had healed him. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were invited as well and we are told that Martha helped serve. It is interesting in how Martha is always pictured in the Bible as one who liked to serve but Mary is shown as worshipping Jesus and listening to him. Although Jews usually ate sitting up at a table, when they had a feast they followed the Greek practice of lying on cushions on the floor and the food was placed on a short table in front of them. They would lean on their left elbows and eat with their right hands. Their heads were towards the table and their feet towards the outside.

Mary wanted to show her love for Jesus in a significant way. She took a large vial (almost ½ a liter) of expensive perfume worth about a year's salary for a common laborer. (Mk. 14:5) Perhaps she had kept this bottle of perfume for the day she would get married. Or it could be that the family bought this perfume and kept it for a day when they needed money. Since perfume sold quickly in the marketplace, some Jews would buy perfume and store it until they needed money, and then sell the perfume. This perfume was kept in a stone jar which had a long narrow neck. The only way to get the perfume out quickly was to break the neck of the bottle. Rather than pour out a few drops of perfume, the whole bottle of perfume was poured on Jesus' head and feet (Jn. 12:3). What an extravagant gift! We are told that the smell of the perfume filled the room. Although it was usual to pour oil on the head of an honored guest, it was very

unusual and a sign of her deep love for Mary to also pour the perfume on his feet. Culturally, a Jew did not like to touch the feet of another person since it was considered a sign of being humiliated. John tells us that Mary also let down her hair and wiped Jesus' feet with her hair. Again, this was a culturally inappropriate action. No Jewish woman was to let down her long hair in the presence of any man except her husband. But Mary did not care what others thought. Nor did she care that she was giving away what might have been her security for the future. Her love for Jesus was so deep that she gave what meant the most to her.

In the midst of this amazing act of love, the disciples began to complain about what Mary did, probably within her hearing. They stated that such an extravagant gift was a waste of money and it would have been better for Mary to sell the perfume and give the money to the poor. No doubt they thought Jesus would support them and reprimand Mary since Jesus often talked about giving money to the poor. (e.g. Mt. 19:21) Passover was also a time when pious Jews would give money to the poor. John tells us that the major spokesman of the group was Judas. Judas was a highly respected member of the disciples, so he was chosen to be the treasurer. It was only after his death that the disciples found out that all along Judas had been stealing from the groups' money. So he probably wanted Mary to sell the perfume and give the money to him so that he would have more money to steal.

Jesus' strongly commanded the disciples to stop reprimanding Mary. Rather than being reprimanded, what Mary did was a special sign to Jesus. Jews often poured this type of perfume on the bodies of their dead loved ones to keep the smell of death down. Jesus said that Mary had poured the perfume on his body in advance to his death two days later. Throughout the time of trial, beating and crucifixion, the smell of this perfume would have reminded Jesus of Mary's love. And in honor to her great love for Jesus, Jesus said that this story would be joined with the Gospel of his death and resurrection and told around the world. For over 2000 years the church has been repeating this story.

Although the Bible teaches that we are to be wise stewards of God's resources (both our personal and the church's), there are times when out of love for God, it is right for us to be extravagant. At that time what the culture teaches is no longer the major issue. Nor is wise use of money important. Rather, we are to allow our hearts to overflow with love and thanksgiving to the one who died for us on the cross.

Q. 9. a) Describe how many Christians would consider what Mary did inappropriate. b) List "extravagant" things Christians can do today to show their love for Jesus.

2. Judas agrees to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Mt. 26:14-16, Mk. 14:10-11, Lk. 22:3-6)

All of us have felt the pain of someone we thought was our friend disappoint us by turning against us. This is especially true during times of persecution when those we thought were fellow believers betray us. Or people we assumed were good Christians suddenly abandon their faith. Most likely when Matthew was writing his Gospel, many Christians were finding themselves in similar situations when fellow believers as well as their relatives were betraying them to their persecutors. One way the Gospel writers wanted to encourage the believers was to show how this also happened to Jesus. Jesus had one of his closest friends betray him. In fact we will see how every friend (disciple) disappointed him at a time when he needed their support the most.

It was not long after Mary showed her great love for Jesus by pouring out expensive perfume on Jesus that Judas secretly went to meet the high priest to form an agreement to betray Jesus to them. These high

priests had just finished determining to delay their arrest of Jesus until after the Passover, but with the new opportunity to catch Jesus and kill him, they welcomed Judas' willingness to betray Jesus. They agreed to pay Judas 30 pieces of silver for his act. Judas had been with Jesus for over three years as one of the 12 closest disciples. Although he was never one of the three closest disciples (Peter, James, and John) he must have been one of the most respected disciples to be granted the honor of being the group's treasurer. When Jesus chose Judas, he already knew that Judas would betray him. And yet for over three years, he treated Judas with the same love and respect that he gave all of his disciples. Even up to the end he gave Judas the opportunity to repent and follow Jesus as a true disciple. Jesus is an example to all of us how to react to those who disappoint us. We are not to get angry at them, treat them as the enemy, refuse to talk to them, or try to get even in some way. Rather, we are to treat them as if they had done nothing wrong to us. In love and grace, we are to reach out to them, praying for them, longing for the day they will repent. How different this is from how Christians often turn their backs against those who have disappointed them in some way!

Q. 10. a) Describe a situation from your life where you have been disappointed by someone close to you like Judas. b) How do most people treat such a person after they have disappointed them? c) How do you think Jesus would like us treat that person after they have hurt us in this way?

Why did Judas decide to betray Jesus? The Bible never gives us any indication, but the following probably contributed to his decision to betray Jesus.

a. Judas was hurt by Jesus' reprimand of him when he thought selling the perfume was best. So he reacted by turning against Jesus; just like a church elder, who is reprimanded for doing wrong things, will often turn against the rest of the elders and treat them as enemies.

b. Judas was following Jesus because he thought Jesus was going to bring political deliverance from the Romans. Some wonder if he was part of a group of political activists called "Zealots." Watching Jesus perform miracles caused him to decide that Jesus was the political Messiah and he wanted to join Jesus in his rebellion against Rome. But over the past several months he watched as Jesus talked more about dying than he did about conquering the enemies. Judas became increasingly frustrated with Jesus in that he did not fulfill Judas' desire to be part of a rebellion against Rome and establish a Jewish kingdom. His frustrations led him to turn against Jesus whom he now saw as an imposter.

c. Some scholars think that Judas wanted to force Jesus to act as the conquering king. He thought that by putting Jesus in a position where he had to fight, he could force Jesus to demonstrate his power to overcome the enemy and the rebellion would start. It was only when Jesus refused to fight that he realized that he had betrayed an innocent person and regretted his actions. (Mt. 27:4) This is the most likely reason

d. Judas was overcome with the love of money. No one falls into sin quickly. It is a gradual fall as decisions a person makes erodes their character. Judas was no doubt an honorable man when he was chosen to be treasurer of the group. But he fell into temptation and gradually began to take more and more money from the group. As his honesty eroded, Satan was able to impact him even more. Satan gains control over people's lives as they make choices to live in ways that are outside of God's will. Judas saw an opportunity to make money out of his situation. So he agreed to receiving 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus. Amazingly, 30 pieces of silver was not a large amount of money. If the silver coin was the one used in the temple, it would have been equivalent to the amount of money a worker would receive for 120 days

of work. It was only the amount of money a Jew was required to pay for a slave whom he killed by mistake. (Ex. 21:32)

Have you seen this same process happen to church leaders? They begin to love the power and honor of being a leader. Their servant-like character changes, Satan gains control and they become dictators of the church refusing to give up leadership when they are not elected into leadership. Instead, they turn into angry opponents of the church and often go to other churches. Or they begin to take small amounts of money from the church and this increases over time. When they are found out, rather than repent, they leave the church or seek to cause division in the church. How difficult it is to keep godly character when in position of leadership!

We should not be too judgmental against Judas. Haven't we all in some ways "betrayed" Jesus? Rather than work for his kingdom, we start to focus upon our personal ambitions. Or we know that Jesus wants to be sexually pure, but we knowingly rebel. Or we support those who cause division in the church, or are quiet when people falsely accuse a believer because we don't want to lose our position of authority in the kebele. Rather than quietly share that Jesus is the only way to God, we are silent in the presence of others. These are just some of the ways we "betray" Jesus.

In this passage we see an important truth. Clearly God was in control of every situation which happened to Jesus. As Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, he unknowingly fulfilled two Old Testament prophecies; Jesus was betrayed by his friend (Ps. 41:9) and sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12-13). Judas was the instrument to help fulfill Jesus' prophecy that in two days he would die (Mt. 26:2) But does this mean that God forced Judas to do this and so he was not guilty of sin? No. God never forces anyone to sin. Every one of us sins when we choose to do something of our own free will that is outside of God's desires. (Jms. 1:13-15) No one can ever blame God or Satan and say they were forced to sin. Everyone of us will be held responsible for the sins we choose to commit. But God is still in control of situations and oversees the outcome of our sins just like he controlled Judas' betrayal to fulfill his plan for the death of Jesus on the cross on the day of Passover.

Q. 11. a) Look at the four reasons why Judas may have betrayed Jesus. Explain how church leaders can act in a similar way today? b) Some people say "God made me do it" or "Satan made me do it." Explain why this is an inaccurate statement for a person to make.

Q. 12. Read Lk. 22:7-13; 24-30. a) List the two events which took place in this section. b) Read Ex. 12:1-20 and Deut. 16. Summarize the different rituals which took place on the Passover.

THURSDAY

1. The disciples make preparation for the Passover supper (Lk. 22:7-13, Mt. 26:17-19, Mk. 14:12-16)

As we saw earlier, scholars debate which day was the actual Passover. The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) indicate that Jesus and the disciples ate the Passover meal together on Thursday night. That means that Thursday night (Jewish days started at sundown of the day before and the Passover would have been from Thursday sundown until Friday sundown) was when Jesus ate the Passover celebration and Jesus died on Passover day. But John indicates that Friday was the beginning of Passover, and Saturday was an especially holy day, for it was both the Passover and Saturday, the Jewish day of worship. John indicates that Jesus died as the Passover Lamb at the same time that the Passover

lambs were being killed. So how do we reconcile these two seemingly conflicting views? There have been different theories suggested:

a. The Jews had two different dates when they celebrated the Passover, much like Europeans and Ethiopians have different days for Christmas and Easter. Some Jews (like Jesus and the disciples) celebrated on Thursday and others (Pharisees and Sadducees) celebrated on Friday. Others believe that Jesus follows the Qumran (community of Jews living in the desert by the Dead Sea) dating of Passover which was on Thursday.

b. Jesus and the disciples met early to celebrate the Passover since Jesus knew that he would die on the Passover. So Jesus did celebrate the Passover with his disciples, but one day earlier than the official Passover celebration. The problem with this view is that there is no indication that they were eating the meal early.

c. Both Thursday and Friday were called the Passover. Thursday was the formal holiday called the Passover. So Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the legal Passover. Friday was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was the beginning of a week-long celebration. Because Passover was closely linked with this celebration, both were called the Passover, so John was using the popular usage. This would mean that Thursday afternoon, the two disciples would have bought and sacrificed the Passover Lamb. That night Jesus and his disciples would have enjoyed together the formal Passover meal. And Jesus died on the formal Passover day. Friday evening began the Feast of Unleavened Bread, known broadly as "the Passover" and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a special day. This day (Saturday) coincided with the Sabbath, making it especially holy. Jesus died Friday afternoon at 3 PM, was dead all day Saturday, and rose from the dead on Sunday morning. [Note: The Jews counted "days" as any part of a day. Jesus had prophesied that he would be in the tomb for three days. The first day would be Friday (from 3 PM until 6 PM), the second day would have been Saturday (from 6 PM Friday until 6 PM Saturday) and the third day would have been Sunday (from 6 PM Saturday until early Sunday morning.)]

We don't know which of these theories is right. However, it is clear that both the Thursday evening celebration and Jesus death on Friday were linked with the Passover celebration. So in our discussion over the next few lessons, we will refer to both as the Passover.

Thursday was a very important day because Jews throughout the city would use the day to prepare for the Passover supper which would be on held that evening. The Passover supper was one of the most important Jewish religious holidays. Every Jewish male within 45 kilometers of Jerusalem was supposed to go to Jerusalem to celebrate. And Jews throughout the Roman Empire were encouraged to attend if possible. Thousands of Jews would gather for the celebration. By the time of Jesus, there were many rituals not found in the Old Testament outlining how the Jews were to celebrate the Passover. Following are some of these regulations concerning the Passover.

a. For all Jews attending the Passover celebration, the Passover meal was to take place in the city of Jerusalem. Because there were so many Jews attending that they could not find a place to eat in the walled city of Jerusalem, the surrounding villages were classified as Jerusalem. Rather than in Bethany, Jesus chose to eat the Passover celebration in the city of Jerusalem. Probably Jesus had secretly arranged with a certain wealthy family to use one of their rooms to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. Jesus did not want word to get out to the religious leaders where he was celebrating the Passover so that they did

not come and arrest him. Or perhaps knowing that he was soon to die, Jesus wanted a private place for him to spend time with his 12 closest friends and disciples.

Thursday morning, Jesus sent Peter and John ahead of the disciples to prepare things for the celebration of the Passover. Church tradition states that the upper room was the house of John Mark's mother. This house would later become one of the major centers for the early church. (Acts 12:12) It was very unusual for a man to carry water in Jewish culture. So scholars wonder whether this unusual act was a sign set up between Jesus and the owner of the house to indicate where the room was. The fact that this man had a spare room just for Jesus and his disciples indicated that he was fairly wealthy. The owner had already prepared the room for Jesus and his disciples.

b. It was Jewish law that at least 10 people celebrate the Passover together. This is because they were required to roast and eat a whole sheep before midnight on Thursday night. Any leftover sheep was to be thrown away. Usually extended families got together for the meal. Or they invited pilgrims in Jerusalem to celebrate for them. Rather than join the family who owned the home for their Passover celebration, Jesus arranged that only he and his 12 disciples celebrate Passover together.

c. The first ritual for the Passover celebration was to get rid of all leaven from the house. Most likely the owner of the house did this. The Jews had a ritual where the wife would throw out everything that had leaven in it. Then the owner and his wife would go through the whole house carefully sweeping every room to make sure no speck of leaven would have escaped their attention. Getting rid of leaven had two major symbols. First, it represented the fact that on the night when God delivered them from their slavery to Egypt, he delivered them so quickly that they did not have time to prepare bread using leaven, but only unleavened bread. Second, leaven became a symbol of sin, so to get rid of leaven became a symbol of how the Jews were supposed to get rid of all sin from their lives in preparation for the redemption God would bring them. (See 1 Cor. 5:7-8)

d. An important part of preparing for the meal consisted of purchasing the Passover lamb. This lamb had to be without blemish. It was taken to the Temple where the priests would sacrifice the lamb. Its blood was caught in a bowl and poured out at the base of the brass altar. The fat and inner parts were burned upon the altar. Peter and John would have then taken the meat back to the house and roasted the sheep in one large piece.

e. Peter and John also purchased certain bitter herbs which they prepared for the meal. They also had to buy fruit and other spices to grind up into a sauce. The final thing which they had to buy was unleavened bread which was an important part of the Passover celebration.

Because there were no women in the group for this important ritual, Peter and John were responsible to make all of these preparations.

The Jews counted days from sunset of one day to sunset the next day. Although the Passover was formally on Friday, the day of Passover began at 6 PM on Thursday night. Jewish law was that the meal could not start before sunset (around 6 PM) and had to be completed before midnight. So just before 6 PM Jesus and his disciples arrived for the Passover meal.

2. The disciples argue over who was going to be the greatest leader in Jesus' kingdom (Lk. 22:24-30)

It was time for the Passover celebration and the disciples entered the room. In the room there would have been large cushions on the ground surrounding tables set up in the shape of a U. Jesus would have sat at the top of the U with John on one side of him and perhaps Peter on the other side of him. Judas Iscariot was close to Jesus as well. Their heads would have all been close to the table and their feet towards the outside. Perhaps an argument arose about who should sit where, because where a person sat indicated their level of authority in Jewish society.

As the time drew near for his crucifixion, no doubt Jesus' spirit grew increasingly heavy. He was about to give himself as a sacrifice for people. It was a major act of humility on Jesus' part; the Creator and King of the universe was about to let people kill him so that they could be restored into his eternal family. But even as his mind was upon his soon coming death, the disciples' minds were upon who among them was the greatest. They began to argue about who would be Jesus' prime minister, what ministerial post they would hold, or who would rule over what country. This was not the first time the disciples argued about this issue. For several months it had become one of their topics of discussion. (See Lk. 9:46-48) This argument must have hurt Jesus. He was going to give his life for his disciples and all they could do was selfishly argue over who was the greatest. Jesus handled this wrong understanding of what makes a leader great in Jesus' kingdom in two ways:

First, Jesus taught the disciples about leadership in his kingdom. Jesus contrasted the attitude towards leadership of rulers over Gentile nations to the attitude of those who led in his kingdom. Gentile rulers (i.e., those who did not align their lives according to God's Word) saw leadership in two ways. First, they viewed themselves "over" those they ruled. They were in the position of power and able to control the people. Second, they saw themselves as "benefactors" of others. They saw themselves as being the solution to people's problems. So they made decisions for the people rather than seeing themselves as equals and making decisions together.

In contrast, Jesus said that leadership in God's kingdom was like being the smallest child in the family. In Jewish culture the oldest son was in the favored position. He was honored by all other siblings and they had to obey him. We have all seen how older children order smaller children around asking them to do things for them. However, the older child does not like to listen to the commands of the smaller children. But leadership in the kingdom of Jesus is like being a smaller child who is expected to obey and serve those older than him. Jesus also said that leadership in the church is like a "slave" who waits on the table of his master. The slave does not serve himself or look after his desires for food. Rather, his purpose is to serve the master's desires for food. In the same way, the purpose of church leadership is to seek to meet the needs of his master, Jesus, and the church members. The leader is to have no desire for the position of leadership. He does not care that he is given a high or low level of leadership. All he desires is to serve Jesus and fellow believers to the best of his ability.

Q. 13. a) Contrast the attitude towards leadership of Jesus to what your culture teaches a good leader to be. How are they similar or different? b) What would change in church leadership if we were to have the attitude towards leadership which Jesus taught? What attitudes towards church leadership would change?

Q. 14. Read Jn. 13:1-17. a) What did Jesus know? (Jn 13:1) b) What did Jesus do even though he knew that he was the King and Savior? c) What did Jesus say the disciples were to do? d) What did Jesus' actions teach about what it means to be a church leader?

3. Jesus washes the feet of the disciples (Jn. 13:1-17)

It is one thing to talk about being a servant leader; it is much different to demonstrate what it means to be a servant leader. Jesus knew he was the divine son of God. He knew that in just a few days he would return to his position of authority, power and glory in heaven. But that did not change his attitude towards serving others. Jesus would soon demonstrate his love for mankind and his servant heart by dying on the cross.

Although a church leader might be asked to die for his members during times of persecution, normally church leadership is about serving people, often in doing things we do not want to do. And so Jesus decided to demonstrate in action what it means to serve others; he decided to act like a slave and wash their feet. Jesus did not have to wash the feet of the disciples. They were pointed away from the table and did not bother anyone. But he wanted to teach the apostles, the future leaders of the church, what it means to be a servant of others. Jesus refused to allow his glory to keep him from serving others. We will only be amazed by this story if we remember who is doing the washing. It was Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the Creator of those whose feet he washed, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The higher the position, the less it is expected that the leaders serve others; rather they expect to be served. When people are elected church leader, they often change from ministering from an attitude of serving others to expecting others to serve them. This is one of the most dangerous temptations leaders face. And yet here the greatest one under God the Father humbled himself to become a slave of others. In all of the stories of great religious leaders, there is not one story where a god humbles himself to be a slave of others. How different is Jesus, our model for true greatness.

In Jewish culture it was demeaning to wash the feet of someone. In fact, no Jewish male servant could be compelled to wash the feet of another person. Only a Gentile slave or women and children could be made to wash feet. It was customary when entering a house after walking on dusty roads with only sandals on their feet for the host to organize someone to wash the feet of the guests as they arrived. There were large jars of water by the front door which were to be used for the washing of feet. Since the owner of the house had turned the upper room over to the private use of the disciples (there was probably outside stairs leading up to the upper room), there was no servant, child or woman there to wash the feet. Peter and John who were responsible to prepare for the feast did not believe they should have to do this. None of the disciples willingly humbled themselves to serve the other disciples in this demeaning way. Instead they quickly took their places around the table. In Jewish culture the "rabbi" or "teacher" was so honored that he would never humble himself to wash other's feet; rather, the disciples were supposed to wash his feet.

Without saying anything, Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer clothes, wrapped a towel around his waist like a slave would be dressed, and began to wash the feet of each of his disciples. Because the disciples were on the floor on pillows with their feet towards the outside, he no doubt just went around the outside of the couches washing their feet as they were at the table.

Jesus was not interested in protecting his "dignity." How often we get angry when our dignity and prestige are hurt. When we are not placed at the best seats at a wedding celebration but among the common people, or when we are not chosen to sing a solo but someone else, or when another church leader is honored but we are overlooked; these are situations which test whether or not we are concerned about our honor or not. Have you felt anger in your heart when these things happen to you? That anger is a sign that the "servant" spirit is not present, but we are looking for the honor from people.

When Jesus approached Peter, he was overcome with embarrassment, not for himself but for Jesus. He loved Jesus and did not want to see Jesus humble himself in this way. (Notice how Peter did not offer to wash the feet of others in place of Jesus.) So Peter refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus told Peter that unless he allowed Jesus to wash his feet, he could not be a follower of Jesus. Shocked, Peter told Jesus to wash all of his body. He wanted to follow Jesus with all of his being, even if it meant dying with Jesus. (Mt. 26:35) Jesus replied that once a person had a "*bath*" he did not need to have anything cleaned but his feet. Why was Jesus so sharp with Peter? Could it be that Jesus was teaching Peter that a position of pride where he refused to humble himself and serve others was so incompatible with following Jesus that pride is an indication that someone is not a true follower of Jesus? Could it be that this shows how much Jesus hates pride?

All scholars believe that Jesus was speaking symbolically about something more than taking a physical bath, which all Jews had to do before the Passover celebration. But scholars debate what the symbolism meant. Some scholars from church traditions which focus upon baptism as a means of salvation assume that Jesus was referring to the power of baptism and cleanse from sin. Probably Jesus was saying that Christians, like Peter, who have believed upon Jesus for their salvation have been cleansed with the blood of Christ; they have taken a "*bath*" in Jesus' blood. However, believers sin daily and need a daily cleansing. That cleansing does not restore their salvation. Rather, like washing of feet, it provides the cleansing which restores a clean relationship with God.

But the major truth Jesus demonstrated was about leadership. He was the master and lord of the disciples. And yet being in that position did not mean that he should not humble himself to serve. It did not hurt the "*honor*" of Jesus when he washed their feet. Jesus told the disciples that they too as the future leaders of their church should practice washing feet. Some churches believe that this should be understood literally and so have a time in church services where believers wash each others' feet. Most likely Jesus, however, was speaking symbolically. He is telling the disciples and all believers, especially church leaders, that in the kingdom of God we should never allow pride to hinder us serving others.

Could it be that we have the same type of attitude towards being in positions of leadership as the disciples did? In country churches it is common to see people wash the feet of their honored guests. But how often do the speakers and guests wash the feet of the woman who is serving them? No, we are taught that this is below one's dignity as an honored person. It seems that the more educated we become and the higher leadership positions we have, the less of a servant attitude we have. We enjoy people "*washing our feet*" by doing things which honor us. But we are very careful not to do anything which appears to lower ourselves before others. We take the best seats in the church or in the car. We eat the best food at the conference. We sleep on the best mattress when visiting a church. "It isn't our culture to lower ourselves to be like the common people" we argue. But it wasn't the Jewish culture either. And yet Jesus went against all that his culture taught to show that leadership is based upon humility and seeking to serve others. Almost every problem we find in church leadership today comes from the fact that we are still seeking positions of power like the disciples did rather than positions of humble service like Jesus.

Q. 15. a) Make a list of problems many churches face among the leaders or between leaders and church members. b) Explain how the wrong attitude toward leadership is at the root of many of these problems. c) How would most of these problems disappear if leaders and ministers would have a servant attitude like Jesus?

Jesus ended his discussion about church leadership with a promise. Jesus acknowledged the sacrifice the apostles had made in following him for the three and one half years of ministry. Some like Peter, James, John and Matthew had left lucrative businesses to become poor as they followed Jesus. Jesus promises to reward such sacrifice. Nothing we do for Jesus will ever be forgotten. Often evangelists or church workers are tempted to complain about their low pay as they compare their salary to others. Such an attitude forgets what Jesus has said, that he will reward his faithful ministers in his kingdom.

Jesus said he would give his apostles his kingdom and they would "*judge*" the twelve tribes of Israel. (Lk. 22:28-29) This statement has been interpreted in different ways. Some Christians think it should be understood literally. They teach that one day, perhaps in the 1000 year reign of Jesus on the earth, Jesus will appoint the apostles to rule over the restored nation of Israel. Others think it symbolically means that the disciples, and all true believers, will be rewarded and honored in Jesus' eternal kingdom. But other scholars understand that Jesus is saying that the disciples were to become the leaders of the spiritual kingdom, the church, which is the new Israel. The book of Acts demonstrates how the apostles provided the leadership for the people of God. We might not know exactly what type of reigning is promised to us. But we can be sure that no suffering we experience on this earth as we serve Jesus will go unnoticed and unrewarded. Church leadership and church ministry always involves a certain amount of added suffering not experienced by other members of the church. Naturally, we are tempted to run away from leadership positions so that we can enjoy an easier life. Or we are tempted to leave church ministry to start another "ministry" or get a development job or work with a company which brings us greater salary. There are times God leads us this way. But usually Jesus is asking us to continue to "suffer" with him, knowing that the day of reward will soon come when we enter eternity.

Q. 16. a) Describe how you have seen church leaders and church ministers give up their ministries because it was too difficult and the rewards or pay did not seem adequate. b) How would the attitude of church leaders and ministers change if they were to focus more on the coming kingdom of Jesus which he has promised to us?

THIRD DAY

Depending upon their church tradition, Christians daily, weekly, or monthly gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Throughout the history of the church, this ritual established by Jesus has been carried on with much meaning. But in our days there is a dangerous trend in some churches. Believers often leave church before taking the Lord's Supper. "Do this in remembrance of me" commanded Jesus. But these who claim to be followers of Jesus disobey this command. Where did the Lord's Supper ritual come from? And why is it important? Today we will examine the beginning of the most important sacrament, the ritual of the Lord's Supper.

Q. 17. a) Why do you think many believers do not partake of the Lord's Supper? b) Read Jn. 13:21-30. What prophecy did Jesus give? c) Read Lk. 22:31-38. What did Jesus say the disciples would do?

JESUS EATS THE PASSOVER MEAL WITH THE DISCIPLES (Jn. 13:21-30, Mt. 26:20-30, Mk. 14:17-26, Lk. 22:14-30)

1. Jesus predicts that Judas would betray him (Jn. 13:21-30)

The celebration of the Passover involved a meal filled with ritual and symbolism. As the leader, Jesus led the disciples through the ceremony remembering God's historical act of delivering Israel from slavery to Egypt. On the table in front of the disciples was the meat from the roasted lamb. But there were also four other very symbolic items.

First, there was a bowl filled with salt water. This was to symbolize the bitter tears which the Jews shed during their time of slavery in Egypt and from which God delivered them.

Second, there was a bowl of a mixture of bitter herbs, which symbolized the bitterness of slavery. It could be that the bitter herbs also symbolized the branches of hyssop with which the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the door posts of their houses that caused the angel of death to pass over their homes and kill the first born of the Egyptians.

Third, there was another bowl of a sauce made of crushed fruit and nuts. This sauce represented the mortar the Jews had to make for the laying of bricks during their bondage in Egypt. Fourth, there were four cups of wine to symbolize four promises God gave to the Jews. (See Ex. 6:6-7) The first cup of wine referred to the first promise when God promised to bring the Jews out of bondage to Egypt. The second cup of wine symbolized the second promise that God would free the Jews from slavery. The third cup of wine reflected the third promise to redeem his people with great acts of power. And the fourth cup of wine symbolized the fourth promise where God stated the Jews would be his people and he would be their God.

To begin the ceremony of the Passover, Jesus lifted up the first cup of wine and gave a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his provision. He would then take a small piece of unleavened bread and dip it into the bitter herbs and eat it. One of the group would next ask "Why is this night special?" Then Jesus would have explained the significance of everything on the table and how it was a night to remember God's deliverance of his people from slavery to Egypt. Next the group would have sung Psalm 113 (and maybe 114). Jesus would then take up the second cup, bless it, and drink from it. This was the sign the major meal was to begin. The disciples would take the unleavened bread that was in front of them and dip it into the sauce and eat the roasted meat.

As they were eating, Jesus suddenly announced that one of them was about to betray him. His statement shocked the disciples and they began to ask "*It isn't me, is it?*" Finally Peter turned to John (called "*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*") Sitting closest to Jesus, John asked him to reveal the person. Jesus indicated that the one to whom he fed the special piece of food was the betrayer. Jesus took some of the unleavened bread, dipped it into the sauce and gave it to Judas who must have been sitting close to him. For the Jews eating together was a sign of friendship, so it was unimaginable that someone who was part of the group eating together was planning to betray Jesus. And feeding the special piece of food was a sign of deep friendship. Why did Jesus share about the betrayer? There are several possible reasons.

First, Jesus was offering Judas his last chance to repent. Jesus loved Judas. From the very beginning he knew that Judas would betray him, but not once did he become bitter against Judas. He gave Judas the same love he gave the rest of the disciples, even allowing him to be elected as treasurer. He knew that Judas had just made the agreement with the Jewish leaders to betray Jesus. But he still gave Judas the gift

as if to ask Judas to reconsider what he was doing in betraying Jesus. Unfortunately Judas refused to repent. Satan used this opportunity to gain control over him.

Second, Jesus was perhaps teaching the disciples the painful reality of life as followers of Jesus. Just like one of his closest friends could betray Jesus, believers would also be betrayed by those who seemed to be close friends and good Christians. But the betrayal of a friend is no reason to give up hope. Nor is it a reason to get angry and retaliate against the one who betrayed them. Rather they were supposed to keep their eyes upon God who alone would never abandon them. At the end of his life, Paul shared how many Christians had abandoned him, but not Jesus. (See 2 Tim. 1:15, 4:16-18) This is a sad reminder to all of us. We often put our hope in a gifted young person and are hurt when they abandon the faith or leave for another church. We are tempted to turn bitter against them or to stop trusting people and say "If they can't be trusted, I will have to do the work myself." This is not the way Jesus modeled how to handle someone who disappoints us.

Third, perhaps Jesus wanted to force Judas to leave their midst so that he would have only his true disciples with him at the end. Jesus was about to give his most personal teachings and he didn't want the traitor to be part of this final teaching.

Jesus told Judas that his betrayal would have severe consequences. The expression "*better not born*" was a Jewish expression of severe judgment. (Mt. 26:24) Jewish teachers used it to refer to someone who did not obey God's Word and would therefore receive great punishment. Knowing that Judas had not changed his mind, Jesus whispered to Judas that it was time for him to do what he had determined to do. Judas got up and left. The disciples still did not realize that Judas was going out to betray Jesus; otherwise they would have turned against him and no doubt physically abused him. They thought Judas, being the treasurer, was being sent out to purchase something for the meal they were enjoying together or to give money to the poor. Only after the death and resurrection of Jesus would they understand what was happening.

2. Jesus predicts that the disciples would also betray Jesus (Lk. 22:31-38)

There are two types of betrayal. There is the long-term betrayal when people abandon their faith and walk away from the Gospel. We have witnessed this type of betrayal as those who have worshipped with us for a long time suddenly join a different religion or return to the world. Judas is an example of this type of betrayal. Although all of the disciples would abandon and betray Jesus, they repented and returned to faithfully follow Jesus. But Judas never repented of his sin, and he never came back to Jesus for forgiveness. Had he repented, Jesus would have forgiven him. But Jesus knew that Judas would not repent of his sin. His heart was now hard and Judas was too proud to acknowledge his sin to Jesus.

But there is also the temporary betrayal which comes from the weakness of our flesh when in certain situations believers will do something that is against their calling as followers of Jesus. This could be a believer who falls into sexual sin, steals money, or out of fear of death says he will renounce his faith. The disciples are examples of the second temporary type of betrayal. This story provides a strong warning to us not to be too harsh against people who "*deny*" Jesus in some way. We do not know who is a "Judas" and who is a "Peter." Just like Jesus welcomed Peter back after denying him and gave him a fruitful place of ministry, as church leaders we must always be willing to seek the repentance and return of those who fall into sin. And when they have been restored and their reputation as followers of Jesus repaired, we should restore them to places of ministry.

(Note: The New Testament never treats church discipline like our court system. In the courts, if someone steals, they are given a prison sentence of a set period of time. Some churches work the same way and if someone falls into sexual sin they are sentenced to six months of no ministry. But the New Testament insists that, like Jesus, we are to forgive the "Peters" who disappoint us and fall into sin. Paul would later teach that the qualification of leadership is a good reputation. (1 Tim. 3:2) The major issue in restoring a person to ministry is not whether a person has finished his punishment time. Rather, the question is whether or not the person is respected by the rest of believers and provides a godly model of what it means to follow Jesus. Peter would quickly repent of his sin and for the rest of his life provide the godly model of service and sacrifice that qualified him for leadership.)

Jesus wanted to teach his disciples that minor betrayals against Jesus is possible for anyone. So he told his disciples that all of them would betray him. Jesus stated that when he, the "*shepherd*" would be arrested, they would all abandon him and flee. No doubt the disciples all expressed that they would never deny Jesus. Each one of them, even Judas, said to Jesus "*Surely not me, Lord.*" Perhaps the loudest protestor was Peter, the one Jesus had witnessed as being the "rock" of the church. So Jesus focused his attention upon Peter. Jesus told Peter that before the rooster crowed three times (on Friday morning), Peter would deny Jesus. In this passage, Jesus gives us a clue about the relationship between God, Satan and us.

First, Jesus said that Satan had "*asked*" to sift Peter. This indicates that Satan has no ability to directly attack Peter or us but that he must have permission from God.

Second, God gives Satan permission to "*sift*" us for a specific reason. Just as we sift teff to separate out the dirt, times of testing and temptations are sifting times for us. First, God wants to test our faith to determine its strength. We can only know how strong our trust in Jesus is or our willingness to stay pure when we are tempted to do the opposite. Jesus allows Satan to put us in a situation where we are confronted with those who stand in opposition to Jesus at work to determine if we will testify concerning Jesus or keep our mouths closed. Are we committed to obeying Jesus and staying pure? Jesus allows Satan to bring a temptation to sin into our lives to see if we will stay pure or give in to the temptation. Second, Jesus allows Satan to "*sift*" us so that we can become aware of our weakness and learn to depend more upon God. Peter, like many of us, was strong and confident in his ability to stand firm. "*Every one of these disciples might abandon you, but not me. I will die for you if necessary.*" Peter said. But when the temptation came, Peter was not even able to stand up against a servant's accusation. This painful experience for Peter showed him how weak he was and how he needed to humble himself and rely only upon Jesus for strength. Often God will let leaders fail so that they too will learn how weak they are in the flesh. One of the dangers of more education is that many church leaders start thinking they are able to lead because now they are educated. But in the kingdom of God, humility and dependence upon Jesus are the only way to avoid doing things in the flesh and walking in the Spirit.

Third, Jesus said that he was praying for Peter. But what was he praying? Note that he did not pray that Peter not fall into the time of testing. The testing of our faith is a normal part of growing in spirituality, so Jesus rarely takes this away from us. But he does limit it so we don't face a testing beyond our ability to overcome. (1 Cor. 10:13) Rather, Jesus prays that the testing not lead to the abandonment of our faith. (The word "*fail*" was used of someone who had lost all of his money until there was nothing left. In the same way, Jesus was praying that Peter's faith would not drain away to the point where it was totally gone.)

Fourth, Jesus shares that Peter's denial was temporary. Jesus was praying for Peter so he would not be like Judas. Jesus told Peter that when he returned, rather than abandon ministry as many church leaders do when they fall into sin, he was to strengthen fellow believers. Because of his fall into sin Peter would actually be in a better position to help weak believers learn how to stand firm in the power God gives and not in the flesh.

No doubt Peter slumped back on his seat filled with embarrassment. However, Jesus did not want to end this discussion just thinking about betrayal. Rather, he got them thinking about their coming ministry. In Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1-12 Jesus had told the disciples and then the seventy that when they went out preaching the Gospel, they were not to take extra clothes or money on their journey. They were supposed to trust God to meet their needs through the generosity of those who provided them hospitality. The disciples acknowledged that while trusting God this way, God had always met their needs. But Jesus now indicates that the situation would change. Because of the growing resistance towards Christians, people would not be as willing to invite them into their homes as they traveled with the Gospel. So they would have to take extra clothes and money to provide for their needs.

Jesus then made a very difficult statement. He told them to sell their coat and buy a "sword" if they did not have a sword. Scholars debate what Jesus meant by this. Clearly Jesus was not asking them to get swords and begin the rebellion against the Romans. Two swords would never be enough to fight thousands of Romans soldiers who would be in Jerusalem for the Passover. And Jesus had earlier told them to accept the abuse of others, to love their enemies, not to fight them. (Mt. 5:38-48) Most likely Jesus was using the symbol of the sword to warn his disciples that just like he faced the "sword" of death on the cross, so also they would face the "sword" of persecution. After his death, the situation would change. The Jews would no longer support them but would fight against them. In such hostile situations, the followers of Jesus would need courage. The coat of a Jew was his most important clothing, for when he traveled, he would use his coat as his blanket to keep warm at night. It was so important that if a person placed his coat down as a pledge that he was going to buy something, that coat had to be returned by nightfall so that he would not get cold. Jesus' words about selling the coat to buy a sword was given to emphasize that they would need to do all they could to prepare for the time of persecution, even selling what was most important to them. They must gain the courage needed to follow Jesus. The disciples misunderstood Jesus. Two of them had short swords used to protect themselves from robbers on the roads. Jesus did not want to argue with them. The expression "*It is enough*" was a Jewish way of saying that he did not want to talk about it any more.

The book of Acts shows how the Apostles often faced persecution with great courage. This is a warning to us as well. Some Christians are teaching that if we follow Jesus, he will make us rich and life will go well for us. But Jesus frequently talked about the persecution that would come upon his followers. Only God knows what will happen in Ethiopia in the next few years, but it could be that persecution will increase again. Do we have the courage ("sword") necessary to face it? We can only prepare by drawing close to Jesus now, living in obedient dependence upon his power and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We will only overcome false teachings by filling our minds with the truths of God's Word. Being ready now can mean that we are a "Peter" and not a "Judas."

Q. 18. a) Do you think most believers are ready for a time of persecution when it comes? Explain your answer. b) What would they need to do to prepare now for that time? c) Read Mt. 26:26-29 & 1 Cor. 11:23-26. Summarize what Jesus was teaching in this section.

3. Jesus initiates the "Lord's Supper" ritual (Mt. 26:26-29)

We saw earlier that Jesus had drunk the first two symbolic cups of wine with the disciples. Now Jesus took up the third cup of wine which symbolized God's promise to "redeem" the Jews. (Ex. 6:6-7) But rather than look back to what God had done in the past, Jesus started a new Passover celebration for his followers. We call this ceremony "the Lord's Supper" to reflect how Jesus started it at the Passover meal and because early believers had a meal together as part of this ritual.

It is important to carefully study this familiar passage. Often we overlook the important truths when we have heard them before.

a. The Passover commemorated the deliverance God brought the Jews from Egypt. Jesus changed this into a commemoration of his death which would bring deliverance from sin.

b. Jesus took the unleavened bread and offered it up with a word of prayer and thanksgiving. He broke it and gave pieces to each of the disciples. Perhaps the disciples were expecting Jesus to remind them of the unleavened bread representing God's redemption from Egypt. They would have been every shocked when Jesus said "*this is my body*," breaking with the traditional way of holding the Passover. This unleavened bread had reminded them of the need to be a holy people of God and how God had delivered them so quickly that there was no time to use leaven to bake bread. But now Jesus said that the bread referred to his body. And Jesus told them that soon his body would be broken on the cross. It was to be broken not because Jesus was killed by accident by Jewish leaders. Rather, it was a gift to us, to purchase our redemption.

c. Jesus then lifted up what was probably the third "cup" of the Passover celebration, perhaps a large cup which he passed around to the rest of the disciples to sip from. To the Jews, this cup symbolized God's promise to redeem Israel when he delivered them from Egypt. It was also a "promise" that one day God would deliver them from enemies like the Romans as well. But Jesus said that the wine was a symbol of his blood which would be shed for them the next day. The words "*poured out*" no doubt reminded the disciples how the blood of the lamb which they were eating had been poured out at the base of the altar just a few hours earlier. But for the New Covenant, it would not be the blood of animals, but Jesus' blood which would be sacrificially poured out. (Note: To the Jews, "blood" was a symbol of the life of something. Jews were not allowed to eat blood since "the life was in the blood." (Lev. 17:10-14) In actual fact, Jesus shed very little blood on the cross. Only a little blood came out of his side when a spear pierced his heart when he was already dead. So when the New Testament talks about "the blood" of Jesus, it refers to his sacrificial death on behalf of mankind.) Part of the Passover story was how the blood from the Passover Lamb on the door post caused the angel of death not to kill the first born of the Israelites. So no doubt Jesus was saying that his "blood" placed upon the heart of a person when they trusted in him would cause God's judgment to pass over them. But Jesus stressed that the wine symbolized the blood of the new covenant. No doubt Jesus was referring to what Moses did to ratify the covenant between God and mankind and to Zechariah. (Ex. 24:4-8; Zech. 9:11) After building the tabernacle, Moses sprinkled blood on all items of worship and on the people. This was an ancient ritual symbolizing the permanence of the covenant. But now with the death of Jesus, a new covenant was being ratified for a new people, the church.

Q. 19. Read Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek. 37:24-28. a) List the different things God promised would happen in this new covenant. b) Describe how each of those promises are fulfilled today in Jesus Christ.

d. Jesus' giving his body and blood was the beginning of the "*new covenant*." Both the book of Jeremiah and Ezekiel mention this new covenant which God would one day ratify between his people and himself. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament, there were different types of agreements. There was a "conditional" agreement in which God promised to do certain things "if" Israel would obey him and be faithful to him. The old covenant started at Mount Sinai when Moses gave it to Israel. But there was another type of agreement between two parties when only one member of the party unconditionally promised to do something for the other party. The New Covenant is based upon this type of agreement. In the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God promised to unconditionally do things for his people. Jesus meant that by his death the next day, he was initiating the long awaited new covenant with God. But this time it was not just with the Jews, but with all mankind. The "*many*," or all who in faith trust in Jesus as the one who paid the penalty of their sin on the cross, would receive the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was bringing eternal redemption, starting a new covenant with a new people, the church.

It is important to remember that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a celebration of forgiveness which Jesus' death bought for us, not a celebration of our holiness. There is a tendency in some churches to be afraid to take the Lord's Supper because people do not believe they are holy enough. It is one thing to be in an open state of rebellion against God by willfully committing sin. We are told to repent of these sins before we come to celebrate Jesus' death. But in 1 Cor. 11 Paul is not teaching that we make ourselves "perfect" and therefore earn the right to partake of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of grace, that although I am not holy, Jesus forgives me and makes me holy by his death on the cross.

e. "*This do in remembrance of me.*" (1 Cor. 11:24-25) It does not matter what denomination one belongs to, all Christians practice this tradition which Jesus initiated that night. Some practice this ritual every time they meet in worship. (Catholics, Orthodox) Others celebrate once a month. In his remembrance of that night, Paul gives us the following clues about the purpose of the Lord's Supper.

1) It is a command. Jesus did not say "If you want to you can do this." Rather, he commanded his followers to remember him; his death, resurrection, and the new covenant Jesus initiated by going through a ritual of eating bread and drinking wine. Christians who refuse to take the Lord's Supper must ask themselves "why" they don't. If they are knowingly disobeying Jesus' command, is it an indication that something is wrong in their lives?

2) The primary purpose of the ceremony is to "*remember*." Jesus knew that as humans we often get busy and forget what is most important to us. Or we begin to focus on ourselves; on our actions and good works. But in this ceremony Jesus is saying that as his followers, we are to remember that everything depends upon what Jesus did for us on the cross. When we eat the Lord's Supper, we are forced to remember and acknowledge that his death on the cross is the only thing that makes us acceptable to God. The focus is on Jesus and not us. As Paul said, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are proclaiming the Lord's death. We are telling everyone that our righteousness, our acceptance with God, our being the people of God, our living in holiness; it all comes from Jesus' death for us on the cross. One reason that it is important for believers to take the Lord's supper is to acknowledge that every blessing in our being followers of Jesus comes from the cross of Jesus.

3) "*This is my body. This is my blood.*" Christians have long debated what Jesus meant and what happens when the Lord's Supper takes place. Some Christians (Catholics) believe that God does a

miracle and the bread turns into the actual body of Christ and the wine turns into the actual blood of Christ. It is unlikely that the disciples would have understood it this way. Rather, their minds would have gone back to the Old Testament where the blood symbolized the initiation of the covenant. Other Christians (Makene Jesus and Lutherans) believe that although the bread and wine do not physically change, in some mysterious way Jesus' body and blood are present. Other Christians focus upon the words "*remembrance*." They believe eating the bread and drinking from the cup have deep spiritual significance. They cause us to think back to the day when the Creator of all died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. To the author of this study guide, this seems to be the best understanding of this passage.

4) "*Drink it, all of you.*" Eating the Lord's Supper is a community practice. It is not something we do alone. Jesus did not ask some of the apostles to partake but not others who weren't holy enough. Rather, the Lord's Supper was to be a symbol of unity within the body of Christ. It does not matter if they are men or women Jews or Gentiles; when coming to the Lord's Supper believers all come as one. One of the reasons Paul got angry with the Corinthians was because they were not living out the symbol of oneness which the Lord's Supper demonstrated. The rich and the poor were not eating together as one. Although it is good to reflect about what Jesus has done for us personally as we take the Lord's Supper, it is very important to also reflect on what the death of Jesus has done for the whole body of Christ. It is to be a symbol of unity, equality and love. It is the family of God (his spiritual sons and daughters) eating in the presence of Jesus our Savior. Anything, be it economic levels, educational levels, or tribal differences; none of these matter in the family of God and must never be a reason for divisions. Any unhealed divisions in the church means that we are lying that we are one in Christ as we take the Lord's Supper. Paul taught that on the cross, all walls of division were torn down. (See Eph. 2:14-22) God is not happy when we allow the teachings of the world to rebuild those walls and he brings judgment against those who perpetuate the divisions in the church.

5) "*Until I come.*" Jesus established the ritual of the Lord's Supper for the period of time between his first coming and his second coming. As we take the elements, we are to be remembering that this is a temporary ritual. One day our Master will return for us and we will be together for ever. With our Master with scars on his hands in front of us, we will no longer need the ritual to remind us of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Having changed the focus of the Passover celebration from what God did for Israel in Egypt to what Jesus would do on the cross, the celebration was almost finished. There was one more cup of wine which Jesus and the disciples were supposed to drink. But it seems that Jesus refused to drink the fourth cup which symbolized God's promise that he would be the God of the Israelites and they would be his people. (Ex. 6:7a) "I won't drink any more until we have our banquet in heaven when I return" he told his disciples. Although we are God's children, the fulfillment of this promise waits for when we are in heaven. Then there will be no separation between God and us; we will be together for eternity. And we will not struggle with our sin nature which hinders our relationship with Jesus. With our new bodies, we will finally be prepared to live with God. Every time we eat the Lord's Supper, Jesus wanted us to long for the great banquet he will host for all of his people when eternity starts. For Jesus, the Lord's Supper was not to only be a looking "back" to the cross, but a looking "forward" to the eternal kingdom.

Q. 20. a) Why do you think many believers do not take the Lord's Supper? Do you think Jesus would approve of these reasons? Explain your answer. b) Review the last time you took the Lord's Supper. How well did

you think about the meanings of the ritual? How did you reflect on the coming kingdom of Jesus when the Lord's Supper will no longer be necessary?

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is not just an "extra" that people can choose to participate in. Rather it is a command given to each Christian. We are supposed to observe the Lord's Supper and it is only when we have a sin which we are not willing to repent of that we should not take it. The Lord's Supper is the re-enactment of the heart of our faith that Jesus died for our personal sins, offering us forgiveness. It is not a celebration of our holiness, but of our sinfulness and yet forgiveness. Together as the family of God all eating together we are acknowledging our "faith" in Jesus Christ as the only basis of salvation. And we are reconfirming our commitment to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

The Passover celebration ended with the singing of Psalms 115-118. But as we will see next week, Jesus still had much more to teach his disciples before he hung on the cross. In fact, Jesus' most important teachings for his followers came during these few hours before he went to the Garden of Gethsemane.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. Read Mt. 25. a) What was Jesus seeking to teach through each of the parables? b) Discuss whether or not believers in your church live ready for the unexpected return of Jesus. c) How would their lives change if they were to apply the truths of these parables as they wait for Jesus' return?

2. Compare Judas and Mary. a) What attitude did Judas have that led to his downfall? b) What attitude did Mary have that demonstrated her great love for Jesus? c) What lessons can we learn about following Jesus from Judas and Mary?

3. Contrast Jesus' attitude toward leadership with the attitude of the disciples towards leadership. a) What did the apostles' attitude towards leadership reveal about their motive for following Jesus and service? How was it similar to how the world understands leadership? How is it similar to the attitude of some church leaders? b) What did Jesus' washing feet reveal about his understanding of leadership? How is it different from how your culture understands leadership or how most church elders understand leadership? c) How would the ministry and role of church elders and pastors change if they had an attitude toward leadership more like Jesus'?

4. Contrast Judas' and Peter's betrayals of Jesus. a) How are they similar? How are they different? b) What can we learn about the relationship between God, Satan, and us when we are tempted to betray Jesus from what Jesus told Peter? c) If Peter had been in your church, how would he have been treated after his betrayal? How is this different from how Jesus treated him? What can we learn about church discipline from this?

5. a) Why do many Christians not take the Lord's Supper? Is the problem with the practices of the church or with the attitude of the people? Explain your answer. b) What does the author mean by saying that the Lord's Supper is a celebration of grace, not a celebration of holiness? Do you agree? Why or why not? c) Review the different teachings given about the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Which ones

are familiar in your church? Which one's aren't? Discuss ways to include a clearer teaching to members about the purpose of the Lord's Supper before the next Lord's Supper ceremony.

LESSON TWENTY-THREE

FIRST DAY

Bekele was the pastor of a new church in an area where many people in the community were strongly against believers. He was often harassed as he walked through town and many merchants openly refused to sell to him. His children were mocked and stones were thrown on his home at night frightening him and his family. The small church building which he had built burned down and he was put in prison on charges that were lies. Bekele became discouraged. What would encourage him in the midst of this spiritual battle? What would encourage his small flock of believers as they struggled against persecution?

In our study of the life of Jesus, the time has arrived for Jesus to die for the sins of the world. He knew that like him, his followers would face persecution from people, both in Israel and among the Gentile nations as the church spread. The time between his first coming to die on the cross and his second coming to reign over the earth would be characterized by much persecution for his followers, like Bekele. The church would be born in times of persecution and grow in the midst of resistance. In a private celebration of the Passover with his disciples, Jesus sought to prepare the future leaders of his church for a life without Jesus physically present to protect and lead them.

John 14-17 consists of Jesus' last teachings to help his followers stay true to him as they waited for his return. Some scholars compare these final sayings of Jesus to the final words of advice which a father gives to his children as he is about to die (e.g. Jacob to his sons- Gen. 49) or to how famous teachers would often give a final teaching of what they believed was most important just before they died. Knowing that on the next day he would die, Jesus used these final hours before his captivity to teach the disciples what some have described as Jesus' most important teachings for disciples.

Q. 1. a) Describe how Christians you know have faced persecution much like Bekele did. b) What truths do you think are most important for believers in Bekele's situation to know so that they will not grow discouraged as they follow Jesus? c) Read Jn. 14:1-31. List the major truths that Jesus taught the disciples and explain why each truth would help a persecuted believer stay faithful to Jesus.

TEACHINGS AT THE LAST SUPPER

1. The followers of Jesus must focus upon their future life in heaven which Jesus is preparing for them (Jn. 14:1-4)

All of us are used to short-term pain in order to gain long-term benefits. A woman accepts the pain of giving birth to a baby because she knows that soon the joy of having a baby is coming. Or a person is willing to have a painful operation in the hospital because of the long-term health benefits it will bring him. Jesus knew that in the midst of persecution or painful events they might face on earth (e.g. sickness, death of loved ones, natural disasters) it is easy for believers to get discouraged. One of our frustrations is that we know that God is able to protect us from all of this and yet he often doesn't. Jesus told his disciples to carefully guard their hearts so that they don't get discouraged. Rather, they must determine to "*trust*" God and Jesus. Christian faith is not an emotional response based upon exciting promises of riches or escape from all problems. Rather, it requires firm trust when we maintain our faith in God even though circumstances do not seem to bring us the blessings we want.

Instead of making any promises like they would soon get rich and powerful as many Christians falsely teach (beware of such teachings, they are lies from Satan), Jesus told his disciples to look to the future. Jesus promised that he was going to prepare their eternal home. Jesus calls heaven "*my Father's house*." Jesus compares heaven to a large palace filled with rooms. It is a building for one family, not a separate building for each person. Jesus is not meaning that he must physically go to heaven and begin to construct a building for us. Rather, he is speaking symbolically to teach important truths:

a. There is a time coming when all of God's family will be together in their eternal home. God, Jesus, angels, and believers of all generations will finally be together. We must look forward to that time so that we don't get discouraged and give up our faith now. The Bible teaches that we are "strangers" and "foreigners" on earth. (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 1:17, 2:11), and we are citizens of heaven. (Phil. 3:20) It is when earth becomes too much our home that we begin to get discouraged and are tempted to despair. It is said of early believers facing death by lions in a stadium that they joined hands and sang "This is our day of victory." How could they sing that? It was because they knew that they were finally going home.

b. There is enough room in heaven for all who believe in Jesus. Jesus told his disciples that there are "*many*" rooms, not only a few rooms. The eternal home will not be limited to just a few people, but will become the eternal home for millions throughout history; and there is always room for more.

c. Jesus is the forerunner, going before the disciples to heaven. The book of Hebrews talks of Jesus being like one who goes before people clearing the bush to form a new path so that others can follow him (Heb. 12:2). Jesus was going to clear the road to heaven for them. He was the one who would defeat the great enemy "death" by dying and then rising from the dead. He would then open the way to heaven. Like Jesus, each believer will travel the road to death. Then he will follow Jesus, taking the path of resurrection and eternal life in heaven. The New Testament also uses the expression "firstborn" to refer to this truth about Jesus. (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5)

d. Jesus himself will come back and escort believers into their home. Scholars debate what Jesus meant when he said "*I will come back*." Some think he is talking about the resurrection. Most likely Jesus' is talking about his second coming when he will return to collect all of his followers and escort them into heaven. Paul tells us in 1 Thes. 4:13-18 that one day, like a victorious king, Jesus will return and those believers who are "dead" (from the days of Adam until the day of his return) will suddenly be raised from the dead and given their eternal bodies (1 Cor. 15:35-56). And those who are alive will instantly be changed and given their eternal bodies. They will meet Jesus and return to the home he has prepared for them and be with him forever. Surely the temporary pain of life on earth will be worth it then. As Paul reminded believers in 2 Cor. 4:16-18, our temporary pains are bringing us an eternal glory that far outweighs any pain we might face.

Christians have different ideas as to the order of the events at the end times when Jesus returns. Some teach that when Jesus returns in the air, he will cause the dead believers to rise and change the living believers, and then take them to heaven where eternity starts. Others teach that Jesus will meet with believers in the air and then return to the earth to start the 1000 year reign on the earth. (See Rev. 20:6) Some Christians teach that Jesus will temporarily take believers (the Church) to heaven. On the earth there will be a short time (called the Great Tribulation) when God will bring great destruction upon the earth. (This is described in Rev. 6-19.) Then Jesus will return with believers and start the 1000 year reign of Christ. Although Christians might differ in their understanding of when and how Jesus will return, the most

important thing is to remember is that Jesus is preparing our eternal home. And when he comes to escort us into that home, all of the pain we suffered on earth will be gone. But as Jesus taught earlier, to not be ready for Jesus' return, especially to give up one's faith during those times of persecution and pain will bring us eternal pain.

Q. 2. a) List reasons why it is important to remember that there is an eternal home which Jesus is preparing for us. b) List things that result in the life of believers when they forget their eternal home and focus upon their earthly home instead.

2. The followers of Jesus must firmly believe that Jesus is the only way to God (Jn. 14:5-11)

One of the greatest temptation followers of Jesus face during times of difficulty is the temptation to return to their previous religion. To renounce their faith in Jesus in order to escape persecution is a clear way that people are looking for temporary relief from hardship as they forget the eternal consequences. A little time (i.e., their life on earth) of less persecution will bring them eternal suffering in hell. It isn't worth it. But Satan also has more subtle ways to deceive believers. He would tempt the disciples and Jewish Christians to give up their faith in Jesus and return to Judaism. "It was good enough for Abraham and Moses and David, so it should be good enough for me" they could have reasoned. During the days when John was writing this Gospel story, the Romans were insisting that all Christians offer a sacrifice to the Roman emperor saying "He is Lord." The Romans did not care what a person believed or practiced as long as they showed their allegiance to the emperor in this way. Many Christians were tempted to offer the sacrifice and say "Caesar is Lord" so that they would escape persecution.

This is one of Satan's temptations today as well. He gets Christians to claim to be followers of Jesus, but they continue their worship of their ancestors or spirits by pouring out coffee to them or visit witchdoctors and wear something to ward off evil spirits so as to not get sick. There is a lie spreading that it is all right for Christians to publicly deny Jesus when faced with persecution, but continue to worship him in their hearts. In the West there is another lie. Most people believe that it does not matter what religion a person belongs to; as long as they are sincere, God will accept them in heaven.

But Jesus strongly denied these lies of Satan. Jesus clearly said that he alone is the way to God. Jesus uses three Old Testament words to express that he is unique.

First, he said that he is the "way." The Jews used the expression "way" to refer to a life lived totally in alignment to the desires of God. (See Deut. 5:32-33, Is. 30:21, Ps. 16:11) Jesus is the one who guides people into the only path that will lead them to God. Jesus is not just saying that by believing in him people are able to reach God, but he and his teachings consist of the pattern of life that fulfills God's desires. Paul would later warn believers that they are not to walk according to the flesh (Col. 3:7) but to walk in love (Rom. 8:4) and live according to the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:16)

Second, Jesus insisted that he is the "truth." (See Ps. 84:11 for how the writer combines walking and truth.) For something to be true means there is a standard that determines that something is right or wrong, accurate or inaccurate. The Bible insists that God is the one who defines what is "true" and what is "false." He says that all worship outside of God's ordained way is "false." Paul would later say that anyone who preached another Gospel outside of the one God had given to him should be punished by going to hell. (Gal. 1:6-9) Why such strong words? Because Paul knew that any teaching that does not follow Jesus' definition of what is the true Gospel condemns a person to eternity in hell. The world today

has little concern for truth. People focus on an experience and as long as that experience excites and pleases them, they assume it is good. But the Bible insists that truth is important. Satan is the father of lies- and he always tells people things that sound good, which they love to hear, but which are false. (Jn. 8:44)

Jesus is the truth in several ways.

a. He is the embodiment of what God says is a life that fulfills God's desires for each one of us. Starting with Adam, all other humans have failed. But Jesus alone was able to perfectly live out the will of God for humans.

b. Jesus is the completely accurate demonstration of who God is. Jesus said that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father. When we look in a mirror, we see a clear reflection of who we are. In the same way, when we look at Jesus, at his life, character, and purpose, we see an accurate reflection of God the Father. Jesus pointed to his miracles as his proof that he and God the Father work in perfect harmony.

c. Everything that Jesus taught was 100% accurate. Therefore, we are to listen to him and obey him. Anything that goes against the teachings of Jesus, either the commandments he made or the principles he taught, is therefore false. In our churches, we hear things not in line with Jesus' teachings. Whereas Jesus warned about persecutions, we preach physical blessings. Although Jesus commanded people to go out and spread the Gospel, we focus upon fancy buildings and other temporary things.

d. Jesus insisted that he is the "*life*." Jesus had been talking about eternal life. This eternal life has two facets to it. First, there is the non-ending life which Jesus promises to all those who believe on him. (Jn. 3:16) Second, there is a quality of life which Jesus offers which can be found nowhere else. Money or fame does not really satisfy. But when a person follows Jesus he has a meaning of life that satisfies down in his heart. (Jn 10:10)

Q. 3. a) Summarize in your own words what Jesus meant by being "the way, the truth, and the life." b) Which of these three words do we take lightly in our churches today? Explain your answer.

3. Jesus gives his disciples the authority to ask God for help (Jn. 14:12-14)

Jesus claimed that he would continue to work, but now his work would be through the Holy Spirit. When Luke wrote the book of Acts, he shows how the works of the apostles was the continuation of the work of Jesus. (Acts 1:1-2) One of the most amazing statements that Jesus made was the statement that the disciples would do greater things than Jesus did. What did Jesus mean by this statement? Clearly, the disciples would not do more powerful miracles than Jesus did. Who has ever used a few loaves of bread to feed 5000 men or raised someone from the dead after three days in the tomb? Rather, as the book of Acts shows, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples would be greater because, through the disciples and Christians, Jesus would do miracles around the whole world. Jesus, however, only did his miracles in Palestine. And throughout history, God has enabled Christians to do more miracles than Jesus did by himself. Plus the impact of the ministry of the disciples has been greater; in one sermon Peter was able to lead 3000 people to believe on Jesus. (Acts 2:41)

One of the most important promises Jesus gave persecuted believers was the help God would give them through their prayers. Jesus promised that he would do everything that the disciples asked "*in his*

name." [The Old Testament frequently said that God would work for the sake of his name. (Ps. 25:11; 31:3)] It is important to understand what this means. Does this mean that we can ask selfishly for things, like a new church building to increase our honor or a new dress and he has to give it? And can we command God to obey us as we pray? When we pray, we must remember several important truths:

a. The Bible is very clear that we can never command God to do something for us. He is God and we are people. No student orders a teacher to do something or no slave orders his Master to give him something. Prayer must reflect our relationship to God. He is God and we are his creation and his slaves. So we ask in humility, not with commands.

b. The Bible clearly tells us that we must ask according to the "will of God." (1 Jn. 5:14-15) In just a few hours Jesus would model this; although he would ask God to deliver him from the cross, he also said "but not my will but yours be done."

c. Jesus told the disciples to pray "in his name." This expression reveals several truths.

First, it reveals that any right we have to approach God in prayer comes because of our relationship to Jesus. We have the openness to go to God the Father only because we have become his children through faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, the words "in his name" refer to asking according to the purpose and character of Jesus. The Jews used the expression "name of God" to refer to God. So when they said that God's name is a strong tower of protection (Prov. 18:10), they meant that God is a strong tower of protection. The name of Jesus refers to Jesus himself, his whole being and character as the divine Son of God, and the Savior of the world.

Jesus said in answering their prayers his goal was to honor God the Father. Prayer is not a selfish tool we use to get our desires, but God's way of allowing us to do things that will bring him glory. Once we have submitted ourselves to God and live to bring honor to Jesus, then we will understand what is important to Jesus and his purposes for the world. When praying for those things, we have the confidence that our prayers will be answered.

(Note: In the Bible, the words "in the name of" have many different connotations. Some of them are a) speaking on behalf of or commissioned by God or Jesus, b) speaking with the desire to fulfill the will of God or Jesus, c) acting in obedience to God or Jesus, and d) working through the power of God or Jesus.)

We must be careful never to speak the words "in Jesus' name" carelessly as an expression when startled or think we can use it like a magical saying that will protect us. In addition, it is not the sound of the phrase "in Jesus' name" which Satan fears. Rather, it is Jesus whom Satan fears. In our relationship with Satan, when we say "in Jesus' name" we are by pointing to Jesus' power over Satan and stating that our authority comes because Jesus is working through us as commissioned followers.

There are some things we know are God's will, such as taking the Gospel to the lost. So we can pray with confidence about this. But there are other things we have a more difficult time understanding whether or not it is God's will, such as whether to build a large church or to start several smaller churches. In these cases, we must pray humbly asking God to show us his will, not demand that he do what we want.

Q. 4. a) List some situations that we can apply Jesus' promise to grant our requests when we pray. b) Describe ways Christians use prayer as a way to command God to do something for them. How would their prayers change if done in humility? b) What do most Christians think "in Jesus' name" means? Do they use it meaningfully? Contrast how Christians use it with the meaning found in the Bible.

4. God will give the disciples the Holy Spirit to help them live faithfully as they wait for Jesus' return (Jn. 14:15-31)

For 3 ½ years, every day Jesus had been leading, guiding, and protecting the disciples. Now he was returning to heaven and the disciples would feel alone just as if their parents died. One of the greatest problems we face in times of persecution is the problem of loneliness and discouragement. Our family members abandon us, people we thought were true believers give up their faith, and our expectations that people will quickly accept the Gospel turn out to be false. Jesus said that the temptation is to feel like an "orphan" who has lost his parents.

Much of Jesus final teachings just before his death concerned the Holy Spirit, a truth Jesus had not emphasized until this time. Knowing that he was about to leave them, Jesus wanted the disciples to know that this would not mean that they would be alone. Rather he would send them the Holy Spirit. It is very important for believers to carefully study these teachings of Jesus about the Holy Spirit that describe the most important teachings about the role of the Holy Spirit in the believers' lives. These truths are very different from what we assume is the major role of the Holy Spirit. Not once did Jesus mention speaking in tongues, doing miracles, being slain by the Holy Spirit, or many other things that people today teach the Holy Spirit will do in a true believer. Notice the following things that Jesus taught about the major ministries of the Holy Spirit:

a. Love, obedience and the Holy Spirit are closely tied together. (Jn 14:15-16) Throughout his final teachings Jesus emphasized love. However, he gave a different understanding about love than we are used to. Jesus emphasized that a relationship with God and with him requires love demonstrating itself in obedience. And a person who lives in obedience has God and Jesus living in them. We tend to focus upon worship as the major expression of our love for God. But the Bible frequently reminds us that obedience reveals the reality of our love. It is easy to sing songs of praise to God, but much more difficult to love our enemies as Jesus commanded. The word "*commandments*" here does not only refer to the specific "commandments" Jesus gave like "love your enemies." Rather the Jews used this word to refer to obeying all of the commandments and teachings God gave them. Jesus meant that if we really love him, we will seek to align our lives to all that he desires in our lives. That includes our relationship with our spouse, our children, and with sharing about Jesus to the lost. It is only when our lives are aligned to Jesus' desires that the power of the Holy Spirit (not the presence of the Holy Spirit which is permanent in believers) flows through us.

Christians often struggle over the relationship between salvation being a gift from God that we receive by faith and living in obedience to God. It is clear from the New Testament that God makes no conditions that we must meet in order for him to accept us. Just like the prodigal son was freely accepted back into the family without first paying anything (Lk. 15:11-32), God accepts every repentant sinner into his family without them having to get their life straightened out first. But the Bible also insists that saving faith evidences itself through life changes. We no longer live for selfish pleasures but to please God. We seek to make him the Lord of our lives, obeying whatever he desires from us. But notice why we keep these commands. It is not out of fear of punishment. As John would later write, perfect love (for God) takes away

fear. (1 Jn. 4:18) Nor is it in order to get some reward as if we were a worker bartering with God saying we will work for him as long as he pays us so much money. Rather, Jesus said the foundation of a disciples' life is the attitude of love. If we truly love people, we will only do things that they like. In fact, there is no such thing as love that knowingly seeks to hurt the other person by doing things that they do not like. In our relationship with God, love causes us to ask "What can I do to please God?" In the Bible we are told the things which bring pleasure to God, like helping the poor and being honest with each other. (Micah 6:8) So we joyfully do these things just because we want to feel God's pleasure.

Q. 5. a) Contrast the attitude between serving God out of fear, out of a desire for a reward, or out of love. b) Which of these three reasons for serving God is most common in the church? Explain your answer.

b. Jesus says he will "give" the Holy Spirit to his disciples. Notice how the presence of the Holy Spirit is never seen as something a person earns by doing something like praying all night or giving money like Simon tried to do (Act 8:18-19). Nor does Jesus say the Holy Spirit will be given to those who are holy enough or pray hard enough. There is no evidence that Jesus ever expected the Holy Spirit to come upon believers in a two-step process, at salvation and then later through some powerful experience. Nor is there any evidence that only some of Jesus' followers would get the Holy Spirit and some would not. Rather Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will be a gift given to everyone who is his true follower.

c. Jesus gives two special names for the Holy Spirit. To the Jews, especially when referring to God, a name reflected some character of God. So the name "El Shaddai" means "God the all-powerful" and was given to reassure the Jews of the great power that God had as their protector. So when giving the Holy Spirit these two names Jesus is seeking to summarize two important characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

First, Jesus called the Holy Spirit "*another Comforter*." The Jews had two words for "*another*." One word meant another of a different kind and the other word, which is what Jesus used, means another of the same kind. Jesus used "another of the same kind" to show that the Holy Spirit would replace the type of ministry that Jesus had been doing for the disciples for 3 ½ years. Everything that Jesus had done to protect, teach, encourage, and reprimand the disciples would now be done through the Holy Spirit. Jesus also called the Holy Spirit the "comforter." The Greek word for comforter is "paraclete" and means "one called alongside to help." This word was often used in the court for a lawyer who would come in and help the person accused of a crime. It could mean "encourage" but the major meaning is one who is there to help. The Holy Spirit would work through and help inadequate believers as they sought to take the Gospel to the whole world. Jesus knew that his disciples were going out into a world that hated them and where Satan would use all of his power to attack the disciples of Jesus. Jesus promised his disciples that they would have a helper to help them be victorious.

Second, Jesus called the Holy Spirit, "*the Spirit of Truth*." We see this important word "truth" again. Jesus knew that the world, under the control of Satan, the father of lies, was filled with half-truths and lies. It is very important for the disciples to know what is true in God's eyes and what is a lie made up by Satan speaking through false teachers and prophets. Jesus was concerned that as the disciples reflect on the life and death of Jesus, and as they began to formulate the basic doctrines of the church, that they do so based upon truth. In every generation, there are those who teach false truths. Rather than being afraid of these false truths, the disciples are supposed to be encouraged that they have the Holy Spirit who guides them into truth.

c. Jesus insisted that the Holy Spirit would only be understood by those who follow Jesus as disciples. All others would not experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

d. Jesus indicated that there would soon be a change in the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the people of God. He would not only be "with" them but "in" them. Jesus was giving this teaching to disciples who were aware of how the Holy Spirit worked in the Old Testament times. Then God would send the Holy Spirit upon certain leaders or prophets to help them in their ministry. The Holy Spirit provided power for ministry, but would leave when his ministry was completed or the individual (like Samson or Saul) sinned greatly. But now, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would live "in" the innermost being of the disciples, and never leave them again.

e. The Holy Spirit would "teach" the disciples. Jesus insisted that all of the truths that he had been teaching originated with God and for anyone to disagree with Jesus or not put his truths into practice was equal to rejecting God himself. But all of us know that we often forget what a person has taught us. Even though these disciples were with Jesus for over three years, it would be very easy for them to forget the truths Jesus taught. So the Holy Spirit would do two things. First, he would teach them truth. Most likely this refers to the enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit to understand the life and teachings of Jesus and how they applied to the church. The early apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were used by God to define what Jesus' teachings and his life and death meant. The Epistles (Romans through Jude) all reflect this ministry of the Holy Spirit. Second, the Holy Spirit would "remind" them of what Jesus taught them. It could be that Jesus meant two things. He meant that when they were ministering, the Holy Spirit would bring spiritual truths into the disciples' minds. All of us have experienced this ministry as we are preaching or counseling someone, when suddenly a truth or verse comes into our minds that provides a clear answer. This is the work of the Holy Spirit reminding us. But this truth was especially important for the four Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Apostle John wrote more than 60 years after Jesus spoke these words. What kept him from forgetting what Jesus taught? It was the Holy Spirit who was able to keep the truths of Jesus accurately in the minds of people until the Holy Spirit used the four Gospel writers to write down the story of Jesus.

Q. 6. a) Compare how we usually think about the Holy Spirit and what Jesus taught here about the Holy Spirit. What is similar or different in our emphasis? b) How would the motivation in our churches change if we would emphasize these ministries of the Holy Spirit rather than just the spectacular things?

Jesus again warned his disciples that he would soon leave but then they would see him again. To what was Jesus referring? It would seem that the leaving of Jesus was not only the death of Jesus, but his soon ascension into heaven. But what about the disciples seeing Jesus? Was he referring to them seeing him after his resurrection? Most likely Jesus was referring to the truth that one day Jesus will return and all of his followers will then see him face to face. All of us only see Jesus by faith. We believe that he is in heaven waiting for us. But that will one day change when Jesus comes to start his eternal kingdom. Then our faith will be vindicated and we will see Jesus. Until that day, however, there is the "*prince of this world*" (Satan) who attacks Jesus and later his followers. The reality of our life is that we are living between the time of the risen Lord but before he returns. That time will be filled with persecutions by people being used by Satan, their master. But in that time of struggle, Jesus promised us a type of peace that non-Christians cannot enjoy. It would not be a peace that is dependent upon external circumstances like having lots of money or being popular. Rather, it was a peace with God that, as Paul said, would guard our hearts. (Phil. 4:7)

Q. 7. a) Describe a situation where Jesus gave you inner peace when external circumstances were not very good.

SECOND DAY

Q. 8. Read John 15:1-16:4. List the major truths found in this section.

1. Jesus tells his disciples that to have a fruitful life, they must remain closely connected to him (Jn. 15:1-17)

Jesus was ready to go to the Garden of Gethsemane. (Jn. 14:31) But it seems that he then stopped to explain additional truths which he wanted his disciples to remember as they faced his departure. To the Jew one of the most important agricultural products was grapes. In fact, in the Old Testament God compared his people to specially chosen grapevines. (See Is. 5, Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15, 19:10, Hos. 10:1) However, in almost every place where grapevines are used to illustrate the people of God, it was to show how God's people did not produce the type of fruit that God desired. Jesus returns to this illustration of a grapevine and uses it for his new people, the church. However he is confident that since they now have the Holy Spirit, they will be able to be fruitful vines, not a useless vine like Israel.

Grapes are vines that grow on long branches from one stock. Farmers would carefully select a grapevine that was known to produce good fruit. They would plant the rootstock and soon the branches would grow. On these long branches grew clusters of grapes from which the Jews would make wine. Most people diluted the wine with water before they would drink it, so usually the wine was not very intoxicating. The grapevines would have a strong trunk that went deep into the ground. From that trunk, as the vines grew, the farmers had to guide the vines along a fence that would keep the fruit from falling on to the ground. Grapevines require a lot of care. There are often lots of little branches that do not grow good fruit that must be cut out (pruned) so that the branches did not take away strength from the branches that would bear fruit. And the branches which were designed to bear fruit had to be cut back every year so that they would grow new branches where the fruit would grow. This process of trimming back branches to make the vine more fruitful is called pruning.

Jesus said that like the nation of Israel, the new people of God belonged to God the Father. He is the "owner" who planted the vine and the one who takes care of the new grapevine. Jesus is the rootstock from which every branch or believer grows. Jesus said that he is the "true" vine, for unlike Israel that frequently rebelled, Jesus is the one who obeys God completely. He would start a new people, a new vine, the church, which would submit to and serve God in a way Israel never did. Jesus' goal is not to have a branch, but to have a fruitful branch. Often we get excited about the salvation of a person. But being saved is not the goal; rather, Jesus wants all of his disciples to be fruitful. Helping a person grow to be a fruitful disciple requires careful work.

First, it requires that each branch be firmly attached to the rootstock. Jesus called this close relationship between the believer and Jesus "*abiding*." We have all seen fruit trees with broken branches. Without the sap flowing into the branch it does not take long until that branch stops producing fruit and dies. Jesus warns that as his disciples live without his personal presence this does not mean that they will stop relating to him. Through the Holy Spirit, they must continue to relate to him. To give up and go back to Judaism or to their previous life will have severe consequences.

How does one maintain their relationship with Jesus? The Bible shows that we do so by praying, listening to Jesus speak through the Word, worshiping together with others in church, and having godly friends who will help us grow spiritually. This helps us maintain a vibrant relationship with Jesus that will enable the Holy Spirit to produce much fruit in our lives. Jesus said that unless they abided in him in a close relationship the disciples wouldn't be able to do anything. Jesus did not mean that they could not preach or teach. Rather he is saying that true God-honoring fruit won't come unless we are dependent upon Jesus.

Second, Jesus says he will cut away and burn any branch that refuses to bear fruit. Jesus emphasizes that being fruitful is a sign that someone is in a true relationship with Jesus as his disciple; otherwise, they could be cut off and burned. To whom do these refer? It could be that Jesus was talking about Jews who refused to believe on Jesus. They were about to be removed from God's vine. Or it could be that Jesus was talking about anyone claiming to be his disciple but was not. Jesus often uses the experience of persecution to separate who is his true disciple and who isn't. Those who follow Jesus only because of some selfish blessing are cut away by testing. There was little wood for fires in Israel so people would burn most things as firewood in their homes. However, the wood of the grape vine was so useless that the only thing the farmer would do would be to pile it up and burn it. This is a good illustration how those claiming to follow Jesus but who clearly do not seek to honor Jesus by bearing fruit for his glory will be punished with eternal death. They were never true branches, just those who looked like a branch for awhile. Notice that it is the Father's job, not ours, to determine who is a good branch or not. Christians do great damage when they think they have the ability to judge whether someone has enough fruit and therefore should be part of their church. Unless there is clear evidence that someone is walking in disobedience to God, we must let God the Father determine who should be "cut" and who shouldn't.

Third, Jesus is not satisfied with only a little fruit; he wants "*much fruit*." Jesus said that God wanted the disciples to bear fruit (Jn. 15:2), much fruit (Jn. 15:8), and fruit that would last. (Jn. 15:16) What does God use to make this happen? One major instrument is the Word of God. Jesus said that they must remain in him by making sure his words remain in them. Being fruitful is an evidence that we are Jesus' disciples. It is not raising our hands and saying that we want to be saved, going through baptism, or singing in the choir. Rather, the major fruit Jesus is looking for is "*love*." Someone has called love the trademark of a Christian. Jesus called love a "*new command*" not because loving others was not a command of the Old Testament. Rather Jesus is saying that in being his follower, loving God and loving others summarizes what he desires from the disciples. A Christian without love is most likely not a Christian. That love has two major focuses. First, it is focused upon God. Therefore, love always demonstrates itself in doing what God desires in our lives. Second, it is focused upon others. Love seeks to share with them the truth about Jesus so that they will not die and go to hell. But it also helps those in need, starting with fellow believers and reaching out to non-Christians as well. How is love defined? Jesus said it means to "*lay down one's life*." This could be physically. The greatest love a church leader can demonstrate is when he gives up his life on behalf of the members of his church. But we also lay down our lives when we give our time to help someone who needs our help, or by giving money to meet their needs, or using our natural and spiritual abilities to serve in the church. Jesus came from heaven to earth to serve and to die; that was the evidence of his love to us. We should also demonstrate love by serving others, not only in the words we say. When we have this sacrificial love for God and others, we are freed to pray with confidence to God who is there to help us serve him effectively.

As Christians we often make following Jesus very complicated. There are many expectations of new believers, lists of things they should do or not do. We ask them to memorize verses and go to lots of meetings. Although Jesus encourages some of these, Jesus wants us to teach believers that ultimately Christianity is founded upon two commands; to love God with all of our being, and love others and therefore serve them.

Q. 9. a) Why is the teaching of Jesus that love as defined by laying down our lives is the most important truth that a new Christian should learn? b) Why do you think there is often so little true love between believers?

Jesus told his disciples that they were now in a different relationship to him than before. The relationship between the followers of Jesus would no longer be on a master-slave basis, but a relationship of "*friends*." In the Old Testament, the title "friend of God" was a title used very sparingly for great men like Abraham (Is. 41:8) or Moses. (Ex. 33:11) The Jews would never use it for ordinary people. But Jesus said that God was now willing to treat all of the followers of Jesus as "friends of God" just like the great spiritual giants of the Old Testament. What an honor! It could be that Jesus was also using this expression in the Roman way. The Roman emperors had close advisors called "friends of the king." These advisors were allowed in the presence of the king at all times without appointments and the king would discuss things with them before making any major decision. So Jesus could be saying that from now on Jesus would grant the disciples open access into his presence where they would talk to him and he would reveal his purposes to them.

However, we must be careful in how we understand this. Some people think we can treat God as if he is like one of our friends. We enjoy talking to our friends, but when they ask us to do something, we always have the freedom to say no or ignore them. As we look at the New Testament, we see that on one level our relationship with God is always like a Master to his slave. [Moses (Deut. 34:5); Joshua (Josh. 24:29); David (Ps. 89:20); and James (Jms. 1:1)] Paul would often call himself a servant of God. (Rom. 1:1; Titus 1:1) There were two types of slaves in the Old Testament. There was a slave who worked against his will for someone. But there was another type of slave who, out of love, chose to serve his master. In the Old Testament times, this type of slave would have a hole punched in his ear as a mark that he is a permanent slave. (Deut. 15:16-17) The New Testament uses this idea to picture our relationship with God. We are not forced to be the slaves of Jesus. Rather, we lovingly choose to become his permanent slave to do his will.

On the other hand there is something different in our relationship with God from the Old Testament which is more like a "friend" or family than a slave. First, there is mutual love; in love God seeks to meet our needs and in love we seek to serve him joyfully and willingly. Jesus said that another major difference was that God was revealing to the disciples his will for them and the reasons for it. Usually a master gives a slave a command with little explanation of why he wants something done. In most things the master hides information, like where the money is kept, from the slave. But Jesus said that now God's desires and plans will be revealed to them just like we would tell many of the hidden secrets of our hearts to a very close friend.

How is this new relationship with Jesus evidenced? First, it involved a new assurance in prayer. For the second time Jesus assured his disciples that he would answer their prayers prayed "in his name." This means that he will answer the prayers that agree with Jesus' desires. We must learn to pray for the things that Jesus is concerned about; things which will bring glory to God and to Jesus, which serve others. We

can't pray "in Jesus' name" and use prayer as a tool to get our selfish desires met. That is not what Jesus meant. Second, Jesus commissions us as his "ambassadors." God the Father had *sent* Jesus into the world with a mission; to help people, speak on God's behalf, and die on the cross. Now Jesus is commissioning the disciples as his ambassadors; they were to go throughout the world helping people, speaking on his behalf, and sharing the Good News to them.

Q. 10. a) Do most believers treat their relationship with Jesus as one of being a friend? Explain your answer. b) Do most Christians see themselves as slaves of Jesus like Paul? Explain your answer. c) What can we learn about our being sent by Jesus from how God sent Jesus and what he did?

2. Jesus warns the disciples that they would live in an unfriendly world that hates them (Jn. 15:18-16:4)

"Believe on Jesus and all of life will go well with you" say many evangelists. In contrast, "Come follow me, and when you do, you will face the hatred of the world" said Jesus. If Jesus were to teach this truth in our churches today, it would sound like a strange teaching. That is because most of us think that when we believe in Jesus, God will bless us with material blessings and with a peaceful relationship with others. But this is a lie. Rather than hide the bitter fact, Jesus warned us that if we are true followers of Jesus, bearing fruit for him, we will face the same type of animosity which he was about to face. When Jesus gave these words, he knew that within one day he would be dead, killed by the Jews and Romans. "They hate me, and they will hate you" said Jesus. Knowing in advance that this was true, the disciples were not surprised when just a few weeks later they too were summoned to the Jewish High Court and punished for their faith in Jesus. (Acts 5:40-42) Soon they would die for their faith as first Stephen, then James and most of the apostles died because they chose to follow Jesus.

Jesus said that "*hatred*" is the mark of someone who has no relationship with God but is part of the world. Why does the world hate us so much? Christians fight less than others, cheat less on their taxes, and are not robbers or murderers. Why are Christians being persecuted in lands like Eritrea, China, and throughout the Arab world? There are two reasons.

First, the world hates all of those who are different. Starting from the apostles, followers of Jesus have always been different. They refuse to give primary allegiance to their family, tribe, or nation. Rather, they live with the awareness that ultimately Jesus is their king. Few leaders are willing to give up their authority over people like this to another king. The world likes everyone in their community to worship the same, so when we refuse to pour out coffee to the ancestors or attend some of the religious ceremonies that go against God's Word, our neighbors or perhaps family turn against us. It is often an indication that something is wrong among believers when they are welcomed by the non-Christian community in which they live. Usually this is a sign that the followers of Jesus have compromised their faith. They begin to act like the world and think of money, jobs, and how to benefit their tribe as more important than Jesus. Could one reason why followers of Jesus in many areas of the country face little persecution be because they are acting just like the world?

Second, the world hates followers of Jesus because it reveals their moral degradation. Jesus said that it was because he came to the world that suddenly people in the world are aware of their sinfulness. No longer can anyone say "I did not know." Jesus clearly showed God's perfect standard of holiness. And he calls people to acknowledge their sin and come to him. But most peoples' attitude was to turn against Jesus instead. When everyone is in a dark room, no one sees the dirt that is in the room or on their clothes.

It is only when the light is turned on that they are aware of the dirt and are embarrassed. In the same way, most people think their actions are good. That is what their parents and their culture has taught them. But when someone chooses to follow Christ and obey his teachings, suddenly people see that their lives are not very good. They hate seeing their wickedness, so they seek to put out the light, which the believer is shining. So if you are working in an office and refuse to take a bribe like everyone else, don't be surprised when they turn against you for shining a light on their wickedness. Followers of Jesus that should never be surprised when people in the world hate us. (Note: Although the people express their hatred of us, often there is a deep respect for those who live as disciples of Jesus. Why else would they elect many believers to be their leaders? They might not be willing to be honest, but they respect those who are honest. What a disappointment and an insult to Jesus when those of us who carry the name of Christian do things that are not honest, copying what people in the world do.)

Often it seems impossible that anyone will believe the Gospel even though it is Good News. With communities resisting anyone who claims to follow Jesus, why would anyone be willing to believe? And is the answer for the believers to escape persecution to be hiding their faith and stopping their witness? Jesus encourages his disciples in two ways. First, he tells us that the reason that people will be saved in spite of the opposition of Satan and the world is because the Holy Spirit is witnessing. It is not our responsibility to change a person's mind and heart. We can't. But the Holy Spirit can, and in ways we don't understand he works to convince a non-Christian of the truth about Jesus and believe. Second, instead of hiding our faith, no matter how strong the opposition, believers must continue to testify. Rarely will someone come to faith in Jesus with the witness of the Holy Spirit alone. Rather, the Holy Spirit works with the disciples of Jesus. It is as we share about Jesus that the Holy Spirit works in their hearts to bring them to faith in Jesus.

There is the tendency in some areas to encourage believers to become silent believers. "Why bring persecution upon yourself?" they say. But what does this accomplish other than keep us from persecution? What if the Holy Spirit wants to use our witness to bring a person to the knowledge of Jesus? Won't Jesus reprimand us for being quiet when he wanted to use our witness to save a soul from hell? When threatened with persecution, the apostles did not hide their faith. Instead, they prayed for increased boldness to share about Jesus. (Acts 4:29)

Q. 11. a) Describe ways the world has shown its hatred towards you. b) Why is it important for each believer to understand that part of following Jesus is receiving the hatred of the world? c) Describe a situation where the Holy Spirit used your testimony to convince someone of the truthfulness of the Gospel.

Jesus warned his disciples about persecution in advance so that they do not go "astray." (Jn. 16:1-4) The word "astray" refers to abandoning one's faith in Jesus. Jesus meant that one way to prepare people to stand firm in their faith and not return to the world is to tell them in advance that persecution is expected. How would this persecution evidence itself? It can mean being expelled from one's community. For the Jews, the synagogue was more than a place of worship; it was the center of the Jewish community. Jesus said that the apostles would be expelled from the Jewish community. But it could be worse. Those who hated Jesus and the Gospel would kill them, even thinking that such an act brought pleasure to God. This attitude of Jews like Saul of Tarsus before he became Paul the follower of Christ, led to stoning Stephen and killing James the Apostle. Millions of believers around the world throughout history have died for their faith. One of the sad truths of human history is that often in the name of religion people turn

against those following Christ. Some claiming to be followers of Christ have even persecuted and killed others who seek to follow Christ! Jesus said that any such attitude is evidence that they don't know God the Father, no matter how much they try to claim they are seeking to protect God's truth. Jesus told his followers to love their enemies, not to persecute them. So any persecution in the name of religion goes against the will of God and gives evidence that people are not true followers of Jesus.

Q. 12. a) Describe how a false understanding of following Jesus has led to much persecution upon believers. b) Explain how a religion that persecutes people in the name of Christ goes against the desires of God.

Q. 13. Read John 16:5-33. List the important truths found in this chapter.

3. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to help his disciples (Jn. 16:5-33)

Jesus again told the apostles that he would leave them and instead of the victorious kingdom they had expected, they would face persecution from a world that often regards believers as enemies. So what encouragement did Jesus offer when the disciples were filled with dread of persecution? Jesus did not promise that he would deliver them from trouble and persecution like some people teach today. Rather, he would give them a special power from the Holy Spirit to help them stay faithful during persecution. Jesus taught the following truths about the Holy Spirit:

a. Jesus said that it was good for him to go so that the Holy Spirit would come to be with them. Why is it better for Jesus to go to heaven? Often we wish we could talk with Jesus just like the disciples did and watch him work miracles. When we are in times of difficulty, we desire his physical presence with us. But there is a reason that it is better for the Holy Spirit to replace Jesus as our helper. When Jesus came to earth, he took on a physical body. This means that he could only be in one place at one time. If he had stayed, he could only be a "helper" for a believer in Ethiopia, but not a believer in Kenya, England or the US at the same time. But the Holy Spirit does not have this limitation. Instead, he can be everywhere at the same time. He can live in each believer's heart no matter where they live. So his ability to help and comfort is more effective than Jesus' was as the church expanded out of Palestine to the whole world.

b. The Holy Spirit would play a major role among the unbelievers. (Jn. 16:5-11) Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the people in the world of three things.

First, he would "*convict the world of guilt in regard to sin.*" The word "convict" was used in a court when a judge informs guilty people of the error of their ways, trying to get them to change how they live. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would work in the hearts of unbelievers seeking to reveal to them their sinfulness and calling them to salvation. The word "*sin*" (note: singular not plural "sins") here does not so much refer to acts of sin which people commit, but mankind's rebellious attitude towards God which cause them to commit acts of sin. The Holy Spirit would especially reveal to them the major "sin" that would cause them to be sent to hell, which is the sin of not believing that Jesus is the Messiah. People will not go to visit a doctor unless they know that they are sick. Some people die of a major disease without ever visiting a doctor simply because they don't realize they are sick. In the same way, people will not turn to Jesus for spiritual salvation until they first are convinced of their need for Jesus. This is an important truth for Christians to understand. We often present the Gospel as being "Trust on Jesus and you will be blessed. He will give you a job, and heal you from your sickness." But this is not the Gospel. Jesus did not primarily come to bless us physically. He came to deliver us from our slavery to sin and from eternal

condemnation. Becoming aware of our sinfulness and need for God's forgiveness is the first step people must take in order for them to believe on Jesus Christ.

Second, the Holy Spirit would "*convict the world of righteousness*." The word righteous here means to be in right standing with God; to be declared not guilty by him. The Holy Spirit must convince people that the way to be declared "not guilty" is to believe on Jesus. Jesus was saying that the Holy Spirit would use the witness of believers to convince people that because of the death of Jesus, they can be forgiven of all of their sins and declared not guilty by God when they accept Jesus as their Savior.

Third, the Holy Spirit would "*convict the world of judgment*." Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would use the presentation of the Gospel to convince unbelievers that if they do not accept Jesus as their Savior God will punish them with eternal judgment. They will remain God's enemy and be cast into hell with Satan, their master. (Rev. 20:10, 15)

Jesus wanted his followers to know that when they testify about Jesus, they will not stand alone. In our own strength it is impossible to convince people that a person who was killed as a criminal on a cross is the Savior of the world. The Gospel seems "foolish" to people of the world. (1 Cor. 1:18) Some Christians say "Who will believe if we don't say that God will give physical blessings or tell them that he will heal them?" This means that they don't trust the Holy Spirit to work in a person's heart so they must try to "trick" the person into belief. The only reason anyone will believe this "foolish" Gospel is because the Holy Spirit convinces a person of the truthfulness of the Gospel. We need to clearly present the Gospel and trust the Holy Spirit to do the work of opening the spiritual understanding of a person. But Jesus is also teaching that what we share as we testify is important. The Holy Spirit rarely convinces people of their need to believe on Jesus without the testimony of a follower of Jesus. So as we share about a person's sinfulness, the Holy Spirit convicts the person of their sinfulness. As we share about Jesus being the only way to forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit convinces the person of this truth. As we warn them that if they don't believe they will go to hell, the Holy Spirit affirms this truth. We must make sure that as we share the Gospel we are sharing about sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Q. 14. a) Compare how many Christians witness concerning Jesus and what Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do in the heart of an unbeliever. What is similar and different? b) Write out a short statement of what you could share to an unbeliever using the three ideas that Jesus said the Holy Spirit would use to convict a person of their need to believe.

Jesus said that the enemy of God, Satan, who is called "*the prince of this world*," already stands condemned. Jesus taught that although Satan is active, he has been defeated by Jesus. Because of the death of Jesus, Satan's power over people has been taken away and his judgment to hell has been declared. Why continue to follow a defeated enemy when we can join Jesus who is the victor?

c. The Holy Spirit will guide the disciples into truth. (Jn. 16:12-16) Jesus knew that the major danger for the believer is not persecution, but false teaching. As we study the New Testament, we can see that almost every epistle addressed false teachings that were leading believers astray. The problem with false teaching is that usually it is mixed with some truth and therefore sounds true. For instance, it is true that Jesus will often bless his people with material blessing. But when someone says that Jesus will always bless a person physically and makes it a major part of the Gospel, then that is a lie from Satan. In a world filled with lots of lies and false teachings, believers need someone who can guide them to know what is

true. That helper and guide is the Holy Spirit who is in the heart of each believer. But even more important, the Holy Spirit is working through the community of believers. Beware of someone who claims to have a new truth other believers don't know. If it was a truth from God, the Holy Spirit uses the body of Christ to confirm it.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit will not originate any truth; rather, God the Father is the source of all truth. God the Father has given Jesus the truth to share with the followers of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit takes those truths and helps the disciples of Jesus to understand the truths and know how they apply to the situations in their lives. We are not to be looking for new, hidden truths from the Holy Spirit today. There might be times he reveals a specific truth that is not known, but the primary way the Holy Spirit shares truth is by using the written Word of God and helping believers understand how it applies to them. We live in days where we are anxious for new words of prophecy. Satan has used this desire to spread lots of lies and false prophecies, just like he used false prophets in the Old Testament times. (See Jer. 14:14-16) Amazingly, we also live in times when few Christians want to spend time studying the inspired, infallible Word of God and allow the Holy Spirit to use that to teach us. One pastor said "Why should we expect God to speak to us through new words of prophecy if we don't listen to what he has said in the Bible?" Be careful that you don't listen to the lies of Satan as he seeks to confuse believers by getting them to look for exciting words prophecies which slowly lead them away from God's eternal truth.

Q. 15. a) Describe how you have seen people focus more on words of prophecy than God's written word. b) Explain what problems this has caused in the church.

We often link the major ministry of the Holy Spirit to great works of power like performing miracles or giving the gift of tongues. But in seeking to prepare his disciples for life without Jesus' physical presence, Jesus emphasized a much more important ministry of the Holy Spirit:

1) The Holy Spirit would be a helper who protects, guides, and helps believers like Jesus did when he was on earth with the disciples.

2) The Holy Spirit would teach believers what is true and what is not true. He would guide them to know what is true in a world filled with lies of Satan.

3) The Holy Spirit would help the disciples as they witness about the Gospel to lost people so that they are convinced of their sinfulness and need to trust Jesus as the only way to God.

Q. 16. a) Describe why each of these ministries of the Holy Spirit is important for Christians. b) Why do you think few Christians emphasize these ministries of the Holy Spirit but focus instead on the powerful ministries of the Holy Spirit? c) Describe what imbalances are caused when a church does not focus equally upon all ministries of the Holy Spirit?

d. The disciples of Jesus need to look forward to the return of Jesus. (Jn. 16:17-33) Most times when a believer abandons his faith in Jesus and returns to the world he does so because he thinks about life now and not life in eternity. He chooses to escape the persecution of following Jesus now rather than spending eternity with Jesus and receive great blessings in the future. So Jesus told his followers to always look toward to his eternal kingdom and not their current situation. Jesus did say that for his disciples living

before his second coming, there would be "*grief*" brought on by persecution and the problems in the world. In contrast, the world would rejoice thinking that the believers were defeated. But Jesus assured his followers that one day things would change. Their grief would turn into joy. Scholars debate over what situation Jesus was referring to that would change grief to joy. Was he talking about the death of Jesus (grief) and the resurrection of Jesus (joy)? Or was he talking about the time of persecution now bringing grief to believers which would change to joy as Jesus comes to start his eternal kingdom? No doubt both of these are true, but it seems that Jesus was mainly talking about his resurrection from the dead in three days time.

Jesus said that there will be a change in how his followers will communicate with God.

First, believers now have the freedom to come to God through prayer. As his children, the door to talking with God is always open. As long as we are praying things that are within the will of Jesus ("in his name"), we can be assured that God will hear and answer our prayers. Second, Jesus will communicate truth clearly. When teaching before his death, Jesus often taught in parables that hid some of the truth from people. In addition, until they had the Holy Spirit explaining the implications of Jesus' teachings and death, some truths were confusing. But after the Holy Spirit came, the teachings of Jesus and his death on the cross would be clear. We see this in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit came upon Peter, he was immediately able to clearly articulate what the death of Jesus meant.

The question Jesus is asking us in this section is "Are we willing to wait patiently during the time of grief (the time of labor pains) until he returns to start his eternal kingdom? Are we willing to keep our eyes on the blessings of eternity even though we might not receive many of the physical blessings we want or escape persecutions?"

Q. 17. Explain how keeping your eyes on Jesus' future kingdom and its blessings has helped you to be faithful. b) How has the temptation to drift in following Jesus and look to worldly blessings increased when you forgot Jesus' kingdom?

THIRD DAY

Q. 18. Read John 17. a) List the prayer requests Jesus had concerning himself. b) List the prayer requests Jesus had for the 12 disciples. c) List the prayer requests that Jesus had for all believers of all ages. d) How are the things that Jesus prayed for usually different from what we focus our prayers upon? What can we learn about praying according to the will of God from this?

1. Jesus prays for himself (Jn. 17:1-5)

"Lord, teach us to pray" the disciples once asked Jesus. (Lk. 11:1) Jesus responded by giving them a model prayer which we call "The Lord's Prayer" But there is more than one way to teach someone. Here Jesus showed what it means to pray "in the name of Jesus," which we saw earlier means according to the will of Jesus. We often pray that God will bless us in some way. For instance, we ask him to give us a job, help us go to school, or get well from a sickness. Jesus encourages us to pray for these things. But Jesus demonstrates here that there are many more important things which we should be praying for than just personal things. If we are to learn from Jesus how to pray, this final prayer of Jesus that he prayed in front

of his disciples is a good example of how we should pray. (Note: It is also helpful to look at the prayers of Paul in Ephesians and Philippians to see how he prayed for people.)

Repeatedly through this prayer, Jesus addressed God as "*Father*." This title for God was very unusual for Jews. The Jews so feared God that they refused to even use the name of God in prayer let alone call him Father in an intimate way. But Jesus reveals to us that our relationship as followers of Jesus is unique in that we can now relate to God as our Father. Children know two things about their relationship to their human father. First, there is a relationship of love between the child and the father. The relationship is not defined by fear, but by love. So all small children know that since their father loves them, they can go to their father for help at any time. Jesus is saying we have this type of relationship with the Creator of the universe. Second, there is a relationship of respect and honor. A healthy father-child relationship means the children honor their father and obey him. This should be true of our relationship with our heavenly Father as well.

Jesus starts his prayer by asking that the Father "*glorify*" Jesus. The word "*glorify*" here means to bring honor to Jesus. Jesus asked God to honor Jesus. What did Jesus mean? First, Jesus was talking about the cross. Although the cross might seem like an instrument of defeat, to Jesus it became the instrument that would bring him honor. It is because of the cross that the name of Jesus is honored in song all around the world today. Second, Jesus refers to his glorification of returning to heaven to sit at the right hand of God's throne. As the eternal Son of God Jesus enjoyed the honor of being God. Paul tells us that he temporarily set that honor aside to come to earth and die for us. But now it was time for Jesus to return to heaven to the glory which was previously his. Third, ultimately Jesus will be glorified when he returns to the earth in glory to reign in his eternal kingdom. We are told that all people will then be forced to honor Jesus. (Phil. 2:9-11)

But Jesus was not primarily concerned that he would be honored. Rather, he was concerned that God would be honored. Repeatedly Jesus told people that he sought to glorify God by doing the things that God told him to do and speaking the words that God asked him to speak. (Jn. 5:36; 7:17-18; 14:10-11) He did not seek to be glorified like an athlete seeks to bring praise to himself after he runs a good race. Rather, his desire was to be an instrument used by God to bring glory to God.

In his prayer, Jesus reflects the great authority that God gave him.

a. He claims that God has given him authority over all people. Therefore we do not need to fear anyone, for we know that they are under the control of Jesus.

b. He claims that God had given to him those who were to be saved. We do not know how God's choice of us and our choosing God works together to bring us salvation. However, Jesus clearly taught that salvation is not simply the choice of people. God the Father is deeply involved in drawing someone to believe on Jesus and becoming his disciple.

c. Jesus claims that he has given "*eternal life*" to those whom God gave to him. This eternal life is not just unending life that helps us live forever; it is a type of life that brings deep meaning and purpose now. Jesus gives an interesting definition to this eternal life. He does not focus upon eternal blessings which we will enjoy. Rather, he looks to the eternal relationship that we will have with God. Jesus said that "*knowing*" God is what defines true life. The Old Testament used this word "know" to refer to the intimate relationship

between a husband and wife. (Gen. 4:1) Jesus is saying that our relationship with God is not defined by how we keep certain laws and regulations or whether we are born into a certain religion or denomination. Rather, it is based upon developing an intimate relationship with God. No Jew during the times of Jesus expected this. For them God seemed very remote because he was so holy and was to be feared. The Jews would not even use his name out of fear of him. But Jesus said that through him, his disciples can enter a close, loving relationship with God. (Note: It is important to balance this truth with the truth that God is still the "consuming fire" to be feared and honored. We should never relate to God with the same type of familiarity and indifference that we act toward our friends.)

d. Jesus had "*completed the work*" God had given him to do. Although Jesus had not yet died, this fact was so certain that Jesus considered it already completed. There were still people Jesus did not teach or sick whom he did not heal. And yet Jesus could say that his work was done. God had a specific plan for Jesus, and that plan was for him to give his life for others by dying on the cross and being resurrected from the dead. There might have been a lot of good things Jesus could still have done, but God's work for him was defined by God and Jesus completed it. God also has specific work for each of us to do. One of the responsibilities of Jesus' disciples is to determine God's plan for their lives, submit to God, and work to finish that work.

Q. 19. What work do you think God has for you to do so that when you die you can say "I have finished the work God has given me to do?"

2. Jesus prays for the 11 disciples he had trained for the past three years (Jn. 17:6-19)

Whereas we often spend most of our time praying for ourselves and our personal needs, Jesus focused his prayers on others. Praying for others is one of the most important ways we show love for them and can help them grow spiritually. Jesus knew several things about the disciples.

First, he knew that the disciples ultimately weren't his, they belonged to God the Father. God had entrusted them to Jesus. All church leaders must remember this. The members of the church do not belong to the leaders or the denomination, but to God. No church should proudly boast "we have this number of members." Such an attitude leads to pride and overlooks the truth that the believers all belong to God. Just as Jesus did not come to earth for his benefit but to give his life in service of the disciples, church leaders must remember that God has given them leadership responsibilities so that they too can give their lives in service of the members.

Second, Jesus knew that his disciples had proven themselves as true disciples because they "*obeyed*" God's Word. Notice how knowing God's Word is the foundation of discipleship. We can't obey God without knowing what we are to obey. Jesus faithfully and carefully taught his disciples. They responded by obeying what Jesus taught. No one can be a true disciple of Jesus, committed to obeying his commandments unless they take the time to know what God wants them to do.

Third, Jesus says that he is the disciples' intercessor. One of the amazing truths found in the New Testament is that both the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27) and Jesus (Rom. 8:34) pray for those who are disciples. God's willingness to work is not limited to our feeble prayers. Rather, the Triune God is working together for us. Jesus said that he did not pray for the "*world*." The "*world*" is John's way of referring both to unbelievers and to the total ungodly, anti-God perspective of the world. By this Jesus was saying that although he might love all people in the world and would die for them, he had a special relationship only

with his disciples. Notice the type of prayer requests Jesus is praying for his disciples. It is not for our physical blessing, but for something much more important:

a. Jesus prays for protection. (Jn. 17:11) Jesus had told the disciples that they will be living in a hostile world which hates them and will persecute them. They needed protection. For the 3 ½ years that he was leading the disciples, Jesus was the one who protected the disciples. He kept Satan from attacking them and destroying their faith. Since Jesus was returning to heaven, he would not personally be on earth to protect them with the authority (name) which God had given him. So Jesus asks God to protect them both from the world and from Satan. The phrase "*evil*" most likely should be translated "the evil one" or Satan rather than from evil as is translated in the Amharic Bible. There are two ways God can protect us. First, he can protect us by keeping all problems and attacks of Satan from us. God rarely works this way. The only way for God to do this would be to take us out of the world, since life on the earth includes problems and temptations. Jesus asked God not to remove them from the world since they needed to be in the world to share the Gospel with others. Second, God can empower us so that we overcome the problems and attacks of Satan. Jesus was concerned that the disciples not be overwhelmed and give up their faith in Jesus. For the Christian, that is the ultimate defeat. So Jesus is praying that God will empower the believers to persevere through problems and persecutions and stay faithful to him.

Notice what Jesus taught would happen to the disciples because they chose to follow him:

First, Jesus gave them true inner joy. One of the things we notice with those who closely follow Jesus is that no matter how bad the circumstances are, they have an inner joy. They might feel the sadness of the death of someone they love or suffer from disease, but when you talk with them, there is a trust in God and a confident joy that circumstances do not take away.

Second, the disciples have been separated out from the world because they heard and responded to Jesus' teachings. Again we see Jesus emphasize the importance of knowing truth. Christians are in a strange position. On one hand, God has left us in the world to continue to work on his behalf. So we live on earth, members of our respective nations. We still identify ourselves as Ethiopians or Americans or Kenyans. But in reality each believer is distinct from the world. Because we have listened to Jesus' teachings, we no longer think like others in our country or act like them in many ways. Others might favor their tribe, but believers are supposed see all people as equal. Others might cheat and lie, but we are supposed to deal in honesty with all. Others focus upon getting rich even if they have to cheat, but believers seek to be truthful and honor God. Others look for selfish ways to get ahead; we look for ways to serve God and others. Paul would later say that our true nationality is heaven. Unfortunately many Christians have not changed how they think and act. Many of us are still in the world and resemble the world.

b. Jesus prays that God will "*sanctify*" the disciples with truth. (Jn. 17:17) The basic meaning of the word "sanctify" is to "be set apart for service to God." It can be used of being set apart from the evil ways of the world and being spiritually pure, which is how we usually understand the term. It can also refer to being distinct. God is said to be holy primarily because he is unique; unlike anything or anyone else, greater than all other things. In the same way Jesus insisted that the disciples are distinct and separate from the world. The word sanctify is often used for something being separated out and committed to God for his service. So an animal was said to be "sanctified" by being set apart from all of the other animals in

the flock to be sacrificed to God. (Ex. 13:2; Lev. 22:2) In the same way, all believers are set apart by God to serve him.

Notice what Jesus said God should use to sanctify them. It was "*truth*." Jesus is not talking about believers living in a monastery to get away from the world. Nor is he wanting believers to be separate from the world by living in their own communities as is common in some towns as evangelicals try to get property where only other evangelicals live. Rather, the separateness that Jesus encourages is the sanctification of knowing the truth and living by the truth. We are expected to live in the midst of a world which hates us and which follows the world's anti-God way of thinking. But we are to think and live differently, just like Jesus lived among sinners and yet kept himself pure.

Jesus was not just talking about being different in our beliefs, but he meant that we are set apart to do a job. God "*sent*" Jesus into the world to serve God and his sanctification would bring the cross. Now Jesus is sending the 11 into the world as "apostles." (The word "sent" comes from the word "apostle" which means one sent out under the authority of someone with a message. Jesus was the "apostle" sent by God to earth and now Jesus was sending out "apostles" to the world with his message.) Jesus' work on earth was complete. It was now time for the apostles to go out and share about the death and resurrection of Jesus. After the Holy Spirit appeared in Acts 2, these 11 disciples would travel throughout the ancient world and work so effectively that within two generations most of the Roman Empire heard about Jesus. God's desire is not that he bless us with salvation which we then selfishly keep to ourselves. Rather, Jesus saves us so that we can become his sanctified ones who serve as God's messengers.

Q. 20. a) Illustrate how believers can be "sanctified" in all three ways. b) List some "work" that God has set you apart to do. Illustrate ways that you are fulfilling that work.

3. Jesus prays for disciples of all ages (Jn. 17:20-26)

Jesus was soon to face the cross that the disciples understood as being defeated. And there were only a small group of disciples with Jesus, such a small result from over three years of ministry. But Jesus knew that he was about to start a movement which today has become the largest religion in the world. In the last section of his prayer, Jesus confidently prays for all of those who would eventually trust the message of salvation that the disciples would teach. He prayed for you and me.

a. Jesus had one major request for believers; that they be one. One of the saddest truths is that in spite of Jesus' prayers for our unity, Christians are greatly divided today. There are hundreds of denominations that often see themselves as the true church and look down on other Christians. Even within a denomination and among church leaders there are many disagreements.

Jesus said that the unity of his followers would be the most powerful verification of the truth of the Gospel that God loves people and that Jesus is in fact God's Son sent by God to die for the world. Nothing takes away from the power of our witness as when the world sees us fighting each other. Why should they listen to us when we say Jesus has come to give people peace when we can't live at peace with another believer?

Unity is also one of the major tools God uses to help us stay firm in our faith. When we are relating closely with other believers we are better able to overcome the temptation to return to the world. But when we start fighting with each other and refuse to relate closely with other believers, our faith is weakened

and we are often overcome by Satan's attacks. Jesus also knew that the ministry of the disciples would be most powerful if they worked together rather than against each other.

But it is important for us to understand what "unity" is. There are four different understandings of being "one."

First, many think being one means that we have to all worship the same, dress the same, and act the same. So many churches copy the worship practices of others, not wanting to be seen as different. God loves variety, not sameness. He did not create one type of tree or flower or one color of person. It is the variety in the world that gives it its beauty. So Jesus is not praying that all believers look and act the same.

Second, others think that unity is getting rid of all denominations and setting aside all distinct beliefs. "It does not matter if someone is teaching a truth that is clearly against what the Bible teaches, we should just love each other and accept each other" some Christians teach. Many of the efforts to be "one" means that churches adjust their beliefs to what the most liberal person believes. Jesus was not seeking that we water down truth in order to work together. And he did not mean that everyone had to believe exactly the same.

Third, some Christians push for organizational unity. They want to get rid of all denominations and only have one great "Christian" church. It is doubtful that this will ever happen until we get into heaven.

Finally, there is a unity which acknowledges that God's Word is the only inspired guideline which all believers are committed to following. Jesus had just prayed that believers be set apart based upon truth, not just love. Biblical unity is based upon **love** where people respect each other and seek to serve the other's needs, not their own needs. And it is based upon **truth** where all believe the basic truths of God's Word. It is also based upon a commitment to **obey** God's desires as outlined in the Bible. It is impossible to have Biblical unity with any group that is not committed to walking in obedience to the truths of God's Word. And there is a unity based upon a commitment to **holiness**. Finally true Biblical unity has the same purpose of continuing the **mission** of sharing the Gospel to the whole world which Jesus started. We do not work on unity for unity's sake, but unity so that we can work together to share the Gospel with all people.

In the Bible, there are two levels of truth.

First there are the major doctrines of the church that define whether or not someone is a follower of Christ. In Gal. 1:6-9 Paul talks about those who preach a "different Gospel" that is not a Gospel. He felt so strongly about maintaining the purity of one Gospel that he said that people should go to hell if they add to the truth that Jesus is the only way to God and that salvation comes by trusting only in Jesus' death on the cross without any human works. Any attempt of unity among believers must be based upon a commitment by all to the major beliefs that historically have defined what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Second, there are many minor teachings found in the Bible that are not clear and believers have different opinions as to what they mean. So Christians have different understandings as to the meaning of the Lord's Supper or the different events which will be part of Jesus' return. So what do we do about these minor differences? Does God expect us to just set them aside and believe nothing? No, it is important for

us to study carefully God's Word and determine what we believe is the best understanding. But in humility we acknowledge that others have their own understandings. This means that there will be different denominations in which people having similar understandings will gather together in worship. However, each denomination will humbly acknowledge that those believing other truths are also part of God's eternal family and lovingly work with them.

For there to be true biblical unity there are two preconditions. First, there must be a common commitment to the truth of God's Word. It is impossible to have "unity" with someone who does not believe that the Bible is God's only inspired Word or that Jesus is the only way of salvation. That is the same as having unity with the devil. Unity is only possible where all true believers hold fast together to the doctrines that define what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Second, there must be a vibrant unity with Jesus. Jesus said that they must be "*in us*" and "*in me*." If someone calls himself a "Christian" but evidences no vibrant relationship with God, it is difficult to have true unity. They won't see as important the things which Jesus says is important, but will reflect the values of the world.

But when believers have the proper foundation of a common commitment to Biblical truth and are committed to following Jesus as his disciples, they have a foundation to be "one." They can work together in sharing the Gospel message. And they can allow each believer or denomination the freedom to believe different minor doctrines and worship differently while still working together. No denomination is truly working in "unity" with another denomination when it knowingly seeks to undermine the beliefs of that denomination. So for a charismatic church to claim that it is working in unity with a non-charismatic church but then force that church to hold a conference which reflects its unique doctrinal beliefs (e.g., slaying in the Spirit) demonstrates that it is not true unity.

It is also important to notice the context of Jesus' prayer on unity. Jesus was not just focusing upon unity that produces warm feelings to each other; rather, the focus of the unity is reaching out to a lost world with the Gospel. The ultimate purpose of unity is to work together to reach the lost for Jesus.

b. Jesus also asked that all those who believe on him see Jesus' glory. This time Jesus is not talking about the glory of the cross. Rather, he was talking about the glory of eternity. Jesus is looking toward the day when he returns to reign with authority and starts his eternal kingdom.

Q. 21. a) List reasons why there is so much division among churches in Ethiopia today. b) Examine attempts for unity between churches in Ethiopia. What part did truth play in the unity? What was the reason for the unity?

FOURTH DAY

EVENTS LEADING TO THE ARREST OF JESUS CHRIST

Suppose you heard a report that someone who was sentenced to hang as a criminal was god. Would you believe it? Just as it would be hard to convince us that someone who died in such a way was god, this is what people throughout the Roman world wondered after the death of Jesus. Wherever Christians shared about Jesus, when people heard that Jesus had died on the cross, they would immediately laugh and turn away. As Paul would say, the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are not believers.

(1 Cor. 1:18) And the Jews believed that being hung on a cross was a sign of being cursed by God. (Deut. 21:23)

One of the reasons the Gospel writers wrote so much of their stories about Jesus' trial and death was to explain why Jesus died on the cross. The Gospels emphasize that Jesus was "innocent," but he was still crucified. It also stresses that Jesus' death was the plan of God, not an accident. And it teaches that the purpose of the cross was for Jesus to die for our sins as a sin offering. Jesus' death is what brought hope for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. The most loving person the world has ever seen was crucified as mankind's evilness showed itself on that day of crucifixion. It is hard for us as we see the evil in the world around us as one tribal group attacks and kills people of other tribal groups or millions die in wars. "Why doesn't God stop this?" we sometimes wonder. The Bible does not give us a total answer, but one of the amazing truths of the Bible is that God allowed his Son, Jesus, to experience the evilness of mankind to its fullest and die a terribly painful way even though he was innocent. (Note: Today, the cross has become a symbol of beauty and people wear it as jewelry. [e.g., Axum, Lalibella, or Gondar crosses.] In the West, even non-Christians wear a cross as jewelry. But in the ancient world that would have been seen as foolish since the cross was the most cruel death mankind had devised to execute people. It would have been like us wearing a golden gun or hanging noose as jewelry.)

Q. 22. Read Mt. 26:36-56. a) What did Jesus pray? How was his prayer answered? b) What did Peter do to try to defend Jesus? c) What did Jesus say which shows that he was not trying to start a political revolution?

1. Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36-46, Mk. 14:26, 32-42; Lk. 22:39-46)

It was now very late, perhaps after midnight. Having finished teaching his disciples, Jesus knew that it was time for him to finish his journey to the cross. Leaving the city of Jerusalem, the disciples traveled to an olive grove at the Mount of Olives (See map in Appendix D in back of book). Judas knew of this frequent meeting place so he could lead the soldiers there to arrest Jesus. This olive grove was called Gethsemane. The word Gethsemane means "olive press" so most likely in this olive grove there was a press to make olive oil.

Arriving at the grove, Jesus told eight of the disciples to stay close to the entrance of the olive grove. He took his three closest disciples, Peter, James and John, with him into the middle of the grove. Jesus told them that he was so overwhelmed that he felt like he was about to die, crushed by the anguish of having to bear the sins of the world. Luke tells us that in his struggle in prayer with God, he sweated what looked like drops of blood. (Lk. 22:44) His language was much like what seen in the Old Testament. (Ps. 142:3-6) What did Jesus do when deeply troubled? Did he complain? No, he prayed. Did he offer up a short prayer to God? No, Jesus spent more than an hour in prayer. We only have a summary of what Jesus prayed during that time.

Why was Jesus so overwhelmed? Why did he ask God three times to take the "cup" from him? The word "cup" comes from the Old Testament where it symbolized God's terrible judgment upon his people. (Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15-29) For the past months, Jesus had calmly walked towards Jerusalem knowing that he would die. Was he now afraid of death? No. Was he concerned about the physical agony he would face the next day on the cross? No. The New Testament tells us that when Jesus died, he became "sin for us." (2 Cor. 5:21) He would also become a curse. (Gal. 3:13) All of the sins of humankind were placed upon Jesus. He was absolutely holy, but now he would be covered with the filth of evil. As a result, God the Father would turn away from Jesus, breaking the close fellowship they had enjoyed throughout eternity.

On the cross Jesus would not complain about the pain he was facing, but he would cry out "My God, why have you forsaken me?" So Jesus was asking God if it was possible to provide salvation by another way besides death on the cross when all of the sins of mankind would be put on him.

Heb. 5:7 describes this night where Jesus cried in deep agony to God asking him to take away the terrible day when he would become sin. "*If possible*" he prayed. Can't God do everything? No, he can't go against his plans. So because of his deep love for you and me, God could not take away the cross from Jesus. There are many times we pray asking God to take something away from us. But sometimes it is "not possible" because the situation is part of God's plan for our lives whereby he wants to do something in us and through us which he could not do in any other way.

Jesus ended his request "*not my will, but yours.*" This is the heart of a disciple who wants above all else God's desires for his life not his convenience. Jesus' prayers always reflected his commitment to submit to God's will. The book of Hebrews tells us that God heard his prayer. But hearing Jesus' prayer did not mean that God took the situation away. Jesus would still die on the cross the next day. But God heard the prayer in other ways. It seems God took away the anguish from his heart because from the time of his arrest on Jesus no longer struggled with the fact that he would die on the cross, but calmly accepted God's will. God also listened to Jesus and promised that the cross would not defeat him but that he would rise from the dead and return to heaven where he would be exalted to the highest place. (Phil. 2:9-10) God answered him in one other way; he sent an angel to encourage Jesus. (Lk. 22:43)

Perhaps one reason Jesus wanted Peter, James, and John to witness this deep struggle in prayer was to teach them that they too would face similar situations. As persecution or disease come upon them, believers will often become deeply burdened and pray for God to take the situation away. Jesus was telling them that it was good for them to pray to God. But he showed them that more important than release from painful situations, they should be determined to submit to God's will. And God's will sometimes means that the "cross" of persecution, and trouble will be part of their lives. A disciple of Jesus accepts God's will even when it is painful, knowing that God only allows it for a larger purpose. God promises each one of us that no matter how dark the situation becomes, there is the day of "resurrection" when we come through the crosses we face. Above all, there is heaven that awaits us after this temporary time of struggle on earth is over.

Jesus had asked his closest friends to join him for two other reasons.

First, he wanted their companionship during the dark hours of his struggle. "*Keep watch with me*" said Jesus. In other words, he was asking them to join him in the struggle. Although fully God, Jesus was also fully human and he dreaded being lonely. If we face times of trouble, one of the most important things we can do is to gather our close friends around us. One of the reasons the body of Christ is so important, especially if we lose the support of our non-Christian friends when we believe on Jesus, is to have close friends who understand us and can join us in prayer.

Second, Jesus wanted them to prepare themselves for their dark times. It is interesting that Jesus did not ask them to pray for him, but to pray for themselves. The time of testing was coming when they would flee had arrived. In Greek, like Amharic, the same word is used for "*temptation*" and "*testing*." Was Jesus telling his disciples to pray so that they would not be tempted? God rarely protects us totally from temptation; it is part of being human. Rather, Jesus meant to pray when we are tested by trials. Jesus knew

that as he was being arrested, Satan would use that time to tempt the disciples to flee and abandon their faith in Jesus. Jesus asked them to pray so that their reaction to the death of Jesus would not be like Judas' who never returned to following Jesus.

Jesus teaches several important truths about prayer.

a. Jesus taught that prayer is an intimate, loving conversation with God. Jesus called God "Abba Father." The word "Abba" was a term used by children for their father similar to how we might say "Daddy" or "Pappa" rather than "Father." No Jew had ever used this word for God before. But Jesus, and then his disciples, were encouraged to relate to God in such a close loving way.

b. Jesus taught that in the midst of difficult situations we can pray without blaming God for our situations. In prayer we demonstrate our trust in God. Notice that Jesus never got angry with God about the coming cross. Rather, he always accepted God's plan for his life with no bitterness. We might not like some of the things God asks us to do or go through, and we might ask God to take them away from us. But we must also have a loving trust in Jesus that has no attitude of bitterness or complaining.

c. Jesus taught the disciples that prayer is not easy; rather it is a struggle between the "*flesh*" and the "*spirit*." (Note: Jesus is not talking about the Holy Spirit here.) "Flesh" refers to all of our human weakness that causes us to fail and "spirit" refers to the inner desire to do what is right. Paul describes this struggle in Rom. 7:7-25. All of us have experienced this, like when we pray many things distract and interrupt us. Why is it we often feel tired when we pray? It is part of the struggle. We often feel guilty about this, but Jesus said that such a struggle is normal. But rather than give in to the human desires that lead us away from prayer, we must discipline ourselves to continue to pray. How do we overcome these weaknesses? It is by being aware of our weak areas, how Satan can attack us, and being vigilant in prayer to receive the power to resist and overcome temptations when they happen.

d. Jesus taught that the disciples should focus their prayers on what matters most spiritually, not just on physical things. The disciples could have prayed for a more convenient life. They probably did not like sleeping outside or living in poverty any more than we do. But never once did Jesus tell them to pray for a comfortable life. Rather, Jesus told them to focus their prayers on their spiritual lives. He told them to use prayer as a tool to overcome the pull of the flesh and Satan. Paul would later share how he prayed that people would grow spiritually. (Eph. 3:16-19) If we really want to become stronger spiritually, we must learn to focus our prayers on our spiritual lives.

Q. 23. a) Make a list of the things you have prayed for during the past three days. 1) Which items dealt with physical needs you or someone else had? 2) Which prayer request dealt with the more important spiritual needs you and others have? b) What does your list reveal about your tendency to pray for the less important things?

2. Jesus Christ is arrested (Mt. 26:47-56; Mk. 14:43-50; Lk. 22:47-53)

The disciples were weak and overcome by their physical need for sleep, so Jesus faced the time of struggle alone with God in prayer. There will be times when, like Jesus, we feel totally alone. But we aren't alone. God is with us, and in prayer we can come close to him.

After the third time of praying to God, Jesus knew that God had no other way for him other than the cross. Accepting his destiny, Jesus woke the disciples, telling them that the time of his betrayal had come. At that time, Judas arrived with a large crowd to arrest Jesus. John tells us that it was a "*detachment*," which is a military term for about 600 soldiers. (Jn. 18:3) It seems there were two types of soldiers in the crowd. First, the majority were Jewish guards under the control of the High Priest who were assigned to the Temple to maintain peace, especially during a holiday. Jewish guards usually carried clubs. Second, there were Roman soldiers who were stationed in Jerusalem to make sure people maintained their allegiance to Rome. Pilate had just arrived in Jerusalem from his home in Caesarea (See map in Appendix A at back of book). He usually came down to Jerusalem with extra soldiers to make sure things remained peaceful during the religious holidays, which was often when riots took place. Because Jesus was popular and the religious leaders feared a riot, they probably asked Pilate for some soldiers to help them arrest Jesus. The Romans soldiers would have had swords.

By now it was past midnight and dark. Jesus was well known in Galilee, but not in Judea where the soldiers lived. How were the soldiers to know which person was Jesus? The high priests demanded that Judas travel with the group and point out Jesus so that they could arrest the right person. Judas indicated who Jesus was by a "*kiss*." Like Ethiopians, the Jews kissed their friends on the cheek when greeting them. What an insult to betray your friend with the sign of friendship! Jesus did not react in anger but called Judas "*friend*." Jesus again models how we are to react when we are betrayed. We are not to retaliate with hatred or anger; rather, we are to treat them as "*friends*."

Afraid that Jesus would fight them to start his revolution, the large crowd carried many weapons. As the soldiers arrived to arrest Jesus, Peter reacted in anger. Several hours earlier he had promised to fight with Jesus and die with him if necessary so he grabbed a sword and started to fight. In the group coming to arrest Jesus was the servant of the High Priest called Malchus. (Jn. 18:10) Peter cut off his ear. Jesus quickly stepped between Peter and the soldiers who would have gotten ready to attack Peter and kill him and the other disciples. Jesus stopped the fighting, clearly demonstrating that he was not a revolutionary who had come to fight the Romans. Jesus revealed to the group their hypocrisy. He had openly taught in the Temple, but they had been afraid to arrest him publicly. Rather, they had come secretly and fearfully at night, which was illegal in Jewish law.

One of the important truths the Gospel writers wanted us to remember is that no one forcefully took Jesus into captivity. Jesus allowed himself to be captured when the "*hour*" had arrived. Previously Jesus had escaped when people tried to capture him. (Lk. 4:28-30) But now he willingly allowed people to arrest him. In fact, Jesus claimed that if he was a revolutionary, he would fight, not by using humans like the disciples, but angels. Jesus claimed that he could call twelve legions of angels (72,000 angels) to fight if he wanted to start a rebellion. In the Old Testament one angel was able to kill 185,000 soldiers in one night (Is. 37:36), so imagine what 72,000 angels could do in battle for Jesus! Even as he was being arrested, Jesus did not think only of himself. Rather he thought of the disciples. He did not want Peter to get hurt by fighting so he stopped it. And he told the soldiers that they had not been instructed to arrest the disciples so they should be left alone. (Jn. 18:8) Perhaps as a lesson to his disciples, Jesus said that violence ("*sword*") causes more violence (sword.) In most cases as followers of Jesus we are never to use violence as a means to protect ourselves when facing persecution. Violence leads to more violence and begins a cycle of unending violence. Rather it is only in trusting God and accepting suffering that God works to stop violence.

The soldiers arrested Jesus. Although just moments before they had been ready to fight for Jesus, suddenly the disciples ran away into the darkness. However, three followed Jesus. One was an unnamed "*young man*" whom the soldiers tried to apprehend but who ran away naked. Many scholars think this was John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark. (Mk. 14:51-52) The second was the apostle John. He is called "*another disciple*." (Jn. 18:15) And then there was Peter. They must have followed Jesus in the distance to see where the soldiers would take Jesus and what would happen to him.

Q. 24. Read Jn. 18:12-14; 19-23. Describe Jesus' trial before Annas.

THE VARIOUS TRIALS OF JESUS CHRIST

1. Jesus has his initial trial before Annas, the previous high priest (Jn. 18:12-14; 19-23)

During the days of Jesus, the most powerful Jew was not the high priest Caiaphas, but his father-in-law Annas. Annas had been the high priest in charge of the Jewish affairs from 5 AD to 15 AD. He used this time to greatly expand his influence among the Jews and increase his wealth. In fact, there is evidence that he was the high priest who began the system of selling animals in the Temple for sacrifice at great personal profit. Even in Jewish writings Annas was described as a corrupt high priest. Annas would have been very angry at Jesus when he drove out the merchants who sold animals in the Temple just a few days earlier because Jesus' actions revealed Annas' corruption.

Annas gained too much power so the Romans deposed him in 15 AD. Over the next 40 years the Romans put different people in as high priest when it suited them. But each of the high priests was related to Annas. They were either his sons or Caiaphas, who was his son in law. Caiaphas ruled as high priest from 16 AD to 36 AD. Although Caiaphas was the official high priest in charge of Jewish affairs, most Jews viewed Annas as the true high priest since in the Jewish system a high priest served until his death.

Instead of taking Jesus to Caiaphas, the soldiers took Jesus to the residence of Annas. Annas and Caiaphas had their residence in the western part of Jerusalem. One of the things which the Gospel writers wanted to inform us of was that everything the Jews did in their trial of Jesus was illegal according to Jewish standards of justice.

The first thing that was wrong about the arrest and trial of Jesus was the underhanded way in which the Jews arrested Jesus. They did not do it openly in the daytime, but secretly late at night. This was the first indication that the religious leaders were not seeking justice, but simply looking for ways to kill Jesus. They had already determined to kill Jesus. (Jn. 11:45-53) Jewish law was very strict in saying that no death sentence could be given until after a fair trial.

The second thing that was illegal was for Annas to try to force Jesus to speak in a way that might incriminate himself so he could have an excuse to punish Jesus. Jesus answered that that unlike a false prophet who tried to influence people privately, he had taught openly in front of the people and religious leaders. Since everyone knew what Jesus taught, Anna should ask them. What Jesus meant was that Annas knew the rules of fair trial and he should be asking witnesses openly in a fair trial, not Jesus in secret. Jesus' answer angered one of the attendants who slapped Jesus and told him not to be disrespectful to Annas. This was the third illegal act, for the Jews were not allowed to strike someone who was being tried. Jesus answered that he had spoken the truth so there was no reason to strike him. All he was asking for was a fair trial. Jesus' response showed the evilness of Annas' heart. He was the most powerful religious

leader who prided himself in obeying God's laws, but then he disobeyed God's laws to protect his financial and leadership position.

It is when people do something that displeases a church leader that the leader's heart is most clearly seen. Many times church leaders get angry at someone for doing something without their authority. They claim to be the spiritual leaders of the church, but then they tell lies or do things that destroy the reputation of others in order to protect their position. How easy it is to stop acting in justice and truth when our leadership is challenged.

Q. 25. a) Describe a situation where a church leader no longer sought what was right and just, but did something wrong in order to get his way. b) Why do you think it is hard to be fair and just when people do not agree with us as leaders? c) What can we learn about our motives for leadership when we are willing to do something wrong to get our way?

Q. 26. Read Mt. 26:57-75. a) Describe the trial that Jesus had before Caiaphas. What was the charge against Jesus? b) Describe the three denials of Peter.

2. Jesus' second trial before Caiaphas (Mt. 26:57-68, Mk. 14:53, 55-65; Lk. 22:54, 63-65, Jn. 18:24)

After being interviewed by Annas, Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, who was the official high priest. Caiaphas was a rich man and his compound was designed with buildings on the outside and an open square in the middle. There would have been a gate into the courtyard that was guarded. Caiaphas had gathered the "Sanhedrin," the highest court for the Jews, in his home. It was comprised of the leading priests like Caiaphas and Annas (Sadducees), respected religious teachers (usually Pharisees), and heads of important families (elders). There were 71 people on the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas was the chairman. It is doubtful that all of the Sanhedrin would have been able to come at this time, but enough gathered to hold a formal meeting. It was illegal in Jewish law to hold a trial at night or in someone's home. The trial was supposed to be held in the Temple where all witness that the trial was fair. Again, we see the Jewish religious and political leaders going against their own teaching of justice.

The Sanhedrin faced a problem with Jesus. They were not just trying to punish him, they wanted to kill him. So they had to somehow get enough evidence to convince the Jews that Jesus should be killed. In their minds, the death penalty would not be for rebellion against Rome, but for blasphemy against God. However, the Romans did not allow the Sanhedrin to execute a person; only the Romans had this authority. So the Jewish leaders had to also somehow convince the Romans that Jesus was a rebel and should be killed. They wanted Jesus to be hung on a cross rather than die by being stoned like Jews usually did or by getting his head cut off like the Jews and Romans practiced. This way Jesus would be viewed by all Jews as being "cursed" by God.

The Jews were very careful in how they carried out the trial, especially in matters that involved the death penalty. At least two witnesses whose testimony had to provide clear proof of guilt were called one by one to share what the accused person had done wrong. The witnesses were not supposed to be interviewed together. The witnesses were supposed to be warned that if they lied, they could be punished by death for they were involved in the "murder" of a person. (Deut. 19:16-21) Caiaphas invited witness to come testify against Jesus, but their testimony did not agree. They were all false witnesses and should have been punished. Again, we see that Caiaphas was not seeking the truth, but only a legal-looking way to punish Jesus with death. The judge was to start by looking for proof of innocence before starting with evidence of guilt. But this was not done for Jesus. In the end only two witnesses agreed in their testimony.

They testified that Jesus had spoken against the Temple saying he could destroy it and rebuild it in three days. Of course Jesus was referring to his coming death and resurrection, but these false witnesses twisted what Jesus said. To speak against the Temple was viewed as speaking against God whom the Jews thought lived in the Temple. So this was seen as blasphemy against God. Mark tells us that even in this accusation it was not similar enough to be used as a witness against Jesus. (Mk. 14:57-59) In frustration, Caiaphas turned to Jesus and asked him to respond to his accusers. This was illegal because the judge was never supposed to ask someone to incriminate himself.

We are told that Jesus kept silent. Why?

First, Jesus knew he would not gain anything by arguing. Once people are determined to do something, any response we make is useless. It is often better to stay silent so that there are no arguments and counter arguments which turn into bitter exchanges.

Second, Jesus knew he was going to the cross. His purpose was not to escape from death on the cross but to submit to God. God was using the injustices of mankind to fulfill his purposes. Like Jesus, we too can calmly accept the false accusations from others for we know that God is in control of those situations as well and will fulfill his will.

Q. 27. Review a time you were falsely accused. a) What was the accusation? b) How did you respond to that accusation? Do you think speaking up helped or created an argument? Explain your answer. c) Describe how knowing that God is in control encourages us even during times of false accusations so that we do not get bitter in the situation or against the person.

Finally, the high priest decided to force Jesus into a situation where he would incriminate himself. This of course was illegal. Caiaphas forced Jesus to respond to the question "*Are you the Christ, the Son of God.*" (Mt. 26:63) Previously Jesus had refused to answer this question when the Jews asked it. (Jn. 19:7) Why did he answer it now when to say "no" would have brought his release? Jesus knew that it was time to die so he openly shared who he was. Also, because the high priest used God's name, Jesus was required to answer. Not answering would also have given the impression that he was not the Messiah, which would have been a lie. To the Jews, the high priest was not asking Jesus if he was divine, but if he is the Messiah promised by God in the Old Testament. The phrase "son of God" was used of great kings like David and Solomon (2 Sam. 7:12-16, Ps. 2:7) and did not necessarily refer to being divine. Jesus' answer was clear and more than Caiaphas expected. He told Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin that he was the Messiah; but then he explained that he was not a political Messiah. Rather he was the fulfillment of the vision of Daniel 7:13-14 and the prophecy of Ps. 110:1. He was the "*son of man*" who would reign at God's right hand (as God's prime minister). He was the one who would come back with God's army to judge all humankind. The Sanhedrin might condemn him now, but Jesus warned them that they would face his judgment in the future. There is no evidence that claiming to be the Messiah was viewed as blasphemy; there were other Jews who did this. Rather, it was Jesus' insistence that he would sit at God's right hand with authority to judge that they thought was blasphemy.

For the high priest, this was a clear example of blasphemy for which the Old Testament commanded death. (Lev. 24:13-16) To blaspheme in Jewish culture was to claim to be God, speak evil against God or to claim something in relation to God that was not true. For Jesus to claim that he was the fulfillment of God's promises to reign through the Son of Man in the eternal kingdom was seen as claiming something

about his relationship to God which was not true. Jews expressed their great sorrow or anger through tearing their clothes, so immediately the high priest tore his clothes and stated that he found Jesus guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death. The rest of the Sanhedrin agreed with his verdict.

The anger of those in the Sanhedrin against Jesus spilled out and they began to spit on Jesus, a sign of great disrespect. And they began to hit him and ask him to reveal who had hit him. The Jews taught that one way to prove that a person was a false prophet was to blindfold him, hit him, and then the person was to say who hit him. The Sanhedrin leaders thought this proved Jesus was a false prophet. Instead of trying to determine the truth of whether or not Jesus was a real prophet, they cruelly abused Jesus. This too went against what the Jews taught was legal at a trial. No one was to be punished until there was a formal declaration of punishment.

How evil humankind is. The most loving person in the world was before them, but their evil caused them to physically abuse him without cause. Jesus is warning us that this can happen to us too. No matter how loving we are, evil people can turn against us and express their evil in terrible ways. If such a thing happened to Jesus, we should be prepared for the anger of people against us as well.

3. Peter denies Jesus three times (Mt. 26:58, 69-75, Mk. 14:53, 55-65; Lk. 22:54, 63-65; Jn. 18:15-18, 25-27)

We often accuse Peter of being afraid to stand up with Jesus. And yet, Peter was bolder than most of us would have been. Peter must have loved Jesus deeply because he followed Jesus into the very midst of his enemies in the courtyard of Caiaphas. John tells us that it was he (called "another disciple") who got Peter into the courtyard of Caiaphas (Jn. 18:15) which must have been carefully guarded like the house of any high official in Ethiopia. Scholars debate how John, a Galilean, could be known to Caiaphas, a high official. There are two theories. Some scholars think that John was actually from a family of priests. They think that the Salome, the mother of John, was the sister to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and both were related to Elizabeth who came from a priestly line. (Lk. 1:5) Therefore the priests in Jerusalem knew John and would let him and his friend Peter into the courtyard. Other scholars think that John was able to get into the courtyard because he was from the family of a well-known merchant. John's father owned a fishing industry and often such people would salt their fish so as to not spoil and take the fish to Jerusalem to sell. Through this trade John got to know Caiaphas' servants who helped him get Peter into the courtyard.

The first person Peter met was a servant girl who was probably guarding the gate checking who was coming in. (Jn. 18:16) As she allowed Peter to enter, this servant girl asked Peter "*You are not one of Jesus' followers, are you?*" In the Greek, the question is phrased in a way expecting a "no" answer. Peter told the girl a lie saying "I don't know him." To us this might seem like a small lie. Often in the face of persecution we are tempted to claim not to be a follower of Jesus. "As long as we maintain our faith in Jesus in our hearts, what wrong is it to lie?" we think. But such language makes us like Peter and is "denying" Jesus.

Peter then moved into the middle of the courtyard where a fire was burning to keep people warm. Wanting to be part of the crowd, Peter started talking with those around him. Another girl listening to him heard his Galilean accent and asked "*You weren't with the Nazarene were you?*" Again, she expected a "no" answer. (Like there are different accents for Amharic depending upon if you are from Shewa, Menz, or Gondar, there were different accents among the Jews.) With people surrounding him who had no doubt been involved in capturing Jesus, Peter became more afraid. His response was stronger for he used God's name to swear that he was not a follower of Jesus.

Wanting to get away from the crowd, Peter moved out to the outside wall. This time another person described as one of the servants of the high priest said "*You must surely be a follower of Jesus*" expecting an affirmative answer. (Jn. 18:26) Peter used a strong oath to promise that he did not even know "*the man*." The use of "*the man*" was often a derogatory way of referring to someone. Just then two things happened. First, the rooster crowed. Jesus' prophecy of the previous night was fulfilled. Second, we are told that Jesus turned and looked at Peter. (Lk. 22:61) This would indicate that Jesus was on a platform probably awaiting the formal trial that would take place at dawn and could look down into the courtyard where Peter was.

Peter deeply loved Jesus, but the reality is in our flesh, loving Jesus is not enough. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to help us stay faithful to Jesus in the midst of persecution. Peter failed. After the day of Pentecost one of the great changes the Holy Spirit brought to Peter and the rest of the disciples is that in the midst of persecution, they openly declared their allegiance to Jesus. (Acts 4) Peter would later die on the cross because he refused to renounce his faith in Jesus. So one of the evidences of the Holy Spirit is the ability to stay firm in one's faith in Jesus. To renounce faith and hide Jesus in our hearts is not a way that Jesus approves of.

Each of the gospel writers included this story of Peter's failure for another important reason. During the times when they were writing Christians were facing persecution and there were cases of people denying Jesus out of fear, just like Peter had done. What were the church leaders to do with them? Were they to be expelled from the church and never allowed to minister again? This story teaches that all of us can deny Jesus. We can deny him openly like renouncing our faith when threatened with death. Or we can deny him by being afraid to speak out at work and share that we are followers of Jesus. Or we can deny Jesus by refusing to obey Jesus' commands. However, even when we deny Jesus, God graciously accepts us back. And like Peter, he can even allow us to become leaders in a church. Church leaders must be very careful not to have the attitude that since someone has failed us, we can never trust them again. Who knows how many "Peters" are being refused effective ministry! Let us verify that they have truly repented and returned. Let us allow them time to demonstrate that they are "without reproach." (1 Tim. 3:2) But then let us trust the Holy Spirit to use them once again to effectively serve God.

Q. 28. Read Mt. 27:3-10 & Acts 1:18-19. a) What response did Judas have to the trial of Jesus? b) Contrast the responses of Judas and Peter to denying Jesus.

4. Judas tries to undo betraying Jesus and commits suicide (Mt. 27:3-10 & Acts 1:18-19)

We do not know where Judas was when Jesus was being tried but maybe he was also watching the trial of Jesus. Perhaps realizing that his attempt to force Jesus to declare himself as the Messiah and start the revolution against Rome had failed, Judas was struck with the fact that he had handed an innocent man over to be killed. No doubt Judas also loved Jesus and felt guilty about his role in Jesus' death.

Judas went to the Temple where he met with some of the religious leaders. "*I have betrayed an innocent man*" he told them. Notice the hypocrisy of these leaders. They claimed to be the spiritual guides of the Jews and knew God's Word. And they were the ones God had entrusted with helping people be forgiven of their sins. And yet in order to further their plans, they were willing to kill an innocent man. And they had no compassion for Judas who was obviously needing to get right with God. "This is your problem, not ours" they said refusing to get involved. How often church leaders become like this. They strongly accuse people of not obeying them or doing something they consider wrong. But they do little to help

people get right with God. "It is your problem" they callously say. But godly church leaders always seek to help those who struggle with sin to be reconciled with God.

In anger Judas threw the money he had received for betraying Jesus down on the floor in the treasury at the Temple. Overcome with a feeling of guilt and hopelessness, Judas went out and hung himself. When we compare the stories of what happened to Judas in Matthew and Acts we see some major differences in how Judas' death is described. We do not have enough information about what happened. Perhaps Judas walked outside of the city of Jerusalem to a point overlooking a valley. Seeing a tree, he hung himself on the tree that was on the edge of the hill. The Jews believed that for anyone to touch a corpse would cause them to be unclean for a week. (Num. 19:11-12) Because the week-long Passover celebration had begun, probably no one wanted to take Judas' body down from the tree since they did not know him and did not want to become ritually unclean. By the end of the week, in the hot sun, the body had rotted. The rope broke and when his body fell into the valley below, it burst open. What a terrible end for one of the disciples of Jesus! Judas had been with Jesus for more than three years. He had watched Jesus do all of the miracles and listened to his teachings. Judas had gone out as an evangelist telling people that the Messiah was coming. He might have done miracles in Jesus' name. But he wandered away from Jesus, allowed sin to grow in his life, and his life ended terribly.

The religious leaders did not know what to do with the money Judas had thrown on the floor. They did not want to put it into the Temple treasury since it was "unclean" because it was used to bring about the killing of a person. To do so would ritually corrupt the whole Temple. So they took the money and, in what they thought was an act of mercy, bought a burial plot for foreigners like Judas who did not have their own burial plot. Since the money actually belonged to Judas it was as if he was buying the field. Because potters used the clay dirt in this area to make their pots, it was called the Potter's Field. The name was changed to Field of Blood because Judas died there. Matthew understood that even this fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Combining two prophecies, Zech. 11:12-13 and Jer. 19:1-3, 32:6-9, he shows how God knew the details of what would happen to Judas.

Notice again the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. On the one hand, they were concerned with ritual purity over 30 pieces of silver and how it would cause them to become ritually unclean. But on the other hand they were actively working to kill Jesus whom they knew was innocent. This shows one of the most dangerous tendencies church leaders can face. It is easy to get angry at people breaking some of the "sins" which the leaders think is important. They get angry when someone sells chatt, drinks beer, or goes to the market on Sunday. But they often overlook sins of pride between the educated and the uneducated or animosity between Christians from different tribes. Or they overlook their sin of tearing down another church leader or church worker by spreading lies because that person does not do what they want. It is so easy for us to get caught up protecting the minor rules of the church and overlook the more important matters of love, justice, mercy, and forgiveness. We need to be very careful that we don't become like these Jewish religious leaders.

Peter's and Judas' response to betrayal were very different. Both showed remorse, but only Peter truly repented. Peter not only shed tears, but he maintained his love for Jesus in spite of everything. He was the one who ran to the tomb to see if Jesus had risen. He continued to follow Jesus after the resurrection. Judas, however, cried but then gave up hope and killed himself. So how do we know if someone has a Judas type of repentance or a Peter type of repentance? It is not the tears they cry. Rather it is what the person does afterwards that reveals whether their repentance is genuine. Judas never returned to

following Jesus. Rather he went out and hung himself. Peter, however, submitted his life to following and obeying and serving Jesus.

Q. 29. a) List lessons on repentance that we learn from the story of Peter and Judas. b) Describe ways church leaders can become like the religious leaders, angry over a small rule but tolerant with more serious sins.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. From Jesus' teaching in John 14-16, a) what are the major truths we can learn about the ministry of the Holy Spirit? b) Compare Jesus' emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit to what many Christians in your church believe to be the major ministry of the Holy Spirit. How are they similar? How are they different? c) What would change in the teaching and ministry of the church if we focused more on what Jesus taught to be the major ministry of the Holy Spirit?

2. In Jn 14-16, Jesus reminded the disciples of their eternal home. a) In what way does an awareness of eternity help a Christian live in a godly way now? b) Compare Jesus' emphasis upon persecution now and heaven later to what is often preached in churches. What is similar or different? c) Why do you think Jesus' emphasis is different from our emphasis?

3. In Jn. 17, Jesus prayed for unity among believers. a) Why do you think there is so little unity among Christians? b) Review the things the book taught about true unity. Which do you believe; which do you not believe? Why? c) Do you think there can be unity among denominations where one church does not respect or honor the doctrinal position of the other church? Explain your answer. d) What are things you can do to increase unity in your church and among denominations?

4. Read 1 Pet. 2:18-25, 4:1 which teaches that Jesus' suffering was a model for us to follow. a) What does Peter say we can learn about suffering from Jesus? b) List the ways Jesus suffered immediately before and during his crucifixion. c) What things can we learn from Jesus about how to react when we are persecuted?

LESSON TWENTY-FOUR

FIRST DAY

Sintayu worked in a government office. He was a very conscientious worker, coming on time, graciously seeking to help people who came into his office with their business. Although others in his office took bribes, he refused to participate in this practice. This angered his fellow workers, and one day they falsely accused him of stealing money. He was taken to the court and even though there was no evidence against him, because his fellow workers bribed the judge, he was convicted of being guilty and sentenced to three years in prison. "Isn't God a God of justice? Why did he let this happen to me when I was seeking to be a positive witness in the office?" he wondered. One day as he was reading the story of the crucifixion of Jesus he realized that Jesus had also experienced being unjustly tried and declared guilty. Knowing that his Master suffered in the same way helped Sintayu to graciously accept his experience. "It is a privilege for me to join Jesus in suffering for rightness" he thought.

Q. 1. List examples of how believers were unjustly punished for something they did not do simply because they are believers. b) Read Rom. 8:17, Phil. 3:10, Col. 1:24. What do you think these verses mean? How does this apply to situations like Sintayu faced?

Q. 2. Read Lk. 22:66-23:25 & Jn. 18:28-40. a) How many times do these passages state that Jesus was innocent? b) List the different things that Pilate tried to do so that he would not have to crucify Jesus.

FRIDAY

1. The Sanhedrin formally declares that Jesus should die because he blasphemed (Lk. 22:66-71, Mt. 26:63-66, Mk. 14:61-63)

The Jews prided themselves in impartially judging a matter. They had many rules guiding the members of the Jewish High Court, the Sanhedrin, to make sure that all decisions were just. But as we saw last week, in their determination to kill Jesus, the Sanhedrin went against their regulations for a fair trial. One scholar has listed the following things which the Jews did that went against their regulations for a fair trial:

a. Even before Jesus was put on trial, the leaders had already determined that Jesus must die. (Jn. 11:50, Mk. 14:1) They were not willing to impartially look at the evidence and make a judgment.

b. They used false witnesses. The Jewish leaders were supposed to call in the witnesses one by one and interview them. If their testimony did not agree, the false witnesses were to be severely punished. To give false witness leading to punishment and death was seen as a way of influencing the murder of someone. There is no evidence that the Jewish leaders examined the witnesses or punished those whose witness did not agree.

c. The Jewish leaders did not assign someone to act as an advisor to Jesus. Especially in cases when it was expected that someone be punished with death, if the individual did not have the ability to hire a lawyer to represent himself, the Sanhedrin were supposed to assign someone who specialized in such matters to help the individual.

d. Most of the trial was conducted at night. This went against Jewish practices. To try someone at night was a sign that the trial was not fair or impartial, but was being done in secret so that people would not know what was happening. Perhaps the Jews were afraid that people who supported Jesus would come to argue on his behalf if they held the trial during the day time.

e. The high priest forced Jesus to incriminate himself by putting him under oath. The Jews believed no one should be forced to speak something that would incriminate himself. The evidence had to come from other witnesses.

f. According to regulations, a formal trial had to be held in the Sanhedrin building, not in someone's home. But it is clear from the Gospels that the Sanhedrin met in the house of Caiaphas.

All throughout the trial of Jesus, justice was perverted. All those in the New Testament times who read the four Gospels would have understood that Jesus was not a criminal and he was not fairly tried.

During the night trial, the Sanhedrin formally declared Jesus guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death. Their decision to punish Jesus left the Sanhedrin with two problems. First, although the Jewish leaders were allowed to handle the punishment of minor criminals, only the Romans were allowed to deal with cases of capital punishment. So, although the Jews wanted to kill Jesus, they were legally not allowed to. Therefore they had to find a way to convince the Roman governor, Pilate, to agree to their decision to punish Jesus with death.

The second problem they faced was that they wanted Jesus crucified, not killed in any other way. The Old Testament was very clear in how to kill those who were found guilty of blasphemy. They were to be taken outside the city and killed by stoning them. (e.g. Stephen in Acts 7:57-58) Otherwise the Jews preferred to cut off the head of a person (e.g. like James- Acts 12:2) or by strangling them. But these leaders wanted Jesus crucified. Why? Most likely it was because they wanted to prove to all Jews that Jesus, rather than being the Messiah and Savior, was cursed by God. In the Old Testament God declared that anyone who was hung on a tree was cursed by God. (Deut. 21:23, Gal. 3:13) They wanted to be able to tell the crowds who had followed Jesus that rather than being anointed by God, Jesus was cursed.

2. Jesus' first trial before Pilate (Mt. 27:11-14, Mk. 15:2-5, Lk. 23:1-5, Jn. 18:28-38)

The Roman headquarters in Palestine was located in Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, over 100 kilometers from Jerusalem. There were only a few soldiers stationed in Jerusalem at the Antonia Tower. But knowing that the Jews often started trouble during their religious holidays, the Roman governor would travel to Jerusalem with more soldiers for every major feast. Usually he would stay in a palace built by Herod the Great in the western part of the city of Jerusalem. Since the Passover was one of the major feasts, Governor Pilate was in town.

World history does not give us much information about Pilate. Palestine was under the direct management of the Roman Caesar, Tiberius and he would appoint governors who were directly responsible to him. In order for Pilate to be appointed as governor, Pilate must have been a famous individual in Rome, trusted by the Roman Emperor for his ability to manage Palestine. Since Palestine was known as a troublesome province, the emperor would have sent one of his more able governors to oversee the province. When Pilate got to Palestine, however, things did not go well for him. He was not sensitive to the Jewish religious beliefs, and he soon clashed with the Jews in several ways.

First, when Pilate traveled from Caesarea to Jerusalem, he had his soldiers carry a staff with the emblem of the Emperor on it stating that he was "god." Other governors knew that the Jews hated this, so they didn't do it. But Pilate did not want to submit to Jewish sentiment, thinking he was the Roman leader and he could do what he wanted. When the Jews protested, he warned them to leave or they would be killed. All of the Jews bared their necks claiming they were ready to die for the purity of their country and beliefs. Pilate was forced to back down, which no doubt angered him.

Second, the city of Jerusalem had little water. Pilate wanted to resolve this problem, so he designed a system to bring water into Jerusalem from a long distance away. All of the Jews were happy with the plan, but when Pilate took money to pay for the project from funds which people had given as a free-will offering in the Temple, the Jews were offended. To them the money in the Temple was to be used only for religious purposes, like remodeling the Temple. When they approached Pilate asking him not to take the money, Pilate refused. He sent soldiers dressed like common people to mingle with the people, and then they took their swords and killed many Jews.

Third, Pilate made special ornamental shields which he placed in Jerusalem. These shields were to honor the emperor, stating that he was god. This offended the Jews for two reasons. First, the Jews believed that any picture went against the second commandment to not have any graven images (Ex. 20:4). Second, the Romans believed that the emperor was a god; to the Jews this was bringing a "god" into the city to encourage false worship. But the Jews would not allow another "god" in Jerusalem, so they asked Pilate to take them away. Even friends of Pilate counseled him to remove them or he would have a riot. Pilate refused, so the Jews sent a delegation to Rome to complain to the Emperor. The Emperor ordered Pilate to take the shields out of Jerusalem, which humiliated Pilate.

So when the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate, there was already a lot of hatred on both sides. Most likely the religious leaders thought that they could influence Pilate so that he would accept their verdict that Jesus was guilty of treason against Rome without asking many questions. But Pilate hated these leaders and did not trust them.

It was common for Romans to start their work at 6 AM. So as soon as it was light, the Jewish religious leaders took Jesus to where Pilate was staying, most likely in Herod's palace. The religious leaders were not willing to go into the outer court of the palace. In the Old Testament, God told the Jews that those who touched dead bodies were ceremonially unclean for one week (Num. 19:11). But the Jews applied this law to visiting Gentiles. They believed that the Gentiles were so evil that they aborted babies and buried them in their yard. To enter a Gentile home caused them to indirectly touch Gentiles who had touched dead bodies, so they would become ceremonially unclean and not be able to worship God for seven days. If they entered the palace where Pilate was staying, they would have become ceremonially unclean and not able to partake of the Passover celebration.

Again we see the amazing fact that in their desire to be "religious" they did all they could to maintain their ritual purity. But they did not care that they were handing over an innocent person to die! This same attitude can happen to church leaders today. They can get very upset when a young person does not dress in the right way. But they see nothing wrong with lying to the people in order to destroy the reputation of someone they do not like or in doing other things which are clearly not what God's desires. One of the ways we can know that we have turned our beliefs into a "religion" is by determining if we are more concerned with the regulations of the church than mercy, justice, or love.

Q. 3. Examine your church situation. a) Illustrate ways that people can become more concerned about external regulations such as not drinking beer than they are about mercy, love, or justice. b) Why do you think God says that the evidence of a true relationship with him is demonstrated in integrity, honesty, love, and justice more than in keeping rules? Explain how these things reveal the condition of our hearts more than keeping certain laws.

When the Jewish leaders arrived, Pilate came out of his palace to meet them. Knowing that Pilate would have no sympathy for their accusations against Jesus for blasphemy, the Jewish leaders changed their accusation against Jesus. When Pilate asked them what their indictment they had against Jesus, the leaders answered vaguely that it was because Jesus was worthy of death that they had brought him to Pilate. No doubt they were hoping that Pilate would accept their verdict and agree to Jesus' death without further discussion. But seeing their unclear response, Pilate sarcastically told them to deal with the matter themselves. The Jews were then forced to admit that they did not have the power to kill Jesus.

The Jews then told Pilate that Jesus was guilty of treason against the Roman government since he claimed to be a king. The Romans were very careful to not allow anyone to claim to be a king who did not receive the title from them. So this was a very serious charge. In the Roman judicial system, Pilate had the total power to examine someone and declare him innocent or guilty. There was no other court of appeal unless the matter was serious enough to take to Rome. Pilate was not willing to simply do what the Jewish leaders wanted. Perhaps he had heard about Jesus and his popularity with the people and knew that the Jewish leaders were not interested in justice, but that they were jealous of Jesus.

Hearing that Jesus claimed to be the king of the Jews, Pilate took Jesus back into the palace to interview him. Pilate openly asked Jesus "*Are you the king of the Jews?*" Pilate was trying to get Jesus to answer "yes" or "no." But Jesus' answer surprised him. Jesus did not act like a criminal afraid of the judge who had the power to sentence him to death. Jesus asked Pilate whether he believed personally that Jesus was claiming to be the king or just because others were saying it. Jesus was not trying to escape being sentenced with death; he knew death to be the Father's will. Rather, concerned about Pilate's soul, Jesus wanted to use this opportunity to get Pilate to think deeply about things. Pilate angrily said "I am not a Jew, so I am not really interested in whether or not you are the king of the Jews." Pilate again asked Jesus what were the charges that the Jews had against him. To Pilate, the words "king of the Jews" had political connotations because he knew Jews wanted a king to help them overthrow Rome's rule. Jesus wanted to clarify for Pilate and for all political rulers after Pilate that he was not interested in being a political ruler over the Jews or any other nation. Jesus was not seeking to overthrow the Roman government. Rather, he had another type of kingdom, a spiritual kingdom, over which he was the king. As proof that he was not interested in political leadership, Jesus said that not once had he tried to gather an army to fight Rome. Clearly Jesus was not the type of king who was a threat to Rome. Jesus explained that the kingdom that he sought to lead was not one based upon political power, but upon "*truth*." As Pilate talked with Jesus, he realized that Jesus was not a political threat to Rome. He was more like a philosopher or teacher than a king, and it was no crime to Rome to have people teach their own views. But Pilate's heart was no doubt hardened by being in a political position where right and wrong was not of primary importance, only what is best for Rome. For him truth no longer mattered.

Unfortunately, there are many church leaders who find themselves in a similar position. They no longer are concerned with whether or not something is "right" or "wrong" or "true." What matters is what is expedient and what fulfills their desires. So if a lie will get what they want, they lie to the government or

to their members. If paying a bribe gets them a piece of property to build a church, they bribe the official. Or if they think that a young person out of a theological school is a threat to their position since he is popular, they are willing to defame the person's reputation to maintain their influence in the church. Like Pilate, their actions say that truth no longer matters.

Q. 4. a) List some examples who Christians, especially church leaders, can forget "truth" in their desire to accomplish something they want. b) List some examples of Christians who have stood for truth, even though it made things difficult for themselves. c) Why do you think it is hard to find Christians who make honesty and integrity so important in their lives that they refuse to compromise in what is wrong?

3. Jesus is sent to Herod Antipas for another trial (Lk. 23:5-12)

It was clear to Pilate that Jesus was innocent of treason and was not a threat to the Roman government. So Pilate told the Jews that he found Jesus to be innocent of the charges the leaders had brought against him. The matter should have ended there, but the Jewish leaders kept insisting that Jesus was a known trouble maker. Pilate did not have the moral courage to stand firm on his decision.

Herod Antipas was probably in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Hearing that Jesus was from Galilee and that most of his teaching took place there, Pilate saw a way out of his dilemma. You will remember that Galilee was not under the direct control of Pilate, but under the governorship of Herod Antipas. Not wanting to anger the Jewish officials, Pilate thought he could turn the matter over to Herod for him to judge since Jesus was one of his citizens.

Jesus was taken to Herod who had killed John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin. Although Jesus had done most of his ministry in Galilee, Herod and Jesus had never met. But Herod had heard about Jesus' teachings and his miracles and he wanted to meet Jesus and see him perform a miracle. But Jesus refused to even answer Herod's questions. Nor did he answer the accusations of the Jewish leaders. Jesus knew that there was a time to answer the accusations of people, but often when peoples' minds are already made up, it does little good to argue. So he kept quiet. Dressing Jesus up in a royal (purple) colored robe, Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. But Herod did not want to make a decision that would turn Galileans against him, so he sent Jesus back to Pilate. This indicated to Pilate that Herod as well did not view Jesus as a dangerous rebel in need of punishment. For the second time, Jesus was declared innocent of the charges of treason. Amazingly, the unjust trial of Jesus healed the enmity that had developed between Herod and Pilate.

4. Pilate seeks to release Jesus by offering the crowds the choice between releasing Jesus or Barabbas from prison (Lk. 23:18-21, Jn. 18:39-40)

It was clear to Pilate that the Jewish leaders were the ones who were seeking the death of Jesus. Pilate did not want to directly go against them, but he also did not want to kill Jesus. So he decided to try another way to gain Jesus' release without displeasing the Jews. Seeking to gain the favor of the Jews, the Romans had a practice of releasing a prisoner of the peoples' choice on the day of Passover. The Romans had already planned a crucifixion for a group of rebels they had captured. These rebels had no doubt been resisting Roman rule. Hiding in the desert they attacked the Roman soldiers and stole from rich people and killed people who were sympathetic to Rome. The leader of this group was a man called Barabbas. We know little else about Barabbas. His name means "son of father" and some scholars think he was given this name because he had a famous father. Knowing that Jesus had been popular with the crowds, Pilate asked the crowds whom he should release; Barabbas or Jesus of Nazareth.

The religious leaders must have anticipated what Pilate was going to do, so they had gathered people around them who were supportive of their lies. To the amazement of Pilate, the crowd shouted for Barabbas to be released. When he asked the crowd what to do with Jesus of Nazareth, in one voice, no doubt guided by the religious leaders, they shouted that Jesus be crucified on the cross prepared for Barabbas. As John 1:11 states, Jesus came unto his own and his own people rejected him.

5. Pilate seeks to change the crowd's opinion by flogging Jesus (Jn. 19:1-11)

Pilate was still not willing to declare Jesus guilty and crucify him. But he did not want to displease the Jews since he had previously been humiliated in the eyes of the Roman Emperor for resisting the Jews. And he knew that the Roman government would hold him responsible if he displeased the Jews and they rioted against him and Rome. So he tried another attempt to gain the release of Jesus. He thought that if he could whip Jesus so severely that people in the crowd would see his beaten body, they would have pity on Jesus and believing Jesus to be punished enough, agree to Jesus' release. Although it was illegal to whip a person who was clearly not guilty, Pilate thought it was better for Jesus to be whipped than it was to kill Jesus on the cross.

The Romans viewed whipping a person as one of the most degrading ways of punishment. Romans and soldiers would be beaten by sticks, but they were not whipped. The Romans had three types of whipping for slaves or people from areas that they controlled. First there was a minor whipping given to people like thieves so that the person would learn not to steal again. Second, there was a major beating, similar to the Jewish thirty-nine lashes, which caused great pain, but did not cause permanent damage. Third, there was a very severe beating usually given to those who were about to be crucified. This special whip had a wooden handle to which were attached leather thongs. On the leather thongs were tied pieces of bone, glass, iron, or stones. As the person was whipped, the flesh was torn off his back. His bones and even his internal organs were often visible. Many people went insane or even died when whipped this way. Scholars debate which type of whipping Jesus received, but most likely it was the most severe whipping usually done just before crucifixion. Pilate showed little mercy for Jesus, but he did not actually want to cause his death.

After the soldiers whipped Jesus, with his back lacerated by the whip, the soldiers decided to take out their anger against the Jews whom they hated, on Jesus. The religious leaders had said that he had claimed to be a king, so they decided to mock Jesus for being a king. On the ground around them were probably branches from a certain palm tree known for its long thorns which was used for fuel for the fire. The normal Roman crown had long golden spikes on it. Copying that, the soldiers took these long thorns and wove a mock crown which they put on Jesus' head. Looking around they perhaps saw a purple looking cloth or perhaps the purple robe which Herod had used, and put it on Jesus. Romans would greet their emperor with shouts of "Hail Caesar." So these soldiers mocked Jesus by saying "Hail, King of the Jews." Then they beat Jesus' face with their fists, taking out their hatred upon the one who was soon to die in love for their sins. How evil the heart of man is; often we take out our anger on those who are innocent! When hurt, husbands often take out their anger on their wives and children who have done nothing to them. Or church leaders take out their anger upon hired ministers who have sought to serve them.

Pilate returned to the crowd standing outside the palace. Pilate again declared that he had examined Jesus and found him to be innocent of any crime. He then brought Jesus out to the crowd for them to see Jesus. Pointing to the beaten, bloody, battered person who did not look at all like a human king, Pilate shouted "*Here is the man.*" Most likely Pilate called Jesus "*the man*" in a voice of despise. Clearly Jesus did

not look anything like a king or a dangerous person. "Surely the crowd would have compassion on such a pitiful sight" he thought.

The apostle John enjoyed plays on words. To the Greeks, the phrase "the man" had become an expression of the ideal man, filled with noble character. Without knowing it, Pilate was honoring Jesus as being the ideal man, the only perfect man since the fall of Adam into sin. He is the model of what all God-honoring people should be like as he humbly submitted to the will of God without argument or bitterness. (1 Pet. 2:19-23)

Much to Pilate's surprise, the crowd and Jewish leaders began shouting that Jesus should be crucified. Once again Pilate declared he was innocent. It was then that the religious leaders revealed what their true charge against Jesus was. They said that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy because he claimed to be God's Son. To the Jews, this expression meant that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, taking God's place over the Jewish people. To the Christians who were reading John's Gospel many years later, it was clear to them that Jesus was the true Son of God, holding all of the divine characteristics which God the Father enjoyed. But to Pilate who had grown up in a society which worshipped many gods, some of whom it was believed had come down to live among men, this meant Jesus was one of the many "gods" to be worshipped.

In fear Pilate took Jesus back into the palace to examine him more carefully. "*Where do you come from?*" he asked. He wanted Jesus to tell him whether or not he was one of the gods who had come to live among men. Amazingly Jesus refused to answer him. This angered Pilate. Seeking to force Jesus to answer him, he began to threaten him. "*I have the power to kill you*" he said. But Jesus did not accept such reasoning. From a human perspective, it might seem like Pilate had the power to release Jesus or hand him over to be crucified. But Jesus knew that all things were under the control of his Father in heaven. It was God the Father who had determined that Jesus should be the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world." (Rev. 13:8) And everything that was happening to Jesus that day had been predetermined by God.

This is an important truth for followers of Jesus to remember. In times of persecution we can become afraid that people will do something to us that will harm us. We know people who are being persecuted for their faith, or who die before they are old, or who are sick with an incurable disease and we feel saddened. But Jesus is encouraging us to remember that he is controlling all things. If we are accused unjustly like Sintaui, God still knows about it and has permitted it. So like Jesus, we can face these difficult situations calmly, knowing that our heavenly Father is controlling them according to his purpose.

If God is in control of a situation, does that mean those who do what is wrong are not to be held responsible for their actions? No. Although God was controlling Jesus' situation, Pilate and the Jews were still responsible. In every unjust situation there are people who bear more or less responsibility. Pilate was wrong in allowing Jesus to be crucified when he knew that Jesus was innocent. But Jesus told Pilate that there were others who bore more responsibility than he did. To whom was Jesus referring? Perhaps he was talking about the Jewish nation who had rejected his kingship over their lives and were working to have him killed. Jesus was more likely referring to the religious leaders who knew God's Word and knew that everything they were doing was against God's desires. In spite of knowing the truth, they choose to go against what was right. All people will be held responsible for their decisions and actions. But God will hold church leaders or theologically trained people who knowingly choose to do something that God does

not approve of more responsible and punish more severely than others who have little knowledge. (Lk. 12:47-48)

6. Pilate makes more attempts to release Jesus (Jn. 19:12)

Pilate clearly understood that Jesus was innocent of any charge of treason against Rome. So he again tried to convince the Jews that Jesus was innocent and should be released. But the Jewish leaders warned Pilate that if he did not pronounce Jesus guilty of treason against Rome, he would not be a "*friend of Caesar*." The phrase "friend of Caesar" was a formal title given to those who were closest to the Roman emperor, like the highest officials in the government. Since the governance of Palestine was directly under the authority of the Roman emperor, Pilate was specifically chosen by the Caesar to be the governor and would have been respected and trusted by Caesar. But that relationship was tarnished since earlier the Jews had accused Pilate of mismanagement and the Roman Emperor had ordered Pilate to do what the Jewish leaders wanted. The Roman Emperor would especially be concerned that Pilate had let someone claiming to be a king go free. So the Jewish leaders were warning Pilate that if he did not punish Jesus for treason and crucify him, they would report him to Rome, and most likely Pilate would be removed from rulership over Palestine and lose his political position in the government. Afraid that he would lose his powerful position, Pilate agreed to Jesus' crucifixion.

7. Pilate formally charges Jesus of treason against the Roman government for claiming to be a king (Jn. 19:13-16)

It was Roman custom for the judge to sit on a special seat that was raised up on a platform and pronounce his decision. Pilate sat upon the seat of judgment to prepare to pronounce Jesus guilty. As he sat down, a message came from his wife warning him not to pronounce Jesus guilty. She had had a dream indicating that Jesus was innocent. (Mt. 27:19) By now it was close to nine AM. (Mk. 15:25)

(Note: Whereas John says that it was noon when Jesus was led away to be crucified, Mark 15:25 says that Jesus was crucified at 9 AM. There is no clear solution over this difference. Some scholars believed some of the Gospel writers used the Roman way of telling time and others used the Jewish way. The Jews believed the day started at 6 AM and so 6 would refer to 12 noon. The Romans believed the day started at midnight, so for them 6 would be 6 AM. John was using the Jewish way of telling time. Other scholars believe Mark's time of 9 AM was more likely. They think John used 12 noon for theological reasons, because that when sacrifice lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple and better indicated that Jesus was the Lamb of God being sacrificed for the sins of the world. We have chosen to use Mark's timing.)

Pilate, probably in a mocking voice filled with anger at having to give in to the desires of the Jewish leaders, said "*Here is your king*." Jesus would have been dressed in rags, beaten and bloody. He did not look like a king to anyone, so Pilate was no doubt making fun of the Jews saying they could only afford such a wretched king. In one voice the Jewish leaders and the mob which they had organized cried out in a great voice "*Crucify him*." What the Jews said next must have shocked Pilate. From the beginning of Jewish history, the Jews had a belief that God alone was their king. In fact, when the Jews asked Samuel for a king, it was viewed by God as a step of rejecting him as the rightful king over the Jews. (1 Sam. 8:4-6) During the days of Jesus, the Jews were resisting the leadership of Rome because they believed that only God, through his Messiah, had the right to rule over them. They even had a prayer to God saying "May you be our Ruler, you alone." So for them to openly say "We have no king but Caesar" was a statement that went against everything the Jews believed. This statement was another formal rejection of Jesus as being the

rightful Messiah over the Jews. This terrible decision would bring God's punishment of the Jewish nation in forty years time. (70 AD)

Pilate had a basin of water brought to him, and in front of everyone he washed his hands as an expression that he was washing away the guilt of killing an innocent man. He told the Jews that the punishment for this sin would be upon them and their children, to which they agreed. Pilate then stated that Jesus should be crucified because he claimed to be the king of the Jews.

Why were the Jewish leaders so determined that Jesus be crucified on a cross, the Roman way to execute only the worst criminals? Most likely the religious leaders wanted to demonstrate to all of the Jews who were following Jesus that he was not the favored messianic son of God, but cursed by God. To die by the sword might classify Jesus as a martyr. But to die by being crucified was a sign of God's judgment upon the person. The Jewish leaders wanted to point to Jesus and say "You see. He was not honored by God even though he did miracles. Rather he was cursed by God. If God wanted to honor Jesus he would not have allowed him to die on the cross. So it is foolish to believe that he is God's Messiah." Paul later agreed that Jesus became a "curse" on the cross. (Gal. 3:13) But his curse was in the plan of God. As sinners, all of us are "cursed" by God and God has said that the one who sins will die. (Gen. 2:17, Ezek. 18:20) But in an amazing display of mercy, God took the curse that was ours and put it on Jesus. All of our sins were put on Jesus on the cross. He became a "curse" in God's eyes. But by bearing our curse, we are now freed to become children of God.

Every part of the trial of Jesus before the Jews and Pilate reinforced the fact that Jesus was innocent, that his death on the cross was because justice was being perverted. God the Father allowed his Son to face great injustice and die on the cross. Throughout history, similar injustices would be done to the followers of Jesus. During the derge, innocent men and women were sent to prison where some of them died. "Where is God the Father when this happens?" we wonder. The story of Jesus teaches us that God is still on the throne in heaven controlling things. Just as the death of Jesus caused salvation to be available for all mankind, in the same way God uses the injustices against his people for a greater purpose. The injustices of the derge regime was used by God to spread the church in a much greater way than ever before in Ethiopian history. So what should we do when faced with such injustices? Are we supposed to give up hope, renounce our faith, and join the enemies of God's children? Many have made that choice throughout history. Or are we to be like Jesus and silently accept the injustices, entrusting our lives and souls to God, knowing that there is a resurrection coming when all things are made right? This is the choice God wants his followers to make.

Q. 5. a) Describe some situations when you or other Christians have faced injustice. b) List ways you have seen God eventually right the wrongs of situations in a way which furthered his kingdom. c) List examples of what happened to those who refused to accept the injustices and gave up their faith.

SECOND DAY

Q. 6. Read Lk. 23:26-56 and John 19:17-42. a) What did the sign say which bore the official accusation against Jesus? b) List the major events that took place on the way to the cross. c) List the major events that took place while Jesus hung on the cross. d) Describe the different reactions people when Jesus was crucified. e) What did Jesus do with his mother? f) List each of the sayings of Jesus in this section and

explain what they reveal about Jesus. g) What two men buried Jesus? What was unusual about these two burying Jesus when the other disciples fled?

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS (Mt. 27:33-44, Mk. 15:22-32, Lk. 23:26-56, Jn. 19:17-42)

1. Jesus dies on the cross

Ethiopia is known for its unusual crosses. There is the Lalibella cross, the Axum cross, and the Gondar cross. The Roman Catholic believers have their own design for a cross and the Protestants have a different design. But all are similar in that the cross has become a piece of jewelry to be worn by people who often do not practice their beliefs. Through the showing of the Jesus film and the frequent reading of the Gospels, the story of Jesus dying on the cross has lost most of its impact to cause sorrow and horror in our hearts.

During the days of Jesus, crucifixion on the cross was considered to be the most horrible deaths mankind had ever designed. Crucifixion was started by the Persians, but it became a popular form of public execution under the Romans. The word "cross" was so evil to the Romans that some would not say it out loud. No Roman citizen was allowed to be crucified because that was beneath their dignity. Only slaves and non-Roman rebels were sentenced to be crucified. The very idea of a Savior dying on the cross would have seemed impossible to the Romans.

Death on a cross was extremely painful. Those on the cross would often hang for two or three days in the hot sun as they slowly died of heat, thirst, no food, and eventually being unable to breath. Often the crows and vultures would come and peck out the eyes and start to eat their flesh even before they died. The Romans wanted the death to be as painful and slow as possible so that all of their enemies would hesitate to rebel against Rome so that they would not face such a terrible death. Even after death, the Romans would not allow the criminal the dignity of burial. Usually they would leave the body hanging on the cross for days as the birds and animals ate the flesh. And then they would throw what was left of the corpse into a ravine or scatter the bones.

There were different types of crosses. One was in the form of a "T" where the cross piece of the cross was placed on top of the upright and the legs were nailed to the upright. Another was in the form of an "X" with the hands and nails being tied to each section of wood. Or the cross could look like a "+" where the cross piece was placed in a slot in the upright. We don't know which type of cross Jesus died upon. Unlike what was portrayed in the Jesus film, the cross was not very high, just tall enough so that the person's feet would not touch the ground. That way dogs and jackals could come and bite the criminal. Sometimes there was a small piece of wood for the person to barely sit on so that they would not die quickly. This was probably not included for Jesus and the two criminals so that they would die more quickly. Although often the Romans would tie the criminal's arms and feet to the cross, if they wanted death to come quickly, they would nail the criminals hands and feet as they did for Jesus. Most likely the nails were not put through the palms of the hands for then it would be easy for the criminal to pull his hand out of the nails. Rather, they nailed through the wrists. And rather than nail the feet together through the top, the soldiers would usually nail the feet through the ankles to both sides of the upright.

The cross did not actually cause the death of the criminal. What eventually caused him to die was suffocation. As the body hung on the cross and grew weaker, the criminal would slide off the narrow seat. With their weight on their arms, it was difficult to breathe deeply. So in order to get a breath of air, they would have to push up with their feet. But that hurt so much that they could not push up for long. As it

became increasingly difficult to push up to get air, the criminal would get less and less air into his lungs until eventually he no longer had the strength to breathe and died.

Such was the death of our Savior. His death was far worse, far more painful than anything pictured in a movie. Three hundred years after Jesus' death, when a Roman emperor decided to become a Christian, he outlawed death by crucifixion. Only as the memory of the terrible execution on the cross died out did people begin to think that a cross could be a sign of beauty. But for the early Christians, it would have seemed as strange as today making a tank or a gun into an ornament to become a symbol of beauty.

2. Jesus is led away to be crucified by the Romans

Once Pilate pronounced Jesus guilty of treason because he claimed to be the King of the Jews, Jesus' fate was sealed. There was no way to appeal the decision. A sign was made stating the criminal charge for which Jesus was being executed. We are told that the sign, in Aramaic for the Jews, in Greek, the common language of non-Jews, and in Latin, the official language of the Roman court, stated that Jesus was "*the King of the Jews*." It was normal Roman policy to have a soldier walk in front of a criminal with the sign revealing the crime. That sign was later nailed to the cross. The Jewish religious leaders reacted negatively to this sign and went back to Pilate asking him to change the sign to "he says he is the king of the Jews." But Pilate refused to bend to the will of the religious leaders any more.

Jesus was then turned over to a squad of four soldiers overseen by a centurion. Usually these soldiers would take the criminal and severely whip him. Scholars debate whether or not Jesus was whipped twice or just once, but if Jesus was whipped again (Mt. 27:26), it would have happened right after Pilate pronounced judgment on Jesus. There were two other criminals (probably bandits and terrorists who had worked with Barabbas who had previously been condemned to die) who were also crucified alongside of Jesus. Often the Romans would lead the criminals through the city by a long road so that everyone could see what would happen to criminals. It was Roman law that no crucifixion could happen inside the city walls, so Jesus was taken to a place just outside of Jerusalem. We are told that the name of the small hill where Jesus was crucified was called "*Golgotha*" which means "*skull*." Some scholars think the name was because that it was a well known execution place, so bones and skull of crucified criminals were scattered there. Other scholars think that from a distance the appearance of the hill with small caves in it looked like a skull. It was also Roman crucifixion procedure for the condemned criminal to carry the cross beam of the cross to the place of crucifixion where the upright was already placed in the ground.

Suffering from a night with no sleep, from having been whipped so severely that the bones of his back were open to all to see, and wearing tattered clothes torn by the cruel beating, Jesus was led by the four soldiers through the city of Jerusalem. Jesus had no more strength to carry the pole. The Romans soldiers had the right to commandeer anyone into service and so they chose a man called Simon the Cyrene from out of the crowd. Cyrene was in northern Africa in modern day Libya. Simon would have been a Jew who was probably in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. We are told that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mk. 15:21). Many scholars wonder whether Simon later became a believer and his children were well-known in the church at Rome which is why Mark mentioned them. (A Rufus is named by Paul in Rom. 16:13 which could be the same Rufus mentioned by Mark.)

On his way to the cross, the crowds would have lined the street to watch Jesus and the other two criminals travel to the place of execution. It is estimated that during the Passover celebration, the number of people living in Jerusalem swelled from 50,000 inhabitants to 250,000 people. So there would have been

thousands of Jews who had never heard about Jesus lining to street to see what was happening. Encouraged by the religious leaders, many in the crowd had earlier shouted "crucify him." But now there was a different reaction. Perhaps seeing how severely Jesus was beaten, pity arose among the crowd, especially among the women. They began to beat their breasts and cry as an expression of sorrow. Jesus turned to them and told them not to cry about him, but to cry for themselves and their family. One of the most difficult experiences Jewish women could face was to not have any children. But Jesus claimed that a time was coming when those who had no children were actually blessed. No doubt Jesus was referring to the coming war with Rome in 66-70 AD when over a million Jews lost their lives.

Scholars debate what Jesus meant by the proverb "*if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?*" Most likely Jesus was comparing his innocence to being a green tree too wet to burn to the guiltiness of the Jews who were to be like dry wood ready for the fire. All of us know how difficult it is to burn wet (green) wood. So if the Romans and Jews brought upon Jesus (green wood) the "fire" of the cross when he was innocent, imagine the evil that would come upon the Jews who were "dry wood" ready for punishment for their rebellion against Rome. Historians tell us that when the Romans fought Jerusalem, things became so desperate that mothers even killed their children and ate them! Such an end was much worse than the sorrow of not having any children.

There were a group of women in Jerusalem who felt God wanted them to help as much as possible those condemned to die on the cross. They would mix cheap wine, which was similar to vinegar, with a drug which would help lessen the pain. But Jesus refused to drink anything that would lessen the pain of death on the cross. He was prepared to suffer completely the wrath that God was about to bring upon him.

3. Jesus on the cross: 9 AM to noon

Once they arrived at the place where the upright was standing, Jesus would have been laid down upon the cross beam he was carrying. The soldiers put nails through the wrists and lift the cross-piece up to the upright and nailed it in place. They then put nails through Jesus' ankle bones.

Jesus was placed on the cross on "*the third hour.*" (Mk. 15:25) Like Ethiopians, the Jews started counting their time from 6 AM, so the third hour would have been 9 AM. Roman law was that the soldiers doing the crucifying were allowed to divide up the criminal's property. Since Romans hung people naked to increase the shame of the death, Jesus was placed naked on the cross. Jesus had five pieces of clothing. There was an inner cloth similar to underwear, a turban on his head, sandals for his feet, a thin tunic similar to what some Muslims wear when worshipping in the mosque, and a thick robe. Each of the soldiers took one piece of cloth, but the fifth piece, the outer robe which was most expensive, could not be divided among the four soldiers without ruining it. So they decided to cast lots to see which of them would get the robe. The Gospel writers were amazed how even this act of casting lots for Jesus' clothes was a fulfillment of prophecy given hundreds of years earlier. (Ps. 22:18)

From 9 AM to noon, Jesus' pain and agony would have steadily increase. But what must have hurt him most was the response of the very people he had come to save. Just like people gather around an accident when someone is hurt, people from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus to watch what would happen. Notice the different reactions of the people during the time of crucifixion:

A. JESUS: At the beginning of his time of crucifixion, Jesus pled with God the Father to forgive those who were crucifying him. This was very different to how Jews in the Old Testament often reacted when

their enemies persecuted them. The book of Psalms has many examples of David asking God to punish those who persecuted him. But Jesus prayed that God would forgive them. Jesus knew that their spiritual eyes were blind and that Satan was using them for his purposes. Rather than get angry at them, Jesus asked God to forgive those who mistreated him. Does this indicate that Jesus meant that they would not be held accountable for their evil actions? No. Rather, it means that Jesus was refusing to seek vengeance upon the Jews. He made the decision to release his enemies and their judgment into the hands of God. And out of love, he longs that they will be restored into a position of forgiveness and not punishment. He desires that they understand what they are doing and repent and be forgiven by God. Interestingly, it was by dying that Jesus actually made it possible for God to forgive and save even those who were mocking Jesus at his crucifixion.

Three years earlier Jesus taught his disciples that they were to "love" their enemies. (Mt. 5:44) Jesus did not just preach this, he lived it. And the greatest example of this was when Jesus forgave those who were causing him such pain on the cross. Stephen, the first martyr in the church, chose to follow Jesus' example and when he died he also asked God to forgive those who were killing him unjustly. (Acts 7:60) Paul also taught Christians were always have a spirit of forgiveness similar to Jesus. (Col. 3:13)

We live in days when there are tribal divisions as one tribe refuses to forgive the other tribe of wrongs committed against them. Unfortunately this is also true in the church. Christians refuse to forgive others in the church for things they believe were done against them. Leaders fight leaders, family members refuse to forgive another family member, and one minister refuses to forgive another minister. Any time there are ongoing divisions in the church, it is an example of how we are refusing to have Jesus' attitude of forgiving those who hurt us. If we are followers of Jesus, isn't this one way we are supposed to become like him? We must repent of how far we have fallen from the example which Jesus set for us.

Q. 7. a) Describe situations where different people or groups in the world are refusing to forgive each other. What is the result of their lack of forgiveness? b) Describe situations in the church where different believers are refusing to forgive each other. What is the result of their lack of forgiveness? c) How would all of these situations change if people would forgive each other? d) Why do you think granting forgiveness is so difficult? e) Examine the different relationships you have- your family, your church, unbelievers in your community, other religions, and people at work. Are there any whom you are holding a grudge against and haven't forgiven? If so, take time now and pray what Jesus prayed- "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."

b. THE CROWD AND THE RULERS: Watching Jesus hang on the cross, the crowd began to taunt Jesus. "You saved others, healing them, and delivering them from Satan. If you are really who you said you are, save yourself from the Romans. Come down from the cross" they said. The pain was getting worse, so this would have been a temptation. He knew that with his power as God's Son, and with thousands of angels at his command, he could have escaped from the cross, killed everyone there and marched away in triumph. And he knew that soon all of the sins of the world would be placed on his holy shoulders to bear on the cross, leading to his father forsaking him for the first time in all eternity. God the Father, in his holiness, could not look on his Son who was now covered with all of the lies, hatred, and murder that you and I and the people of the world from the days of Adam have committed. This too would have tempted Jesus to come down from the cross. But Jesus knew that in order for you and I to be saved from eternal judgment, he had to die for our sins on the cross. So he refused to listen to the taunts of the crowd.

c. THE ROMAN SOLDIERS: Not just the Jews, but now the Gentiles joined in taunting Jesus. The Roman soldiers normally hated the Jews because the Jews always resisted them and called them "Gentile dogs." So they took their anger and hatred out on Jesus, making fun of him for being a weak and helpless king.

d. ONE OF THE CRIMINALS CRUCIFIED WITH JESUS: The two criminals with Jesus were rebels against the Roman government. One of the two criminals joined in the taunts of the others, telling Jesus to prove he was the king by delivering himself and the criminals from the cross.

e. THE OTHER CRIMINAL CRUCIFIED WITH JESUS: Surrounding Jesus were the most trained religious leaders of the day. They knew the Old Testament laws and the traditions of the fathers. But their spiritual eyes were blind and they did not recognize their King and Savior. But amazingly, only one person in the whole crowd understood what was happening, and he was a religiously untrained person. In fact, he was able to see the real Jesus even better than the disciples could. We don't know what this criminal saw that convinced him that Jesus was not only innocent of the crimes he was being punished for, but was part of a spiritual kingdom. Hearing his fellow rebel taunting Jesus, this criminal defended Jesus. "We are standing at the door of eternity. We are soon to die. Don't you fear God? This is a time of repentance, of getting ready for death, not taunting others. We deserve to die for all of the evil things we have done. But this man is totally innocent" he told his friend. But then he turned to Jesus and told him "*Please remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" What faith! Jesus was on the cross dying, but this criminal saw past the cross to a spiritual kingdom.

The rebel came to Jesus with a repentant spirit, admitting his sinfulness and unworthiness. The Bible calls this "repentance," admitting that we are sinners worthy of God's punishment. He understood that Jesus was the Savior, the one who could deliver him from the punishment he should receive, just like we must understand that Jesus is the one who bears our sin on the cross. He knew that Jesus' death on the cross was not the end of the story, but the beginning of a different kingdom; a greater, eternal kingdom. And he wanted to be part of that. The rebel trusted Jesus to be the one who would help him enter that kingdom. He no doubt thought that Jesus' kingdom was in the distant future, but Jesus told him that his reward would begin that very night, they would be in paradise together.

Throughout history one of the amazing things is that often those who have the most education or religious teaching have the most difficult time seeing spiritual realities. But it is those who are despised by society who seem to have the easiest time understanding what "faith" means. Paul later wrote that God chooses not those honored in the world, but those despised by the world. (1 Cor. 1:20-31) That day, the "righteous" religious leaders went away unsaved, under God's judgment; but the "wicked" rebel died saved because he turned to Jesus in repentance.

Q. 8. a) Why do you think this criminal could understand spiritual realities better than the religious leaders of his day? b) Describe how you have seen the spiritual truth that those who seem to be most qualified to become Christians are often resistant to belief and those who seem least qualified are most open to belief.

Jesus promised the man that that very night he would join him in "*Paradise.*" The word paradise was a Persian word referring to a beautiful garden. While in exile in Babylon and Persia, the Jews took this word into their language and began to use it to refer both to the Garden of Eden during the days of Adam, and

also for heaven. Although some Christians, like the Roman Catholics, think Jesus was teaching that there is a temporary place before a believer enters heaven where they can work off the bad things they have done in their lives and become good enough to get to heaven, that is not what Jesus meant. He was promising this criminal that he would go into the place of God's blessing, the place where the righteous like Abraham or David were. Even though evil in the sight of others, his faith in Jesus caused him to be rewarded with eternal life.

That promise is what is available for all mankind. No matter how evil a person might be, there is no one too evil for God to refuse to forgive him and give him eternal life. God accepts everyone who will humble themselves, repent of their sins, and turn to the crucified Savior and Lord, committed to following him for the rest of their days. For this criminal following Christ was for only a few hours. But for us, it may be years. But the path of salvation (repentance and belief) is always the same for all people.

Q. 9. Describe how the steps of repentance and belief this criminal took to be saved is similar to what you did to become a child of God.

f. WOMEN DISCIPLES OF JESUS, JESUS' MOTHER, AND JOHN. Less than 24 hours earlier, the disciples had promised that they would follow Jesus even if it caused their death. But when Jesus was captured, they all fled. Peter and John did follow Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But it seems that Peter then left to hide somewhere and mourn the fact that he had denounced Jesus. But John and a few of the women faithfully followed Jesus to the cross and stayed near until he died. Men sometimes look down on women, thinking that they are not valuable for the work of the kingdom. But in reality, often the women followers of Jesus are more faithful in serving him than most men. Think about who is usually serving on church work days, who faithfully attends the community gatherings and prayer meetings. It is women. Jesus never despised women, but instead greatly honored women, even giving them the privilege of witnessing his resurrection first.

Scholars have debated the identity of these women. There was Mary, Jesus' mother; Mary, the wife of Clopas (Jn. 19:25), who was perhaps the same as Mary, the mother of James and Joses (Mt. 27:56); and Mary Magdalene, a woman whom Jesus had delivered from evil spirits. But who is the other woman who is called Jesus' mother's sister? (Jn. 19:25)? Although we can't be certain, many believe this woman was called Salome. (Mk 16:1) She was not only the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, but also the mother of James and John.

Most likely Joseph had died many years earlier, and as the oldest son, the Jewish culture taught that Jesus was responsible to take care of his mother. Mary had other sons and daughters (Mt 13:55), but we are told that none of them had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. (Jn. 7:5) So they were not supportive of Jesus and were not present at the cross encouraging Jesus in his time of sorrow. So Jesus turned to John, his cousin, and formally gave Mary, his mother, into the care of the Apostle John, called "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*." Jesus was declaring that from now on, John was to take the place of the oldest son and care for Jesus' mother as if she was John's mother, and Mary was to treat John as her eldest son. John tells us that he obeyed Jesus and took Mary into his own home and took care of her.

Catholics quote this verse to say that Jesus not only meant for Mary to treat her sister's son, the Apostle John, as her eldest son, but was saying that Mary would become the "mother" of the church. Believers would be like her children. She would therefore have an honored position, able to talk to Jesus

on behalf of her children. This understanding of this verse was one of the reasons over time Mary became venerated among the Catholics and Orthodox Christians. But this interpretation is unlikely. The most natural understanding of this verse is that Jesus gave John his obligation as the eldest son to take care of his mother. Although the New Testament and the early church honored Mary for her humility and willingness to bear God's Son, there is no indication that the early church gave Mary a place of special honor in the church as the "mother" of the church.

4. Jesus on the cross: noon to 3 PM

If, as John shows, it was the day before the Passover, all Jews would stop work at noon to prepare themselves to celebrate the Passover celebration. In the Temple, the priests would begin to sacrifice the Passover lambs which the people brought to them. But what mattered that day was not what took place in the Temple or the special meal in the homes, but outside the city wall on the cross. Jesus was going to die as the Passover Lamb of God who would finally deliver people from their sins. The second "Exodus" of deliverance from bondage to Satan and sin was about to begin. This time the destination was not the promised land of Canaan, but the promised land of heaven.

Throughout these last three hours, Jesus' pain continued to increase and his ability to breath would steadily grew less as he grew weak and could not raise himself enough to get a good breath. Some doctors think that as his ability to breath deeply decreased, fluid began to fill his lungs making breathing even more difficult. These last few hours when the divine Son of God experienced death were filled with events which symbolically expressed what was happening on the cross.

a. Darkness covered the land of Palestine for three full hours. Some scholars think that this was probably a solar eclipse when the moon got between the sun and the earth causing unusual darkness in the middle of the day. However, this would have been impossible because of the time of month when the Passover was taking place. This darkness was a miracle sent by God to symbolize what was happening on the cross. The time of spiritual darkness predicted by Jesus had arrived. Satan's plans were about to come to completion. The sins of the world were now placed upon Jesus so that he could die in your place and my place. The perfectly holy Son of God now became "sin." (2 Cor. 5:21) This darkness no doubt was a sign from God of his judgment upon his Son who was now bearing the sins of the world.

b. Jesus cried out "*My God why have you forsaken me?*" For all of eternity the fellowship between God the Father and God the Son has been perfect and unbroken, with no selfishness and nothing hidden. Suddenly, God's holiness could no longer face the sinfulness of his Son, and he withdrew from Jesus. Jesus felt abandoned by God. Jesus used the words of his forefather David, expressing his agony of being separated from God. (Ps. 22:1) Not once did Jesus cry out over the physical pain he was experiencing. But now, seeing his Father turn his back on him, he faced his deepest pain, which was the pain of being abandoned.

Some of those listening to Jesus' cry mistook the Aramaic word "*Elohi*" for Elijah. They thought Jesus was calling out to Elijah (who had never died but was taken to heaven [2 Ki. 2:11]) to come and help him. "Will Elijah listen to his call?" they wondered. Not wanting Jesus to grow too weak before they could see if Elijah would come and rescue Jesus, they dipped a sponge into some cheap wine usually drunk by soldiers, put it on some branches from a nearby bush called "*hyssop*," and offered it to Jesus to drink. For the Jewish Christians, the words "hyssop" would have brought them memories of a practice in the Old Testament. The Jews used "hyssop" to put the blood on the doors of their houses so that the angel of death

would not kill their firstborn. (Ex. 12:22-23) Hyssop was also used in a ceremony to cleanse a home that was ritually defiled. (Lev. 14:4-7) and to ritually clean a priest. (Num. 19:6) David later used this practice as a symbol of being cleansed from sin. (Ps. 51:7) Jesus, the Lamb of God was dying for the sins of the world. His death was the "hyssop" used by God to bring spiritual cleansing to the people of the world.

c. Jesus cried out "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*" The Jews would often teach their small children to pray this prayer at night just before they went to sleep. Jesus was now going into the sleep of death, and he committed his spirit to God. It might have seemed that God had abandoned Jesus, but Jesus knew that he hadn't. In spite of all of the physical and spiritual agony Jesus was experiencing, he faced death calmly. Jesus became the model martyr as he faced death. There were no angry cries or bitter questions. Rather, there was a trusting commitment of the unknown future into God's hands. Death is always a fearful experience. But when we reach the valley of death, as followers of Jesus we are to be like him with hearts filled with trust as we commit our souls and the life after death into God's loving hands. Faith is expressed best in the presence of things that are unclear, such as when we face death or a disease which seems incurable.

Q. 10. a) Describe situations when Christians are supposed to commit their spirits into the hands of God.
b) How would their attitude be different if they had the same attitude as Jesus?

d. Jesus cried out in a loud voice "*It is finished.*" What was finished? This was not the cry of a defeated man, but the cry of victory. Jesus had completed the reason he came to earth. He did not come to earth primarily to heal people of their physical sickness. Rather, his purpose for coming was to become a sin sacrifice for the world to God as the perfect Lamb of God. And now he had completed that. God's way of salvation for the sins of mankind through the death of Jesus was now complete.

The fact that Jesus died at 3 PM had special meaning to the Jews. At 3 PM the priests and the people were offering sacrifices to God, including sacrificing their Passover lambs in preparation for their Passover celebration. They thought that sacrifice would gain them forgiveness for their sins and remind them of the deliverance God gave the Jews during the days of Moses. So in the Temple area the Jews were fulfilling their ritual worship. But outside the city walls, God was sacrificing his Son, and no one really understood that Jesus was purchasing the freedom from spiritual slavery for a new people of God, the church. Which sacrifice counted? Religions throughout the world continue to perform their many rituals, but like the sacrifices in the Temple that day, they didn't bring forgiveness. Only by accepting the sacrifice which God made through his Son does any worship become acceptable.

e. Jesus "*gave up his spirit.*" It is important to note the word "gave." Jesus had earlier stated that he alone had the authority to lay down his life and take it back up. No one could take his life from him. (Jn. 10:17-18) No doubt Jesus could have physically lived longer. But he knew that the work of dying on the cross for the sins of the world was now complete and there was no need to delay his death. So he gave up his spirit to God and died.

f. The curtain of the Temple was torn from top to bottom. This curtain separated the "holy place," which was the first part of the Temple where priests ministered daily lighting the candles and changing the bread and offering incense from the "Holy of Holies," the second division of the Temple. In this part used to be the Ark of the Covenant, although during the days of Jesus there was only a stone symbolizing the ark. The Jews believed the Ark of the Covenant was the throne of God where he ruled over Israel. Who tore

the curtain? It must have been God, for it was not torn by human hands from bottom to the top. What did this act of God mean? From the beginning of worship in the Tabernacle, this curtain symbolized to the Jews that they were too sinful to approach into the presence of the holy God. "You are a sinner, and if you come into the presence of God, you will die" it proclaimed. Only the high priest was allowed to come with great fear into the Holy of Holies once a year. Tied to his foot was a rope in case he was not holy enough when in God's presence and God killed him. That way people could grab the rope and pull his body out of the inner part of the Temple. The writer of the book of Hebrews understood this symbol and said that because of the death of Jesus, the way into the very presence of God ("the throne of grace") is now open. (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:19-22) One of the important differences between God's relationship to his people in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is that in the Old Testament people had to stay away from God for fear of not being pure enough. But in the New Testament, because followers of Jesus have been cleansed from all their sins by the death of Jesus and have received his righteousness, they are able to come without fear into God's presence. There is no curtain between God and man.

This is one reason why it is wrong for followers of Jesus to use saints or other mediators to try to approach God. It is as if they don't believe God who has said that they are now his children (Jn. 1:12) and are perfectly acceptable to him so they can personally ask for things from God. Suppose a child was afraid to go to his father and ask him a question, but went to a servant instead and asked him to go to his father and request something. Wouldn't that disappoint his father? "You are my child. You, and not a servant, can come at any time and talk to me" he would say. That is what the torn curtain was declaring to the Jews.

Q. 11. a) Describe ways that Christians often act toward God as if there is still a curtain between them and God. b) Why do you think some Christians prefer to use mediators rather than go to God directly when they pray? c) What do you think this reveals about their attitude towards God and his making them a child who has the right to approach God at any time?

g. An earthquake shook the city of Jerusalem. We don't know why this happened. Paul said in Col. 2:15 that on the cross Jesus defeated Satan. Was this a symbol of the great spiritual battle taking place? Or was it a symbol of how the creation which Jesus had made was shocked by what was taking place? Or was it a symbol of judgment against those who had turned against their Messiah?

h. Graves of certain righteous people were opened and people resurrected for a certain period of time. Only Matthew mentions this event. Again we can't be sure why God caused this event. Was it a symbol to the Jews that because of the death of Jesus, not only were the sins of people after the cross forgiven, but the sins of the righteous people of the Old Testament also? The book of Hebrews tells us that the sacrifices of the Old Testament only provided a temporary cleansing from sin. Only after Jesus was the true sacrifice were their sins totally forgiven. (Heb. 10:11-14) Or was this event an illustration to the early believers of how they too will be raised from the dead through Jesus? These righteous people eventually died again. But those who will one day be raised from death by Jesus will live forever.

i. The centurion overseeing Jesus' crucifixion acknowledged that Jesus was righteous. The centurion no doubt started with a callous attitude towards Jesus. He had probably overseen many such crucifixions of criminals, and Jesus seemed like just one more criminal. But over the six hours that Jesus was on the cross, the centurion became aware that in some way Jesus was different from any other criminal he had executed. Perhaps he was impressed with how Jesus had such a forgiving spirit when being killed. Every other crucifixion he had witnessed, the criminals were bitter and cursing those who were killing them. But

Jesus asked God to forgive them. Or perhaps he knew that the darkness and the earthquake were acts of God and not natural events. The expression "*son of God*" (Mk. 15:39) would have been made in the context of the religion of the Gentile centurion. He believed that there were many gods, and there were times when the gods would come into the world in the appearance of a human. He perhaps thought Jesus was one of these appearances of the gods in human form. We know, however, that there aren't many gods, and that Jesus is truly the eternal Son of God. The centurion was also indicating that Jesus was innocent of the accusation of rebellion. It was clear to the centurion that Jesus was not a rebel against the Roman government.

j. The people also recognized something tragic had happened. Luke tells us that as the crowd went away to start the Passover celebration, they began to beat their breasts, which is a traditional sign of remorse. Even they knew that something terrible had taken place on the cross, that an innocent man had been killed.

k. The legs of two criminals were broken, and Jesus was speared in the side. Not only did death by crucifixion take several days, but it was normal practice for the Romans to leave bodies on the cross for several more days until the bodies rotted and then not allow the corpse to be buried properly. However, this went against the Jewish beliefs. In Deut. 21:23 God told the Jews to make sure that they buried the corpses before nightfall, otherwise the land would become ritually unclean. For the Jews, the new day began at 6 PM of the night before. And being the Sabbath (and perhaps the Passover depending on whether the Passover was Thursday or Friday), no work such as burial was allowed. So the Passover and Sabbath did not start on Saturday morning, but Friday evening. That meant that the religious leaders only had a few hours left for the three on the cross to die and for them to be buried. Again we see the religious leaders more concerned with maintaining ritual purity than what was just in the eyes of God.

The religious leaders went to Pilate and asked him to do something to cause Jesus and the other two criminals to die more quickly. They no doubt had a plan to bury Jesus and the criminals in one grave. The way to speed up the death of someone on the cross was by breaking the legs of those on the cross. When this was done, the person could no longer push up with his legs in order to breathe. This means that they would soon suffocate and die. So Pilate told the soldiers to break the legs of each of the criminals. Having broken the two criminals' legs, when they got to Jesus they were surprised to see that he was already dead. However, wanting to make sure, one of the soldiers took his spear and thrust it into the side of Jesus. John said that out of his side came blood and water. Doctors debate what this means. Some think that the spear pierced all the way to the heart of Jesus. Around the heart is a sack of watery fluid and blood had no doubt gathered around the heart because of the trauma of his death. Other doctors think that as Jesus slowly suffocated, fluid built up into his lungs and abdomen, so when the spear pierced this, water and blood came out.

Scholars debate what John was seeking to teach by this part of the story. There are two possibilities. Some think that John was seeking to point to the Lord's Supper (blood) and baptism (water) celebrations, the two major rites of the church. Others think that John was seeking to prove that Jesus actually died. There were false teachings in the church in Asia when John was writing his Gospel. One false teaching spread by the Jews was that Jesus never really died. The soldiers only thought he was dead, and when placed in the cold tomb he revived and escaped. But the flow of blood and water were proof that he did die. Another false teaching was that Jesus was never fully human. He just had the form of a human, and on the cross he reverted to his spiritual state and escaped. But the blood and water were proof that Jesus

was human and did actually die. Even the fact that Jesus did not have his legs broken was a fulfillment of prophecy. (Ps. 34:20)

5. Jesus is buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two secret believers (Mt. 27:51-56, Mk. 15:42-47, Lk. 23:50-56, Jn. 19:38-42)

One of the amazing things about the story of Jesus' crucifixion is who boldly demonstrated they were with Jesus and who didn't. We would have assumed the disciples would stand firm, dying to protect Jesus, but they fled and hid. And we would have expected that the women flee, not wanting to get caught up in the political problems. And we would have especially thought that rich traders and famous religious leaders would hide the fact that they followed Jesus so that they would not be ridiculed by the other members of the Sanhedrin. But the women and the rich merchant and one religious leader openly showed themselves to be Jesus' followers.

Joseph of Arimathea was a rich merchant and a member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus was a member of the Pharisees and also part of the Sanhedrin. [You will remember that it was Nicodemus who, perhaps because he was afraid of what others would say, came to visit Jesus at night. (Jn. 3) He tried to support Jesus once in the Sanhedrin, but was quickly silenced by the others. (Jn. 7:50-52)] When they heard that Jesus was dead, the two decided to no longer secretly follow Jesus but openly demonstrated their support of Jesus. The two worked together to make sure Jesus had an honorable burial rather than being thrown in a common grave with the other two criminals. Joseph went to Pilate to request special permission to take the body of Jesus. Normally the Romans would not even allow the family to receive the body, wanting to maximize shame by not allowing the person to be buried or by being thrown into a common grave with little respect. Most likely Pilate agreed to Joseph's request since he knew that Jesus was innocent and because he knew that Joseph was an important person. Joseph went back to the place of crucifixion and got the body of Jesus off the cross and took it to his tomb that was located close to the place of crucifixion. Nicodemus gathered spices for the burial of the body.

The Jews had different burial places for the poor, the righteous, and for the wicked. The Jews were afraid that somehow the body of a wicked person would corrupt the rest of the Jews in the graveyard. No doubt the religious leaders were anticipating that Jesus and the two other criminals would be buried in the plot for wicked people. Although the Jews buried people in the ground like we do, it was common for the rich people to dig a cave in the side of a hill for a family burial plot. The cave-like tomb had a shelf inside the door where the body was placed wrapped in strips of cloth mixed with burial spices. Often there was a large stone placed over the opening to keep out thieves and wild animals. A year after the death, the family would return to the cave. By now the body had decomposed and there were only bones left. The bones were gathered up and placed in a box and taken to the back of the cave and put on a shelf.

Joseph, being rich, had such a plot prepared for himself and his family. As of yet, no one had been buried in it. Out of love for Jesus, Joseph chose to put the body of Jesus in that cave. Nicodemus came to the cave with over 30 kilos of burial spices. Thirty kilos of spices was the amount of spice used either for a very rich person or a king. Not only does this show how wealthy Nicodemus was, but how much he loved and respected Jesus. Jews would mix sweet smelling spices with the burial cloth so that the smell of death would be lessened. There were two types of burial clothes. One was a bag-like cloth into which the body was slipped. The other was to take strips of cloth and wrap the body from foot to head, sprinkling spices into the wrapping. This is what Joseph and Nicodemus used on Jesus.

Preparing a body for burial was usually the work of women. It was they who would wash the body and then wrap it with spices. The women who had been watching Jesus as he died on the cross followed Joseph and Nicodemus and watched where they had placed Jesus. Concerned that Jesus was not properly buried, they wanted to see where Jesus' body was being placed so that they could come back on Sunday and more carefully prepare his body. But it was almost six o'clock, the time when the Sabbath would start and all work was prohibited. So they went away, waiting with heavy hearts through Friday night up until Sunday morning.

Q. 12. What can we learn about discipleship from the story of Jesus' burial?

THIRD DAY

Although death on the cross is one of the worst types of execution that humans have developed, unlike The Passion of Christ movie, the Bible never focuses upon the terrible pain which Jesus experienced from dying on the cross. The New Testament always focuses upon what happened spiritually on the cross. But the Bible never defines clearly what actually took place on the cross. We know that it is the place where Jesus died for our sins, but how were our sins put on Jesus? Why was the death of Jesus on the cross necessary? Why couldn't God just forgive our sins without the cross? And how was Satan defeated on the cross (Col. 1:15) when he is so evidently alive today causing great problems in the world and in the church? There are many questions about what took place on the cross which we can't answer. However, the New Testament is filled with statements showing the implications of the cross. One scholar has estimated that the cross of Jesus is mentioned over 175 times in the New Testament. The death of Jesus and its many implications can be compared to what we sometimes see in a clear soft drink bottle as it is held up to the sun. Suddenly coming out of the bottle are many different colors that are very beautiful. What seems to us as simple light actually consists of many different beautiful colors reflected through a bottle. In the same way Jesus' death on the cross seems like a simple truth, but it is actually filled with beautiful truths which scholars are not able to fully understand. Only in heaven will we comprehend more clearly what the cross accomplished for us. With the mighty crowd in Rev. 5:11-13 we will praise Jesus for that work on the cross. One major reason Jesus commanded us to frequently celebrate the Lord's Supper is so that we always remind ourselves that our every blessing flows out of the death of Jesus.

Today we will summarize some of those beautiful truths that are a result of Jesus' death on the cross. The TEE book on Christ and Salvation more fully discusses Jesus and the implications of his death on the cross.

Q. 13. Summarize in your own words why Jesus had to die on the cross and what was accomplished for us by his death.

THE REASON FOR THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST AND ITS BENEFITS

1. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the central, most important truth about Christianity

"Who is Jesus?" is the most important question a person can ask. Some Christians focus upon Jesus the healer. "Come to Jesus and he will heal you of your physical disease" they invite non-Christians. Others focus upon Jesus the one who blesses with material blessing. "Come to Jesus and he will give you a job and make your life comfortable" others say as they invite non-Christians to follow Jesus. "Jesus is a good moral teacher, showing us how to live in peace and love" say some people. "Jesus was a martyr who died

an unfortunate death" state others. The world is filled with different opinions of who Jesus is and what his life represents. Many of the perspectives of people about Jesus have some truth in them. Jesus often heals people of their diseases, but not always. And he sometimes gives people material blessings. Jesus was the greatest teacher the world has known, and if we followed his example the world would be able to live in peace and love. But none of these provides the most important teaching of who Jesus is. The central most important truth about Jesus is that he is God's Son who came to take care of the sin problem of mankind so that they can relate to God. In the Bible we see the following:

a. Jesus insisted that he had come "*to seek and to save the lost.*" (Lk. 19:10) He had come to give himself as a "*ransom*" for the world. (Mk. 10:45) So Jesus defined the very purpose of his life as being the Savior, the one who would take care of the sin of mankind. Jesus never said he had come to heal the diseases of the world, or to eradicate the poverty of people, or to be a model teacher and moral person.

b. The whole story of the Bible focuses upon the death of Jesus and its implications. After he rose from the death, Jesus insisted that all of the Old Testament (the writings and the prophets) pointed towards his death on the cross. (Lk. 24:25-27) Starting from the time of Adam when the first animal sacrifice took place (Gen. 3:21), to the first prophecy of someone who would come to destroy Satan (Gen 3:15), to the sacrifices of the Old Testament which pictured the coming final sacrifice of Jesus (Heb. 9:6-15), to clear prophecies of Isaiah 53:4-6 which tells that the Messiah would bear the iniquities of his people; each part of the Old Testament was looking toward the cross. Peter wrote that the prophets looked with great interest into the prophecies seeking to understand the salvation that was coming in Jesus. (1 Pet. 1:10-12) Paul explained that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3) stating that this truth was the very foundation of Christianity. And the last book of the Bible, Revelation, describes Jesus as a "lamb looking like it was slain" (Rev. 5:6) and shows people from all nations praising Jesus, not for their physical healing, but because he had "redeemed them from their sins." (Rev. 5:9-10) The death of Jesus on the cross for the sins of mankind is the most important truth of the Bible which separates the belief of Christians from the teachings of other religions.

c. The longest story from the life of Jesus as told in all four Gospels is the story of the death of Jesus. It is clear that each Gospel writer says Jesus' death on the cross was the most important truth in about Jesus.

We must be very careful that we do not get distracted and focus on less important truths about Jesus (e.g. his healing people) which minimizes the major reason why Jesus came to die on the cross. How do we know if we are minimizing this truth? Listen to what many church evangelists and leaders say when they invite a person to become a follower of Jesus. Do they focus upon Jesus healing, the blessings he gives, or upon his death for sin so that people can become children of God? Many never mention the fact that Jesus came to save sinners from their sins. In fact, some preachers in the West no longer are willing to say that people are sinners because they think that is an insult! One time I was teaching that the Gospel is telling people that they are sinners and that Jesus died for their sins and they need to repent and commit themselves to following Jesus in obedience. I explained that there is nothing in the Gospel that states that Jesus promises to heal us of our diseases while on earth or to meet all of our physical needs. One student raised his hands and asked "Who will believe if we don't promise that Jesus will heal their diseases?" He meant that we often feel that we have to offer 'gubos' of some physical blessing to people to get unbelievers to promise that they will follow Jesus. This is far from the Gospel that the apostles taught. Paul stated that he refused to boast in anything but the cross of Christ. (Gal.6:14) He taught that the Gospel was all about

preaching the "cross" which to many was foolishness. (1 Cor.1: 18-27) But Paul trusted the Gospel message that Jesus died for sins, saying that it alone had the "power of salvation."

Q. 14. a) Describe how you have heard people focus upon healing or material blessings rather than upon sin and forgiveness when seeking to win a person to Christ. b) Explain how this goes against what the Gospels present as the major reason for Jesus' death.

2. In order to understand the reason for Jesus' death on the cross, we must first understand who God is and who we are

No one can have a Biblical understanding of what happened on the cross until they have a Biblical understanding of who God is and how God sees people. It was because of people's sin and because of the character of God that the cross was necessary. We can summarize the teaching of the Bible as follows:

a. Every human is a sinner. The book of Genesis tells us how God created Adam and Eve in the image of God. They were without a sin nature, and their natural inclination was to do what God wanted. As a result there was open and intimate fellowship between God and humans. But that all changed when Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God. Immediately their open and intimate fellowship with God was broken, and they felt shame and hid from God. Their inner nature also changed, and after that time, they had a tendency to rebel against God. Eve's decision to "be like God," controlling her own life and destiny (this is the root of all sin) led to continued acts of sin. As we study the Bible, we see how this tendency to sin and rebel was passed down from Adam and Eve to all of their descendants. We notice this rebellious tendency in little children. We tell them not to do something and immediately they want to do it. Other things changed as well; the world was cursed (Gen. 3:17-19, Rom. 8:22) and relationships between husband and wife were impacted. Rather than walking in harmony, Adam and Eve and all their descendants compete with each other to have their selfish desires met and blame each other for wrongs.

Along with this "curse" came the judgment of death in three realms. First, there was physical death as people got sick or aged and then died. Second, there was spiritual death as the natural inclination towards relating to God in obedience died within mankind. That is why Paul insisted that people outside of Christ are "dead in their sins." (Eph.2:1-2) Third, there was eternal death, the punishment on all people who die in a state of rebellion against God. For eternity they will be separated from God and from all the good things God gives.

The major problem of mankind is not hunger, poverty, war, tribalism or disease. These are all secondary problems, stemming from a deeper problem, which is sin. So when we promise a person that if they come to God they will be healed, we are getting them to think about their secondary problems rather than their primary problem of sin. Jesus came to deal first with the primary problem, the sin tendency and the fruits of sin which keeps people from enjoying God's presence and also from living in peace with each other. That is why the Gospel message always starts with the acknowledgment of personal sin and repentance of sin. John the Baptist (Mt. 3:1-2), Jesus (Mt. 4:17), and Peter (Acts 2:38) all insisted that people repent. So if our message of salvation is to be Biblical, it must start with the key problem of mankind, which is their sin, and show that Jesus is the solution to that problem.

b. God is absolutely holy. Imagine a judge who did not care what people did; who would shrug his shoulders when they were rebels against the government, murders, rapists, or thieves. What type a world would it be if there was no sense of justice and holiness, if the judge would just say "I love you and

therefore will let you go free." It would be a terrible world. Inside each person is the acknowledgment that justice and holiness is good. If we sinners long for holiness and justice on earth and react against those who knowingly do evil things against us, imagine how much the absolutely holy God must hate it when people he created rebel against him. Every sin is an act of rebellion against God; it is as if we are telling God we don't care what he desires or says, we will do what we want. Every time we tell a lie, we are saying to God "even though you want me to tell the truth, I don't want to, so I will do what I want." As the absolute holy Judge, God must punish every sin. Otherwise he would be like the judge described above. God warned Adam and Eve of the consequences if they sinned. "On the day you sin, you will die!" he told them. God's perfect standard was established; his holiness required that everyone be 100% sinless or they would die-physically, spiritually, and eternally. Out of his character of holiness comes God's commitment to punish sinners.

c. God is absolutely loving. If God was just holy, he would immediately put to death everyone when they sinned. Not one person would be alive on the earth. But what keeps God from doing this? It is his compassionate love for every person he has created. Because of his love for each person on the earth, God wants them to live, to enjoy fellowship with him, and to be part of his eternal family.

So how could God be both holy (demanding that he punish sinners) and loving (desiring to make a way for sinners to be forgiven)? The way God established for this is the principle of "one life in place of another life," or the principle of substitution. We can see this in the story of Adam and Eve. We are told that they were naked, so God killed animals and clothed them. Behind this story is a hidden truth, the truth that God took the life of an animal to clothe both physically and spiritually the sinners. The children of Adam and Eve knew this so they sacrificed animals to God. Throughout the whole of the Old Testament, God established the ritual of animal sacrifices, to "make atonement" for the sins of people. (Ex. 30:10)

But there was a problem with this approach. How can the life of an animal pay for the sins of a human? And a person sins many times a day; no one could ever afford to sacrifice an animal every time they had a lustful thought, got angry, or told a lie. God allowed this imperfect system of gaining forgiveness of sins for a time until he could send Jesus. (Heb. 10:11-13) When Jesus died on the cross, he was fulfilling the principle established by God of "one life on behalf of another." For Jesus to qualify as the sacrifice for all sins, he had to meet the following conditions:

1) Jesus had to be human. A spirit being cannot die, he cannot give his life in place of another physical being. In eternity past, the Triune God lived as a spiritual being and therefore could not qualify as a human to die for sins. Therefore, one of the Triune members of God had to become a human. Jesus willingly agreed to become a human so that he could qualify as a sacrifice for humans. Heb. 10:5 tells us that God prepared a body for Jesus. This of course was by being born by the virgin Mary.

2) Jesus had to be sinless. Suppose God could have convinced a good person like David to die on the cross. Would this have worked to fulfill God's principle of a "life for a life?" The answer is No. One reason this would not work is because all people, no matter how good they are, sin. And as sinners, they need a sacrifice for their own sins. They cannot die for someone else's sins.

3) Jesus had to be infinite. If Jesus was equal to just one person, he could only die in place of one person. Somehow God had to accept Jesus' death in place of all humans who will ever live, from the time

of Adam and Eve until the end when eternity starts. It was because Jesus was also God, with a life that was of infinite value, that he could die in place of every man and woman and child that ever lived.

So the cross is the meeting place of the sinfulness of mankind and the holiness and love of God. From these three truths comes the need for the cross. As the world watched Jesus die, all they could see was the physical death of a "rebel" or a person who was wrongly accused by the Jewish leaders and Romans. But hidden from view, a great sacrifice was taking place, when the sins of all mankind were placed on Jesus. Paul summarized this by saying that God made the sinless Jesus to become "sin" so that we could become forgiven and righteous and acceptable before him. (2 Cor. 5:21)

3. Various results from the death of Jesus on the cross

Scattered throughout the New Testament are many verses that describe different facets of what happened on the cross and what Jesus' death on the cross produced for us. None of these descriptions tell the whole story, but together they give us a good idea what happened that Friday when Jesus died on the cross:

Q. 15. Read Mk. 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 9:15. Summarize what these verses teach about what Jesus' death accomplished.

a. Jesus' death was a ransom paid which freed us from slavery (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23; Gal. 3:13, 4:5; Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4)

Sometimes in the news, we read sad stories of children being sold into slavery. Praise God, slavery is outlawed in most of the world today. But in the ancient times, slavery was a common practice. Scholars estimate that a great percentage of the people in Rome were slaves. Just like people sell cattle in the middle of the marketplace in country towns, in ancient times it was common for people to sell people in their marketplace. Sometimes a relative or a compassionate person would pay the purchase price and then release the slave, giving him his freedom. This process of paying the price and releasing the slave was called "redemption." It was also used for someone who was captured in war and the price the family would pay to get their family member back.

In the Old Testament, God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage was seen as ransoming them. God used this to illustrate delivering his people from any bondage or problem that held them captive. (Hos. 13:14) Jesus, in describing his purpose for coming to the earth, also described it as being a "ransom." (Mk. 10:45) The idea of a ransom brings out three questions:

1) To what "slavery" are humans in bondage which demands that a ransom is necessary? The Bible points to two key things which have enslaved every person. First, humans are enslaved to "sin." (Rom. 7:14, Heb. 9:15) The Bible teaches that we all have a sin nature which encourages us to commit acts of sin. (Rom. 7:7-20) Second, humans are enslaved to Satan, the "god of this world." (2 Cor. 4:2) Each person is a part of his kingdom and have to be "ransomed" so that they can get out of his kingdom and become part of God's kingdom.

2) What "price" was paid to purchase us? Paul insisted we have been "bought with a price." (1 Cor. 6:20) He pictures someone going to the marketplace and purchasing a slave. That slave no longer belongs to the previous owner, but to the new owner. In purchasing us, we no longer belong to Satan, but to Christ. (Note: A good picture of what happened to us is the picture of the bond servant. In the Old

Testament, when a slave did not want to leave his master's home, he would have his ear pierced. He voluntarily made himself a slave for life to his master. (Deut. 15:16-17) In the same way, when Jesus frees us from the slavery to sin and Satan, we are not freed to live as we want. Rather, we are freed so that we in turn can become the volunteer slaves of Jesus. That is why Paul would often call himself the bond slave of Jesus. (In the Greek, Rom. 1:1 refers to a bond slave.) The Bible points to the death of Jesus as the price paid for our salvation. It was the death of Jesus which freed us from slavery to our sin nature. And it was the death of Jesus which broke Satan's hold over us. (Col. 2:15)

3) To whom did Jesus pay the price? Scholars have debated this throughout history. Did Jesus pay God so that the debt God held against us was cancelled? (Col. 2:13-14) Or did Jesus pay Satan, giving his life as the payment for the death that we were due? The New Testament never addresses to whom Jesus paid the price because what was important was that Jesus paid the price to free us, not to whom he paid the price. Such debates are meaningless.

Q. 16. Paul said that we have been bought by Jesus and do not belong to ourselves. (1 Cor. 6:19-20) a) Do you think that most believers see themselves as "slaves of Jesus?" Explain your answer. b) Describe ways this truth should change our attitude to following Jesus and serving him.

Q. 17. Read Jn. 1:29; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21. List what ministry of Jesus is described here.

b. Jesus is the sacrifice Lamb who died in our place (Jn. 1:29; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21)

We previously studied that foundational to understanding Jesus' death is the idea of one life being sacrificed on behalf of another life. We see this in the Old Testament animal sacrifices. When a sinner brought an animal to be sacrificed, he was to place his hands on the head of the animal and confess on it all of his sins. The animal was then slaughtered as a sacrifice, dying in place of the sinner. (Lev. 1:3-5) The reality is that every little sin we commit makes us worthy of the "death sentence." (Ezek. 18:4) The lie we told, our pride in our race, the anger at our wife or children; God the righteous judge should pronounce us guilty and worthy of death. It is as if we were standing before the judge and all of our sins were listed. But just as the judge was ready to punish us by hanging, Jesus stepped forward and said "punish me instead. Let me die in his place." (Is. 53:6, 1 Pet. 2:24, 3:18) The Gospel teaches Jesus died on the cross so that we would not have to die because of our sins. All of our sins were transferred to Jesus, and he became sin. (1 Cor. 5:7) The story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac provides a good illustration of what took place. Instead of Isaac, the lamb died. But in Jesus' case, God did not spare his own Son, but let him die.

Q. 18. Read Rom. 3:25 and Eph. 1:7. Describe what other results the cross brought us.

c. The cross was the place where our sins were atoned for (Rom. 3:25, 1 Jn. 2:2, Heb. 2:17)

The word "atonement" originates in the Old Testament worship. In the tabernacle, the lid of the ark of covenant was called the "atonement cover." (Ex. 26:34) Once a year the high priest would come into the holy of holies and sprinkle blood on the cover. The result of this action was called atonement. (Ex. 30:10) The word atonement means to cover over or to remove. So when a person sacrificed an offering, his sins were being covered over, or removed so that he would not be under the judgment of God. Behind this statement is the idea that because sinners are guilty, God, the righteous judge, must punish them. But through the death (blood) of Jesus, the sins have been covered, and therefore God is able to pardon the sinner. Paul expresses it as God being both just and the justifier of the sinner. (Rom. 3:26) The book of Hebrews teaches that not only did the death of Jesus cover over the sins of everyone who will live after the

death of Jesus, but it was the death of Jesus which covered over the sins of the Old Testament saints as well. (Heb. 10:8-12) The animal sacrifices they offered in faith to God only temporarily covered sin until God's final sacrifice came to cleanse all who have faith. (Rom. 3:25-26, Heb. 9:26)

d. Because of the cross, God can forgive sins (Eph. 1:7)

A just and holy God cannot overlook sinful rebellion of mankind; there must be punishment. But out of love God wants to forgive sinners, not bringing upon them the punishment they deserve. Because of the cross God is able to forgive our sins. In Col. 2:13-14, Paul pictures this as if there was a long list of all of our sins (debts). When Jesus died on the cross, that long list of sins was placed on the cross, and there Jesus paid the penalty of those sins. The New Testament talks about two types of forgiveness. First, there is the legal forgiveness, a once-for-all declaration that we are "not guilty." When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are declared "forgiven" by God for all sins we have committed in the past, those we commit now, and those sins we will commit until the day we die. The reason Paul could say there is no condemnation against us (Rom. 8:1-4) is because legally Jesus paid the penalty for all of our sins and so there are no more sins for which we can be punished with eternal death. Second, there is relational forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 tells us that when we confess our sins, God will forgive us of our sins. John is not writing about the punishment of eternal death, but the loss of fellowship that results when we knowingly sin against God. Suppose a child disobeys his father's command. Does that mean he is no longer a son to his father? No. His disobedience destroyed their fellowship, not his being a son. And when he asks forgiveness of his father, his being a son is not returned, but the fellowship restored. In the same way, we become children of God by believing on Jesus (Jn. 1:12). When we sin, that does not cancel being God's children. Rather, it hinders our fellowship with God. Our repentance restores our fellowship, not our being God's children.

e. The cross provides the basis for justification (Rom. 3:21-26)

The Greek word "justification" was a legal term often used by judges in the courtroom when they pronounced an accused man "not guilty." Some scholars describe this term as "just as if I have not sinned." The book of Romans explains how the reason that God could look at sinful men and women like us and still declare us "not guilty" is because Jesus died and paid the penalty of our sin on the cross. This term (also translated "righteousness" in some translations) has three different meanings. First, it is used to describe the fact that we have been legally declared "not guilty" for our sins at the time we believe in Jesus' death on our behalf. Second, it is used for an amazing truth that when we accept Jesus as our personal Savior, his righteousness is credited to us. So God does not just see us as being "not guilty" of our sins, but having the goodness of Jesus upon us. (2 Cor. 5:21) Third, it refers to living our lives in line with God's desires. The first two usages of justification or righteousness take place when we are first saved. It describes the basis for why the holy God can make us his children and allow us into heaven. It is not that we are to earn God's favor and heaven by being good enough. No one can do that because everyone is a sinner and legally should be punished with eternal death. Rather, it is because on the cross our sin debt was paid for and Jesus' righteousness credited to us by God. The last usage of righteousness refers to something that increases as we grow in spiritual maturity throughout our lives.

The fact that we are freely justified by God without any work on our part is a hard truth for many Christians to accept. Most of us want to believe that we must somehow do something to earn God's forgiveness. We think salvation is similar to paying back money which we borrowed from the bank. We must work hard, earning enough money to re-pay to the bank what we owe it. In the same way, we think that somehow if we sin we will cause God to think "So and so is now good enough and I will forgive him

and let him into heaven." Many Christians carefully fast and give to the poor, or attend church regularly, or stop drinking alcohol; all with the desire to somehow earn God's favor. In some countries, people will walk on their knees for many kilometers until their knees are bloody to pay for their sins and be acceptable to God. All of these actions come from the human thought that we must somehow do something great to somehow cause God to say we are good enough.

But the Gospel is very different. The cross declares that Jesus paid it all. His death paid off any requirements that God has to make us acceptable to God. All we have to do is accept that Jesus has paid all requirements for us to be acceptable to God on the cross, something the Bible calls "faith." But what about good works? Although the Bible insists that we cannot earn God's favor by doing good things, it does teach that if a person is truly a follower of Jesus, their lives will change and they will do good things. (James 2:17) As Paul said, we are now "new creations" (2 Cor. 5:17) with a new heart and a new desire to obey God. Now our actions come out of a desire to show our love for Jesus and our desire to submit to him as the Lord of our lives. It is important for Christians to understand this, because as long as we are trying to earn God's forgiveness, we are not saved. No one can ever do enough to cause God to forgive him. It is only when we accept Jesus' free gift of salvation that we become God's children. (Eph. 2:8-9)

Q. 19. a) Describe different things people do to seek to earn God's favor and forgiveness. b) Explain what these actions illustrate about their "trusting Jesus" for their salvation. c) If we don't do good things in order to be saved, why do we need to change to live in obedience to God?

Q. 20. Read Rom. 5:8-11, 2 Cor. 5:20-21; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 1:21-22. What do these verses say happened on the cross?

f. On the cross Jesus "reconciled" God and sinners, and also reconciled all people to each other no matter what their tribe (Rom. 5:8-11, 2 Cor. 5:20-21; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 1:21-22)

The story of Adam and Eve describes for us what happened between God and mankind when sin entered into the world. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God. Mankind and God became separated. Notice in this story that God did not separate himself from people, but people hid from God. However, God went looking for Adam and Eve, seeking to be reconciled with them. In the same way, the cross is God's way of seeking to be reconciled with all mankind. On the cross Jesus provided the basis for God to accept sinners back into fellowship with him. The cross was God's way for mankind to put away their enmity towards God and be accepted into full fellowship with him. Jesus became the mediator between God and mankind (1 Tim. 2:5) and brought peace. (Rom. 5:1) When we tell others about Jesus, we are serving as God's ambassadors of "reconciliation," much like ambassadors are sent to two warring countries to bring peace between them. (2 Cor.5:20)

But the cross did much more than this. The cross is the basis for reconciliation between humans, even between tribes who have been fighting for many years. Enmity between tribes usually comes from remembering sins committed against each other, often in the distant past. But when people from those tribes come to Jesus and accept his death for all of their sins, God declares them "not guilty." Therefore, the past sins have been taken away and can never be held against them. That is why Christians from different tribes are to realize that the dividing wall of enmity has been taken away by Jesus on the cross. (Eph. 2:11-22) So when they come to church and see people of another tribe, they must realize that all of the wrongs of the past have been paid for and taken away. Now they are supposed to accept each other as if they have never done anything wrong. The Bible even goes further than this. We are told that because of what Jesus did on the cross, there is no longer anything that divides in the church; no tribal or sexual or

economic divisions. (Gal. 3:26-29) Instead, we are now all part of God's new family, citizens of God's new country where tribal divisions play no part. One of the saddest facts in the church today is that we still have walls of division. Different tribal groups will often not worship together, using language differences as their excuse. Because of the enmity, when the leaders make a decision believers immediately look to how it helps or does not help their tribal group. And when church members choose elders or leaders, they do not ask who is a godly example or spiritually qualified, but only who is from their tribe and use this as the basis for electing leaders. All such actions are a declaration that we do not believe that Jesus' death did away with divisions. Rather than believe what the Bible says about Jesus' removing such walls of division, we are living as if Jesus' death did not pay for their sins, only ours.

Amazingly, this reconciliation was not limited to humans. Instead, in some unknown way, all of creation was reconciled at the cross. (Rom. 8:19-21; Col. 1:20)

Q. 21. a) List ways the walls of division are still seen in the church. b) What do such actions reveal about our understanding of what Jesus' death accomplished?

Q. 22. Read Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 1:1-2, 18-25; 2:1-11, Rom. 6:1-7, Jn. 3:14-15, 8:28; 12:31-32; 16:9-10, 18:32; Col. 2:10. What do these verses teach about what Jesus did on the cross?

g. The cross was the place where a new holy people of God, the church, was formed (Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 1:1-2, 18-25; 2:1-11)

In the Old Testament, starting with Abraham, the focus of God's attention was upon the Jews. God wanted to use the Jews to draw all nations into faith in God. But when Jesus died on the cross, a new covenant was formed between God and all who choose to believe on Jesus. God is creating a holy people from every tribe and nation. (Rev. 5:9) It is important as you interpret the Old Testament to remember that it is the old covenant and that there are differences between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God. Although faith was always the condition for God to save people, the Old Testament people were a physical nation with a defined tribe, a clear border, kings, priests, and a special Temple in which God placed his glory. In the New Testament, God's people are part of a spiritual kingdom which has no borders, no king-like leaders, no need for war, and no priests who are distinct from others. Instead, as God's children, all believers are royalty, all are priests, all are able to speak God's word like prophets, and God dwells in hearts, not in buildings.

h. The cross was where the control of our sin nature was broken (Rom. 6:1-7)

Grace refers to God's free gift of salvation to those who do not deserve it when they accept Jesus as their Savior. And the greatness of grace is reflected most when a great sinner, like the thief on the cross, humbly repents and chooses to follow Jesus. But if grace is best seen when sin is worst, shouldn't that mean that we should encourage sin in our lives? This is what some people were accusing Paul of teaching. Paul's response was that a life where a believer knowingly lives in sin is an impossibility. The reason is because on the cross, our sin nature was crucified, and its hold over us has been destroyed. Free from the control of sin, we now are able to serve Jesus in obedience and holiness. Baptism is a picture of what took place on the cross; our sin nature was crucified with Christ (pictured when a believer is being put under the water) and our new nature born much like Jesus rose from the dead (pictured in the believer coming out of the water once again). Paul taught that someone who blatantly continued in their life of sin had not experienced the work of the cross to break the power of sin nature, so perhaps he is not a believer at all. In other Bible passages, Paul warned that those who habitually and blatantly sin will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

i. The cross was the place where Satan was defeated (Jn. 3:14-15, 8:28; 12:31-32; 16:9-10, 18:32; Col. 2:10)

The Romans had a practice of generals taking people they had captured on the war front and parading them before the people to show their total defeat. For Paul, this illustrated what happened to Satan on the cross. Jesus, defeating Satan, took away people from his kingdom and Satan and his followers became captors on display to Jesus' power. We don't fully understand what happened between God and Satan when Jesus died on the cross. But from Scripture we can know the following:

1) Satan lost his hold over people so that Christ could take people from Satan's kingdom and put them in God's kingdom.

2) Satan lost his legal ability to accuse people before God. Before Jesus died on the cross, he could accuse God of being unjust by forgiving sins. "They are sinners, and they must die." Satan could have legally argued. But when Jesus died on the cross, God could rightly answer Satan "They are sinners, but their punishment has already been paid for by Jesus. So I am legally right in accepting them into my kingdom."

3) Satan's hold over people of the fear of death was broken. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, the followers of Jesus have nothing to fear. Death for them is not a curse but a blessing since it is a "tool" to usher God's people into the presence of God. In fact, Paul could say that for the believer death was preferable to physical life, because it caused the person to be eternally with Jesus. (Phil. 1:21-24)

4) Satan's ability to hold people as prisoners to their sin nature was broken. Although believers do sin, Jesus broke the hold of the sin nature so that now they have the ability to choose not to sin.

Q. 23. a) List some things that Jesus' death on the cross accomplished in your life. b) Pray right now and thank God for each of these things.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. Read 1 Pet. 2:18-24. a) What do these verses teach about the possibility of Christians being unjustly punished? b) What attitude did Jesus have towards unjust punishment that we are supposed to follow? c) From the story of Jesus' crucifixion, list the different unjust actions against him. d) List four situations believers often face that they are the recipients of injustice. Discuss how Jesus would expect his followers to react in each situation.

2. Although claiming to be religious and concerned about obeying regulations for worship, the Jewish leaders were willing to murder an innocent man. a) What does this reveal about the human tendency to follow external religious rituals but do things that are clearly outside of God's laws? b) List examples of how Christians today, even church leaders, are more concerned about following some regulations of the church than mercy, honesty, love, and justice. Why do they do this? Why is it wrong? c) Why do you think God says that the evidence of a true relationship with him is demonstrated in integrity, honesty, love and justice more than keeping rules?

3. On the cross, Jesus forgave those who killed him. a) What does this teach us about what is expected from us when others do something that makes us angry? b) Describe situations believers face that they struggle with forgiveness. What was the result of lack of forgiveness to them, to their family, and to the church? c) What should church leaders do to help members of the church forgive each other and unbelievers for the hurts that have been caused?

4. Review the 8 things that the cross accomplished. a) Why is each one important? b) Do you think most believers understand what happened on the cross? If not, what should your church leaders do to make sure people understand the meaning of the cross? c) Many preachers today focus upon Jesus' healing power and material blessing. What difference do you see between their emphasis and what the New Testament emphasizes? d) Review the teachings given to new believers in your church. What should be taught so that it more clearly follows the Bible's emphasis of the purpose of Jesus' life and death?

LESSON TWENTY-FIVE

FIRST DAY

Habtemariam watched with great sadness as his mother and father were buried, both on the same day. They had been killed in a car accident. He felt a sense of deep grief and loss. But above all, he felt hopeless. Death was so final. He wept loudly with a sense of no hope.

For mankind, the most fearful and hopeless experience is death. In order not to die, people will spend all of their money just to extend their lives for a few months. And when someone they love dies, there is a deep sense of loss and hopelessness.

Q. 1 a) Describe how you have seen people face the death of someone they love or their own death with a deep sense of dread and hopelessness. Why did they feel this way? b) Read 1 Thess. 4:13-18. What did Paul say followers of Jesus were not supposed to do? c) Why do you think he said this? What event changed the believers' hopelessness to hope when it concerns death? c) Read 1 Cor. 15:1-8. List all of the things which Paul said were part of the Gospel which he passed on to the Corinthians.

When we hear the word "Gospel," we usually think of Jesus dying on the cross. We tell people how Jesus died for their sins and that they must believe on Jesus' death in place of their sins if they want to be saved. However, the New Testament clearly tells us that the resurrection of Jesus is also an important part of the Gospel. In fact, Paul said that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, everything else preached as part of the Gospel was false (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Each of the four Gospels end the life of Jesus with the amazing story that Jesus did not stay in the grave, but rose on the third day. It was not the story of the death of Jesus which turned fearful disciples into fearless followers of Jesus who were willing to die for their faith. Rather, it was the news of the resurrection which made the greatest impact upon the disciples. In the New Testament, the word "hope" became closely associated with the resurrection of Jesus and the implications of his resurrection for followers of Jesus. The disciples insisted that Jesus' resurrection was the "first fruit" (1 Cor. 15:20) or the guarantee that all believers will also rise from the dead and that is why in the midst of their sorrow, unlike Habtemariam, believers can still have hope.

How do we prove that Christianity is true? What argument can we use to seek to convince others that the Gospel is true? Christianity's strongest proof is that Jesus rose from the dead. Others have died on crosses. But no one has risen from the dead without the external help of another person. (e.g. like the Shuman woman's son- 2 Ki. 4:18-37). However, Jesus rose from the dead with no human to assist him. And unlike all others who rose from the dead, he did not die again. Not too many years ago, a famous atheist journalist decided to prove to all that Christianity was false. After much study, he was forced to admit that the resurrection of Jesus was one of the most verifiable facts of ancient history. He became a follower of Jesus and wrote a book called "Who moved the stone?"

The story of the resurrection of Jesus is unclear as to what happened when since none of the Gospel writers give us a clear order of events on that famous Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead. It seems that each writer used people they knew as the basis for their story, and so each writer only provides a part of the story. And yet, a careful examination of the facts do not reveal any major inconsistencies

which would indicate that the story is fiction. Rather, we get the impression that eye witnesses were relating what they saw and experienced.

Q. 2 Read Mt. 27:62-66; Mt. 28:1-15; Jn. 20:1-13. a) What did the religious leaders ask Pilate to do on Saturday? b) Why did they want Pilate to do this? c) Who went to the tomb first and witnessed the empty tomb? c) What happened that caused the soldiers to be afraid? What did they do? d) What rumor was spread by the soldiers? e) Who were the first two apostles who witnessed the empty tomb?

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

JESUS RISES FROM THE DEAD

1. The religious leaders assign soldiers to guard the tomb (Mt. 27:62-66)

We saw last week how Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus in a tomb as some of the women followers of Jesus watched. Since it was almost 6 PM when the Jewish Sabbath started, everyone left to return to their homes in time for the Sabbath celebration. That night, the religious leaders began to talk about Jesus. They did not feel guilty about killing an innocent man. Rather, they remembered Jesus prophecies that the Temple would be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. (Mt. 12:39-42) Somehow, they had probably heard what Jesus had on three occasions taught his disciples that he would rise again on the third day. (Mt. 16:21; 17:23, 20:19) This prophecy concerned them. They were not worried that Jesus would rise from the dead as he promised. Rather, they were afraid that in order to make it appear that Jesus rose from the dead as he prophesied the disciples would take the body of Jesus from the tomb and hide it. With no body in the tomb they could proclaim that Jesus had risen from the dead. The disciples were so afraid of the religious leaders that they were hiding behind locked doors. (Jn. 20:19) The last thing on their mind was the resurrection of Jesus, so they were not thinking about stealing Jesus' body. But the religious leaders did not know that.

Early Saturday, the religious leaders went to Pilate once again. In doing so, they no doubt broke their own regulations concerning the Sabbath. But it was more important for them to stop any possible rumors about Jesus than it was for them to honor their religious regulations. Again we see the hypocrisy of religious leaders who claimed to obey God's Word, but were willing to put aside their laws in order to do something unjust.

Pilate agreed to do two things. First, he put a seal on the stone which had been placed on the opening of the tomb. Most likely this was a large stone which ran along a groove to cover the mouth of the cave. There would also have been a sign saying that if anyone broke the seal, they would be punished by the Roman government. Second, Pilate assigned soldiers to guard the tomb in case the disciples came back to take the body. These soldiers knew that it was a major offense for them to fall asleep while watching. In fact, if a soldier fell asleep while on watch and if a prisoner escaped, the soldier was often executed. (e.g. Acts 12:18-19, 16:23-28) No doubt the religious leaders went back to their homes thinking that they had finally defeated Jesus. Not only was he dead, but now no one would be willing to steal Jesus' body and say that Jesus was alive. But God is not limited by any human attempt to stop him and his plan. These soldiers might be able to protect so no humans could enter the cave. But who could guard the inside and stop God from rising Jesus from the dead? No one, not even the mighty Roman government.

2. The women go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body (Mt. 28:1-10, Mk. 16:1-8, Lk. 24:1-18, Jn. 20:1-13)

Jesus had predicted that he would rise on the third day. But how was Sunday the third day? Clearly Jesus had not been in the grave 72 hours (three full days) but only about 40 hours. Both the Jews and the Romans figured days in a similar way. They believed that any part of a day was classified as a day. So the first day was Friday (from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM). The second day was Saturday (from 6:00 PM Friday to 6:00 PM on Saturday). (Note: The Jews started counting days at sundown of the day before, so Saturday began at 6:00 PM on Friday afternoon, not Saturday morning like we understand days.) The third day was Sunday (6:00 PM Saturday to 6:00 AM Sunday) We do not know for sure what time it was when Jesus rose from the dead, but it was probably early Sunday morning before light.

In Jewish culture, women were supposed to wash the body and make sure it was properly covered with cloths. The women knew that Joseph and Nicodemus were unused to preparing bodies for burial, and they had been in a hurry to finish the burial of Jesus before Sabbath started and when all work stopped. These women were determined to show their love to Jesus one more time by making sure he was buried properly. Although they could have done this Saturday after 6 PM, it would have been dark and difficult to work on Jesus' body. So they waited until early Sunday morning when the light first arose and they could finish the burial procedures.

Sometime before the women reached the tomb, several things happened.

First, there was a great earthquake which must have frightened the people in Jerusalem. This was the second earthquake in just two days, following the earthquake when Jesus died on the cross. Although the first earthquake on Friday afternoon was no doubt a symbol of the terrible judgment being faced by Jesus when he bore our sins on the cross, the second earthquake was a symbol of God's great power when Jesus rose from the dead.

Second, it appears the stone covering the mouth of the tomb fell over since later an angel would sit on it (Mt. 28:2). The stone did not fall away in order to let Jesus out. With his resurrection body, things like doors or stones did not stop Jesus' body from going through them. (Jn. 20:19) Instead, the stone was removed so that people could look into the tomb and see that Jesus' body was no longer there.

Third, the soldiers who were used to facing enemies and dying, were so frightened by what they experienced (earthquake and angel) that they fainted. Later they woke up and quickly went to the chief priests to report what happened.

None of the Gospel stories clearly tell who was involved in this first group of followers to be told of Jesus' resurrection. All of the Gospels focus on Mary Magdalene. Matthew and Mark indicate that at least three women were present, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, the mother of James and John. As they drew near the tomb, they were wondering who would roll away the stone so that they could go inside to attend to Jesus. The stone was so large that it took several strong men to move. According to Luke, the women entered the tomb and saw the place where the body of Jesus was supposed to have lain, but it was now empty. Confused, they left the tomb, and suddenly they saw two angels. (Matthew only mentions one angel, perhaps the spokesman, but Luke shares that there were two angels.) The women were very frightened at the appearance of the powerful angel. But the angel reassured them, telling them that Jesus was no longer dead, but risen. The women were supposed to tell the rest of the

disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead, and then together go back to Galilee where Jesus would meet with them.

Hidden in this story was a cultural issues which would have shocked the early Christians. They would have been surprised that the first witnesses of the resurrection were women and not men. In ancient times, the Jews had such a low view of women that no one would trust what a woman said. In fact, the Jews would not allow the testimony of a woman in court. But God has no such prejudice. In fact he loves women as much as men, and he honored these women who loved him so much that they were willing to risk their lives in order to anoint Jesus' body with spices. They were the first to hear of the resurrection and see him alive. By including this story, the writers were seeking to teach that in the church, rather than women being treated as unimportant, women were acceptable as equals. Paul would later say that in the church, there was no male (more important) or female (less important), but all were one (equal). [Gal. 3:28]

Q. 3 a) Why do you think Jesus honored women by choosing them to be the first to witness his resurrection? b) Contrast Jesus' attitude towards women with how many men in churches today treat women. Why do you think some Christian men still have a very low opinion of women and what they can accomplish for Jesus?

No doubt struggling to understand what had happened, the women walked back to where the disciples were fearfully hiding. Mary Magdalene shared what had happened at the tomb and that the body of Jesus was missing. But the apostles did not believe the women, perhaps thinking that they were just being emotional. Peter and John (the "second disciple") decided to go to the tomb and see for themselves. Both ran to the tomb, but being younger, John ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. Standing outside the tomb, he looked in and saw the empty tomb. Peter, however, went right into the tomb. In the tomb he saw two piles of cloths. First, there were the cloths that Jesus' body had been wrapped in. It would appear that these cloths were still lying wrapped up in the position of where Jesus' body had been, but now there was no body in them. This is in contrast to what happened with Lazarus, who had to have the strips of clothing unwound from his body. And then there was the separate cloth which had been wrapped around Jesus' head. It was placed to one side close to where Jesus' head had been. John followed Peter into the cave. Writing his Gospel many years later, John shared how he immediately believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Out of all of the disciples, only John believed in Jesus' resurrection before he actually saw Jesus. (This truth is important to us today. Many people will only believe on Jesus if they see some miracle. If those miracles do not take place, they don't believe, or their faith grows weak. John is teaching followers of Jesus who never saw the physical Jesus that they should be like John, trusting in the risen Lord even though they can't see him, or see miracles.) The rest of the disciples however, were still filled with doubts. It was too difficult for them to understand that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Mary had followed the disciples back to the tomb, and after Peter and John returned to the room where the disciples were hiding, she stayed at the tomb crying. The word "*crying*" in Greek refers to the deep, loud crying people do at funerals, a cry of hopelessness at the death of a loved one. Her crying would be especially bitter, for not only did she still believe that Jesus was dead, but now she thought someone had stolen Jesus' body. To be properly buried was very important to Jews.

Suddenly she saw two people in the tomb who asked her what she was crying about. Not realizing that they were angels, she told them that someone had stolen Jesus' body. Although these angels had told

her about Jesus' resurrection, Mary could still not believe the truth that Jesus had risen from the dead. Hearing a noise, Mary Magdalene turned around and saw someone else. Like the two men who talked with Jesus but did not recognize him (Lk. 24:16), she did not recognize Jesus. She assumed that Jesus was a gardener and had taken the body so she begged him to give her the body of Jesus. It was only when Jesus called her name that she recognized that it was the risen Jesus. She called out "*my rabbi*" and fell at Jesus' feet and wrapped her arms around his legs.

Scholars debate what Jesus meant in telling Mary not to hold on to him for he had not yet gone to his Father. Jesus was not saying "Do not touch me" as some translations say; a more accurate phrase would be "Do not hold on to me." But what did Jesus mean that he had not yet gone to the Father? Some scholars think that Jesus was planning to leave earth and go to heaven immediately after he talked with Mary to present his "blood" (Heb. 9:12). By her clinging to him, she was hindering his going to present himself to God the Father. Jesus would then quickly return so that he could meet with the other disciples a few hours later. Other scholars believe that Jesus was indicating a change in how his disciples were to now relate to him. Whereas before they could treat Jesus more as a human friend, now Jesus was the risen Lord, and was to be treated as Lord. Jesus meant that Mary and we can't treat him casually like we do our human friends. In our love for Jesus and relationship to him, we must always remember that he is the risen Lord, the powerful God. That is why suddenly Jesus made a distinction between his relationship to God as Father and their relationship to God as Father. Although having the same Father, the relationship between Jesus as Son of God and believers as sons of God is distinct. Third, some scholars say that John was using this story to teach a spiritual lesson. As Lord, believers are never to "take hold of Jesus" as if to control him and force him to do what they want. Rather they are to acknowledge that Jesus is the risen Lord and let Jesus control them as they serve him. Often believers approach prayer in an attitude that they can order Jesus or God to do something. "Heal this person" they demand. Such an attitude goes against the truth that he is Lord and we are his slaves. A slave never orders the master to do something. He can only make a request. In the same way, followers of Jesus can only request ("if it is your will" - Lk. 22:42) God to answer their prayers and deliver them from their problems. Every answer to our prayers comes not as a right we claim, but as a mercy which we do not deserve. (Note: This story also went against a teaching in John's times that Jesus rose as a "spirit being." The fact that Mary could grab hold of him and later the disciples could touch him indicated that he had a true body.) Like expected of all believers, Jesus asked Mary to become his witness. She was supposed to go back to the disciples and testify that he was alive. The Good News was never meant to be something only for the disciples; it was to be shared with others.

3. The guards report what happened at the tomb to the chief priests (Mt. 28:11-15)

Throughout history, non-believers have offered three explanations of why Jesus appeared to rise from the dead but didn't. Some have claimed that Jesus did not actually die. Rather, on the cross, he lost consciousness. Thinking he was dead the soldiers allowed the disciples to take Jesus' body. In the cold tomb, Jesus revived and escaped. This view is foolish, for not only were the soldiers experienced in determining when someone was dead, the spear into his side verified that Jesus was dead. Another theory is that because the disciples were so convinced that Jesus would rise from the dead that they "dreamt" that he had risen. This psychological happening is similar to how some bereaved people will hear the "voice" of their loved one talking to them after the person has died. But it is clear from the Gospel story that none of the disciples expected Jesus to rise from the dead. Even when some saw Jesus and told the rest of the disciples that Jesus was alive, they still refused to believe. Third, it became common among the Jews to believe that the disciples stole Jesus' body to make it appear that he rose from the dead.

Where did this story start? Matthew 28:11-15 tells us why such a story was obviously false. The tomb was carefully guarded and sealed with a Roman seal. Fearful disciples who refused to fight for Jesus when he was alive would never have considered attacking these soldiers and stealing the body and risk the punishment of Rome. And if the Romans knew that the soldiers had been overpowered by a few disciples, they would have been executed, which they weren't. So it was clearly a rumor started by the Jews that the disciples stole the body.

After the earthquake the soldiers ran away. They did not go to the Roman leaders, probably because if the Roman leaders knew that the soldiers had fled, they would have been killed. The Romans were not lenient on soldiers who ran away from their post. Instead the soldiers went to the chief priests who had organized for them to guard the tomb. They reported to the priests everything that had happened. Obviously the priests knew that something unusual had happened. But their spiritual eyes were so blind that they did not even stop to think what the events meant, especially what the resurrection demonstrated about Jesus. The priests were not concerned with truth; rather they were concerned about their reputations. So they continued their unjust practices by bribing the guards and telling them to spread the word that the disciples had fought and defeated them, stealing the body. Knowing that such a report would have gotten the guards into trouble with their Roman commanders, the priests told the soldiers that they would assure their commanders would punish them. Clearly if this story was true, as the belief that Jesus rose from the dead spread, the Jewish leaders would have concentrated on finding the body of Jesus. But not once in the book of Acts do we read of the religious leaders seeking to find the body of Jesus to disprove what the disciples were teaching. They knew that it was impossible for them to disprove the disciples' claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. The empty tomb is Christianity's strongest proof that the teachings of Christ are true, that he is more than just a great prophet or teacher, but the one whom God rose from the dead.

Q. 4 a) Why is the resurrection of Jesus an important truth for Christians to believe? See 1 Cor. 15:12-32. b) Read Lk. 24:13-35. What did Jesus use to prove that the Messiah must die and rise from the dead? c) List some of the verses from the Old Testament you think Jesus might have used to teach the two men.

4. Jesus appears to two men on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35, Mk. 16:12)

Many hours passed as the disciples hid in their building filled with confusion. Was the news that Jesus was alive true, or was it a "ghost" that Mary had seen? they wondered. Towards the end of the day, two of the disciples decided to walk back to their home in Emmaus. This probably means that these two disciples were Judean followers of Jesus. After three days of sitting around Jerusalem, these two disciples finally gave up hope and walked home. Scholars do not know for sure where Emmaus was located, but Luke tells us that the town was 60 stadia or 11 kilometers away from Jerusalem. This journey would take several hours to walk.

As the men walked, they were talking about what had happened over the past three days. Just a week earlier, they had been very excited as they watched Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, and were filled with excitement as they believed the Messiah had finally come to provide political deliverance for the Jews. Their hopes were crushed, however, when Jesus was taken captive, given an illegal trial, and crucified. In the midst of that gloom and despair, suddenly word came from some women that Jesus had risen from the dead. These two men, along with the rest of the disciples, did not believe this, but they were now very confused. "What had happened to Jesus' body?" they wondered.

Suddenly Jesus appeared next to them, walking as if leaving the Feast of Unleavened Bread and returning home. Why didn't these two recognize Jesus whom they had followed as disciples? Perhaps Jesus, in his resurrection body, had changed so that it was not immediately clear whether or not it was Jesus. Or more likely God knowingly kept the two men from recognizing Jesus until after Jesus was able to explain the Old Testament more clearly to them. Believing him a stranger, they commented on how even a pilgrim to Jerusalem must have heard about the crucifixion of the famous Jesus, the healer, the one many thought was the Messiah. Over the next couple of hours as they walked to Emmaus, Jesus started with Genesis and from other Old Testament scriptures explained that the Messiah was not only a political deliverer, but the one who would die for the sins of mankind and then rise from the dead. What scriptures did Jesus use? We aren't sure. He probably started with Genesis 3:15 explaining the first prophesy of the Bible about how Satan would be able to bruise the heel of the descendant of Eve, but would in turn be crushed by that Son. Or he could have shared how the sacrifices of the Old Testament demonstrated that the Messiah would also have to die for sins. Maybe he explained Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 12:10. Although we don't know the specifics of what Jesus shared, Jesus taught a very important truth. Although the Old Testament does explain the history of the Jews and God's working with them, the Old Testament, and all of the Bible, was given to focus upon Jesus. There are thousands of prophecies in the Old Testament which he has fulfilled or will one day fulfill in a more complete way when he returns. In fact, the center of God's plans is not about America, Europe, or Ethiopia. Rather, the center of his plan was Jesus. Even now, the center of God's plan for history is not about our personal blessing or the power of any nation. Rather, it concerns the kingdom of Jesus, which is spreading to all nations.

When they reached the town of Emmaus, the two disciples still did not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. However, listening to Jesus explain God's Word caused their hearts to be filled with a sense of hope. Jesus pretended to continue his journey. In Jewish culture, it was very impolite to show up uninvited to a person's home and assume that the family would feed them and give them a place to sleep. Jesus waited until the two invited him to come into their home before he entered. Having invited him into their home, the three began to eat together. Usually it was the host who was responsible to pray for the food and share the food around. But Jesus assumed the position of the host, broke the bread and prayed for it. Suddenly they recognized Jesus. But Jesus immediately disappeared. During the 40 days before his ascension when Jesus would appear to the disciples, he no longer traveled normally, spending hours walking. Rather, he would suddenly appear and then disappear again.

These disciples were so excited that, even though it was probably evening, they traveled the long journey back to Jerusalem. As they burst into the room where most of the disciples were staying, they shouted out that they had met with Jesus, that the rumor of his resurrection was true.

None of the Gospels tell us about another appearance that had taken place between the time when the two disciples left Jerusalem and returned. Jesus appeared to Peter. (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:2-3)

Q. 5. Review some of the prophecies Jesus could have used to explain his death and resurrection to these two men. List what they prophesy about his death and resurrection.

SECOND DAY

Q. 6. Read Lk. 24:35-43 & Jn. 20:19-23. a) Where were the disciples when Jesus appeared to them? b) What did Jesus say to them? c) What did Jesus do to show them that he had a real body and was not only a spirit being? d) Explain why you think Jesus wanted his disciples to believe that his resurrection included a real body.

5. Jesus appears to the disciples (Lk. 24:35-43; Jn. 20:19-23)

As the two disciples shared the story of how Jesus appeared to them on the road to Emmaus, even though the doors were securely locked, Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst. His sudden arrival startled the disciples and many thought that Jesus was a "ghost."

Jesus wanted these disciples to have absolute proof of his physical resurrection. So he gave them three evidences.

First, he told them to look at the marks from the crucifixion which still remained on his body. There were the marks in his wrists and on his feet from the nails. These marks were not open sores like we would expect from a new wound. Rather, they were probably scars indicating where Jesus had been physically nailed to the cross. When we get to heaven, the scars on our bodies, the imperfections that are marks of coming from a cursed world, will be taken away. But for Jesus, it seems his scars will be with him for all eternity because they are the marks of becoming a curse on our behalf. As the book of Revelation shows, as John saw the resurrected and ascended Lord, Jesus appeared as a "Lamb who was slain." (Rev. 5:6) So today in heaven, the scars of the crucifixion remain on Jesus.

Second, Jesus invited the disciples to actually touch his body. A ghost only has the appearance of a body, not a real body. But Jesus experienced not only the resurrection of his soul, but the resurrection of his body. And unlike Lazarus and others who rose from the dead, Jesus' resurrected body was his eternal body similar to what all followers of Jesus will experience at the end times. (1 Cor. 15:20-23) Third, Jesus ate some food. He was not hungry, but wanted to prove that he was not a ghost.

Again we see how important truth is. The Gospel writers did not want people living years after Jesus' death and resurrection to think that Jesus only rose from the dead spiritually as some false teachers taught. To the early Christians, this truth that Jesus physically rose from the dead was very important. It was the "hope" which encouraged them when they faced death, often through persecution. They knew that if Jesus rose from the dead with a physical body, they too would rise from the dead with physical bodies like him. That is why the resurrection of Jesus is called the "first fruits" from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:23) The hope which the New Testament Christians looked towards was not the hope of earthly blessings; rather it was the hope of the resurrection of the dead and the eternal blessings which Jesus promised after death.

The reality that Jesus rose from the dead was never to be a truth only kept among believers. Rather, it was good news that was to be proclaimed to the whole world. So Jesus did two things to prepare the disciples for this ministry of sharing the Good News to all people.

First, Jesus gave them the commandment to take the Good News to all people (Jn. 20:21) Jesus said that his followers of Jesus were supposed to continue his ministry. God the Father had sent Jesus to earth to minister and die for the sins of the world. Now Jesus was sending them for a similar purpose, to selflessly minister so people can hear about Jesus and believe. A careful study of this verse in Greek reveals some important truths. When Jesus said that the Father had sent him, he used a tense which indicates that although Jesus has completed the task which God asked him to do by dying on the cross, the mission of reconciling the world back to God the Father through the Son was incomplete and must continue. Therefore, Jesus sent the disciples to continue the mission. The tense of the command given to the disciples is a present tense, meaning that it would be a continual command throughout history. Each generation and each church is commanded to "go." The responsibility to take the Gospel throughout the world is not only given to the richer western churches. God has given them a part in his program. But the command is also given to the poorer African countries. It is given to each church in Ethiopia. Every church has the to command to go with the Good News to all of the world.

Q. 7. What is your church doing to fulfill this command? What is it doing in its community? What is it doing throughout the remote parts of Ethiopia? What is your church doing beyond the borders of Ethiopia?

In our days we must be very careful that we do not allow the desire to have good church buildings, beautiful choir robes, and expensive musical instruments distract us from this command of Jesus. Could one way that Satan is defeating us be seen in how we have been distracted by these things and so little of our people and resources are given to take the Gospel to the world? Isn't this disobedience to the command?

Second, Jesus breathed on his disciples the Holy Spirit. (Jn. 20:22) This verse has caused a lot of debate among Christians. The first problem is that the book of Acts describes the coming of the Holy Spirit as happening fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost. So in what way was the Holy Spirit given at this time? Scholars have offered different interpretations seeking to harmonize what Jesus did here and the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. Some scholars believe that this was a "temporary" giving of the Holy Spirit until the full coming of the Holy Spirit 40 days later. Other Christians use these verses to teach that the coming of the Holy Spirit is in two stages. John was teaching that all Christians receive the presence of the Holy Spirit upon belief in Jesus Christ. But Acts is indicating that some believers receive the power of the Holy Spirit (as evidenced by speaking in tongues) after they are saved. Other scholars believe that Jesus did not actually give the Holy Spirit because there is no evidence that the Holy Spirit came upon them at this time. Rather, this was a symbolic action which is the promise of the Holy Spirit which would be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Another view is that John was not presenting the story of Jesus chronologically, but was seeking to teach the whole story of salvation as one event- which included the death, resurrection, ascension, and the giving of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. John knew that Jesus actually gave the Holy Spirit to his disciples later in history, but he wanted to teach the following truths:

a. Jesus wanted to stress that he is the one who gives the Holy Spirit to his followers. A careful study of John indicates that God the Father and God the Son are both involved in sending God the Holy Spirit upon believers. Some passages refer to the Father sending the Holy Spirit. (Jn. 14:16, 26) But here, the emphasis is upon Jesus sending the Holy Spirit. The act of "blowing" the Holy Spirit upon them was a symbolic action that Jesus did to reinforce the understanding that Jesus was taking the Holy Spirit whom God had given him and was passing that Holy Spirit on to the disciples. Unlike what some Christians teach, there is no indication that the Holy Spirit can be passed from one person to another by the act of blowing.

The book of Acts does not support such actions. In Acts the Holy Spirit is usually given to a unique group of people through the Jewish symbolic act of blessing, which is the laying on of hands.

b. Jesus wanted to stress that the Holy Spirit was given to all of his followers. The disciples were aware of God's Old Testament pattern of working where some leaders or prophets would get the empowerment of the Holy Spirit but most wouldn't. But for the first time in history, Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to all disciples. In each story in Acts when a group of people received the Holy Spirit, everyone in the group got the Holy Spirit, not only a few in the group.

c. Jesus passed on the Holy Spirit without any preconditions from the disciples. They did not have to fast and pray or become more holy. Jesus gave the Spirit to each of the disciples as a gift.

d. The ministry of the Holy Spirit was closely linked with the ministry of witnessing about Jesus. Many Christians assume that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is linked with spectacular things like speaking in tongues, performing miracles, or giving words of prophecy. And the Holy Spirit does reveal his presence in these ways on occasion. But consistently throughout the Bible, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is closely linked with the command to witness. (See Acts 1:8) The two major ministries of the Holy Spirit revealed in John was the empowerment for witnessing and teaching truth to followers of Jesus (Jn. 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:8-11). Other ministries are secondary or supportive to these two major ministries of the Holy Spirit.

Notice how the Holy Spirit is also linked with the ministry of forgiveness which places one in a right relationship to God. It is important to understand the context of John 20:22-23. The Bible is clear that only God has the right to forgive sins, not people. That is why the Jewish leaders got so angry at Jesus when he claimed to forgive sins. (Mk. 2:5-11) In this context, it is clear that the forgiveness of sins is the right of the Holy Spirit, not the right of people. The disciples were responsible to tell the message of the Gospel, explaining how people can be forgiven of their sins. But it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to forgive the sins when a person believes on Jesus, or to withhold forgiveness of sins when a person refuses to believe on Jesus. All followers of Jesus are able to do is confidently proclaim that when people trust Jesus' sacrifice for their sins, their sins are forgiven on earth and in heaven. And they can strongly warn others that when they reject Jesus' sacrifice for their sins, their sins will not be forgiven on earth or in heaven. There is no evidence either here or in the rest of the New Testament that the ability to declare a person forgiven or not forgiven resided in the apostles or in Peter, contrary to what some churches teach. (See explanation of Mt. 16:18 earlier.) Rather, forgiveness of sins rests with the Holy Spirit who works through the followers of Jesus as they proclaim the Gospel.

The Jewish religious leaders understood that their role as teachers was very serious. They believed that it was through the accurate interpretation and proclamation of the Old Testament laws which brought about the forgiveness or lack of forgiveness of people. So this verse strongly warns Christians, especially evangelists and pastors, that they must be very careful and accurate in what they say. If what they teach is not accurate, they are causing the people to go away un-forgiven by God. But if they accurately proclaim the Gospel, they are giving the people the opportunity to have their sins forgiven. But always, it is the Holy Spirit who forgives, not people.

Q. 8. Read Jn. 20:24-31. a) What did Thomas refuse to believe? b) What did he say when he saw the risen Jesus? c) Whom did Jesus say was more blessed than Thomas or the other disciples?

OTHER POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES OF JESUS

1. Jesus appears to Thomas and the rest of the disciples (Jn. 20:24-31, Mk. 16:14)

When Jesus appeared to the other disciples and commissioned them to take the Gospel throughout the world, Thomas was not present. When Thomas heard that the risen Jesus had appeared to the rest of the disciples, he refused to believe it. Thomas wanted clear proof that Jesus is real and struggled having faith without the clear proof. There are many Christians today who are similar. They want to see a miracle to make sure that their faith is valid, and when the miracle does not happen, they tend to give up their faith. Or they face an intellectual challenge, an unexplainable event or the death of a loved one, and they become filled with doubt.

For a whole week, Thomas heard about the resurrection of Jesus, but kept refusing to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. Thomas demanded the same experience that the other disciples had enjoyed, the ability to physically touch Jesus and see his scars, before he would believe. For a whole week, Jesus did not appear again to his disciples. It was Sunday again (eight days included the first Sunday) and the disciples were still gathered together in a room. The door was still locked, probably out of continued fear of what the Jewish religious leaders might do to them. Suddenly Jesus stood in their midst and told Thomas to put his finger into the scars on his side and hands. Clearly, Jesus, although he had not been physically present among his disciples, had been listening to the discussions the disciples had been having throughout the week, and knew what Thomas had said.

Thomas needed no further proof that Jesus had risen from the dead. He also made a great advancement in his understanding of who Jesus is. Thomas was the first of the disciples to call Jesus not only Lord (which could be interpreted "master") but also "God." For a Jew to consider anyone outside of God the Father as God was a big step of understanding, similar to how it would be for a Muslim to make the same statement today. The early Christians knew that Jesus was more than just a great prophet. In a way that they did not understand nor seek to explain, they knew Jesus was God just like God the Father is God. It is true that the New Testament never explains the doctrine of the Trinity. It was not until hundreds of years later that the Church sought to define what the Trinity meant, that there was somehow ONE God in THREE persons. The early believers did not try to explain this mysterious truth. They knew that there was one God. (Jms. 2:19) But they also knew that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were all God. (Mt. 28:19) This is an unexplainable truth, far beyond the ability of humans to understand. It is a truth we accept by faith.

Jesus wanted to teach Thomas, and all believers, that faith without proof was a greater faith than faith that has proof. The early disciples had the privilege of having physically seen Jesus, both before his death and after his resurrection. We often wish we could have the same privilege. "If I could only see Jesus, it would be much easier to believe" we think. Or today there are many Christians who say, "If only I could experience a great miracle in the name of Jesus, it would be much easier for me to believe in Jesus." But belief that demands proof is a weak faith. And often a faith that is based upon proof will disappear when those miracles are not present. So Jesus told his followers that they must learn to have a faith that is not based upon visible proof, but a commitment to Jesus which is based upon a conviction that the Gospel of Jesus being the risen Savior and Lord, even if it might not seem like it at the moment.

Q. 9. a) Explain how some people base their willingness to believe in Jesus upon witnessing a miracle. b) Describe how you have seen such people often give up their faith when those miracles do not continue as expected. c) If we should not base our faith upon what we see with our eyes, what are we supposed to use as the basis of belief?

2. Jesus appears to seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Tiberius) (Jn. 21:1-14)

Q. 10. Read Jn. 21:1-14. Describe what happened when Jesus appeared to his disciples.

Jesus continued to make appearances to various followers over a period of forty days. (Acts 1:3) Probably sometime in the second week, the disciples left Jerusalem where they had been celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and returned to Galilee. Jesus' appearances were infrequent. Perhaps one day Peter got tired of waiting for Jesus to come, so he decided to go back to finishing, the profession he had before he chose to follow Jesus. Or it could be that Peter thought that he needed to go back to work so that he could have food for his family and the disciples. James and John, who used to fish with Peter, decided to join him as did Thomas, Nathaniel, and two other disciples. Although they fished all night, which is the best time to fish, they caught nothing. No doubt tired and discouraged, early in the morning they started for the shore where they kept the boat. They saw someone on the shore who asked them if they had any fish. They were forced to admit they didn't have any fish. The man then told them to throw out their net on the other side of the boat. It must have been difficult for the disciples to do this. They were very tired, and they were the fishermen, not the one on the shore. But they obeyed and caught many fish. Although over 60 years passed since this event when he wrote this story, John still remembered that there were 153 fish.

When John saw this, his mind no doubt went back to a similar event three years earlier when after a night fishing without success, Jesus had also asked Peter to throw his net on the other side of the boat and he caught a lot of fish. (Lk. 5:1-11) John immediately knew that the man on the shore was Jesus. Peter was so impatient to see Jesus that he jumped out of the boat and swam about 90 meters to the shore. By the time he got there, Jesus already had a fire going with fish roasting on the fire and bread. Where did he get these things? Obviously, Jesus, the creator of all things, created them for his disciples who were hungry. As the boat came ashore, Peter went to help the other six men haul in the fish and sort them. The disciples and Jesus then ate breakfast together.

It is hard to know why John included this personal story of seeing the resurrected Lord. We can see Jesus' love for his disciples, so that even when he was not permanently with them, he was still aware of their physical needs. He was also still the miracle working God who could help them catch fish when it seemed impossible. And when Jesus blesses a person, he gives in abundance.

Q. 11. Read Jn. 21:15-23. a) What three questions did Jesus ask Peter? b) How did Peter answer each question? c) What three commands did Jesus give Peter? d) What prophecy did Jesus give about Peter?

3. Jesus reinstates Peter to a position of caring for Jesus' flock (Jn. 21:15-23)

All of us know the embarrassment of realizing that we have disappointed someone we love. Inside we are sorry for what we said or did which caused the other person to be hurt. But often we are too proud to apologize. So every time we see the person, we act cold to them and the friendship is lost.

This was the situation between Jesus and Peter after the resurrection. Peter had promised that he would be faithful to Jesus, even if it meant he would die with Jesus (Jn. 13:37-38). But then, Peter denied that he knew Jesus three times. Peter had wept tears of repentance and regret, no doubt asking God to forgive him. But now after the resurrection of Jesus, every time that Peter saw Jesus, he felt uncomfortable with him. Things weren't what they once were. It was probably this embarrassment which kept Peter from going to the cross to be with Jesus when he died, unlike John who was there (Jn. 19:25-27). But Peter did not know how to return the relationship to what it once was. As is common in all human relationships, restoring a relationship means that one person must take the first step. Jesus did that with Peter. Peter had denied Jesus three times, so Jesus asked Peter a question three times to show Peter that he was totally forgiven.

During the early church times, as persecution from the Romans grew, there were Christians who denied their faith. Later, when persecution decreased, they wanted to return to the faith. Some Christian leaders insisted that since they had denied Jesus, they should not be accepted back into the faith. Other leaders wanted to make it so easy that these people could return to the faith without ever facing the truth that what they did was evil in God's eyes. It seems that Jesus was showing another way. He wanted Peter to understand how wrong it was for him to deny Jesus. But he was also telling people like Peter that they could return to the faith, but they must make sure that following Jesus and not saving themselves from persecution was more important.

Q. 12. a) Describe a situation when you have seen someone who has sinned and disappointed others have a difficult time humbling themselves, asking forgiveness, and working to restore relationships. b) Describe how you have seen church leaders be reluctant to forgive someone who has fallen into sin or who has renounced their faith during times of persecution. c) Describe how you have seen church leaders be too easy on those who have sinned so that they do not learn from their mistakes. d) Suppose two young people came to you and said that they had fallen into sexual sin. How could you counsel them in a way that both emphasizes the seriousness of their sin against God, but also shows the forgiveness which Jesus offers?

After eating breakfast together, Jesus probably asked Peter to go for a walk along the shore of the sea with him. As they were walking, no doubt there was an awkward silence between them. Jesus broke the silence with a question "Peter, do you love me more than these?" Scholars debate what the "these" refers to. Was it to the fishing boat and so Jesus was asking him whether he loved Jesus more than his profession of fishing? It is difficult for Christians to love Jesus and desire to obey him when it causes them to lose their job. Or did the "these" refer to the other disciples and so Jesus was asking Peter whether his love for Jesus was greater than the love the other disciples had for Jesus. It is easy for Christians to examine their love for Jesus by comparing themselves with other Christians. Since they appear as more "spiritual" than other Christians, they become self-satisfied. Most likely Jesus was asking Peter whether he loved Jesus more than he loved the other disciples who were his close friends.

In the Old Testament, God told the Jews that they were to have no other "god" before him. Another way to say this is to say that they were to have nothing in their lives which they loved more than God. Not many of us worship other gods today. However, we often have things which we love more than God. It can be family, or education, or wealth. We know we love something more than God by evaluating what we are willing to do to get what we want. If we know that God does not want us to cheat on a test, but we cheat so that we get a good mark, then education and getting a good mark is our "god"- we love it more than Jesus because we chose it over what God wants. Or if we choose filling out a DV to go to America when we

know that God has asked us to serve him in Ethiopia, then clearly going to America has become our "god" and Jesus is now in second place. So Jesus was asking Peter if he was in first place in his life or something else. Peter insisted that Jesus was his first love.

In seeking to restore Peter to the position of being a faithful, obedient disciple, Jesus focused upon two major truths:

First, Jesus insisted that at the heart of being a disciple is "love." Christians often use two other reasons to get someone to be a follower of Jesus. Some use "selfishness" as a way to get someone to follow Jesus. "Come to Jesus and you will be blessed with material blessings or health" they encourage. Such a statement indicates that we are asking people to follow Jesus out of self-love, not out of a love for Jesus. Another motive that Christians use is fear. "If you do not follow Jesus, you will go to hell" they emphasize. It is true that people who do not believe on Jesus will face judgment. However, Jesus did not focus upon fear as the major reason for becoming one of his followers. Rather, like Peter, Jesus asks us to follow out of love. When we love someone, we live seeking to do things which will bring them pleasure. We don't focus upon what is convenient for us or what we want. So Jesus was telling Peter that as a follower, he was to follow Jesus not because he would get a high position in the church, or get rich, or escape persecution- but simply because he loved Jesus.

Second, Jesus insisted that love for Jesus is primarily evidenced through service. "Peter, if you really love me, take care of my sheep." Jesus told him. God enjoys it when we worship him and when we tell him that we love him in songs of worship. But it is easy to do that. It is much more difficult to serve Jesus in how we handle our money, how we use our time, or how we look for ways to use our spiritual gifts to serve others and help them grow in their faith. Love is more than the words we say; rather we must demonstrate our love in action. God does not bless us just so that we enjoy things. Rather, God blesses so that we can then be his instruments to fulfill his purposes (Ps. 67:6-7). For instance, God blessed Abraham so that Abraham could bless the world. (Gen. 12:3)

This passage provides important teaching for church leaders. Why should a person become a church leader? Clearly, it is not so that they will gain honor as an "elder." Nor is it so they can gain some financial gain or so that they can enjoy the power of controlling others. Jesus meant that the foundation of godly leadership is love for Jesus. And when a person loves Jesus, they willingly serve him. The major way leaders demonstrate their love for Jesus is by taking care of Jesus' sheep, meeting their physical, and especially their spiritual needs. They work to help them grow spiritually into mature, productive followers of Jesus. When Jesus asks them to take care of his sheep, they give their time and finances to help others grow spiritually. (Note: Jesus insisted that believers belong to him, not to the church leader. Church leaders begin to lead for a wrong purpose when they think that the members of the church are their members, not Jesus' sheep.)

Q. 13. a) Describe how serving Jesus out of love results in being a better disciple than when we follow Jesus because we want something from Jesus or are afraid to disobey him. b) Explain how service for God with our whole lives is a clearer evidence that we do love Jesus than saying that we love Jesus. c) Examine your heart. If Jesus asked you "Do you love me more than these?" how would you answer him? What would you show as evidence that you love him?

Jesus turned from challenging Peter to love him above all things, to reminding Peter that following Jesus would come at great personal cost. Jesus foretold the eventual death of Peter because of persecution. Jesus told Peter that there would come a time when he was old that Peter would be taken to a place he did not want to go and die there. Jesus never promised his followers an easy time if they followed him. Church history tells us that around 64 AD, about thirty years after Jesus' prediction, Peter was working in Rome. The Emperor Nero captured him and he was taken and crucified.

Peter was not so much worried about what would happen to him in the future, but what would happen to John who was following them. Peter asked Jesus if John would also die for his faith. Peter had the same mistaken idea that many of us have of what is "fair." He thought that if Jesus is fair, he must bless everyone equally or everyone must have similar suffering in life. Or he must cause everyone to have the opportunity to be a leader or have a great spiritual gift. Jealousy over differences among people and leaders is a major cause of divisions.

Jesus was not happy with Peter's question. As God, Jesus has the right to do whatever he wants with each person. He has the right to give one person material wealth and let another person be poor; or give one minister the ability to heal and do miracles and another a less spectacular gift. He gives some good health and he allows others to struggle with their health or some couples are able to have children and others are not. Jesus told Peter that if he allowed John to stay alive until he returned, that was not Peter's responsibility. Like us, Peter was supposed to leave all of these decisions up to God. Rather than comparing ourselves to others, we are to focus on the one thing that is important, which is following Jesus out of love. So Jesus told Peter "Follow me."

Q. 14. a) Describe ways that people compare themselves to each other and get jealous or bitter when they do not seem to have as good of a life or as great a spiritual gift. b) What does this reveal about their willingness to trust God to make the decisions in their lives? c) Explain why following Christ with all of our beings, no matter what happens to us, is the most important truth that we can remember throughout our life?

4. Jesus appears to his disciples in Galilee (Mt. 28:16-20, Mk. 16:15-18)

Q. 15. Read Mt. 28:16-20. a) Where did this appearance of Jesus take place? b) What was the command that Jesus gave the disciples?

One day Jesus told the disciples to go to a specific mountain where he would meet with them. We do not know which mountain Jesus was referring to. It is interesting that on that mountain there were two opposite responses among the disciples. Some worshipped Jesus. This is another indication how the disciples' understanding of Jesus increased after the resurrection so that they were ready to worship him. A Jew was careful to only worship God, so clearly this indicates that they had already begun to view Jesus as greater than just a man. But we are told that others continued to doubt. This would have been the third time most of them had seen the risen Lord, so it is amazing that they still doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead.

On that mountain for the second time Jesus commissioned his disciples to take the Gospel to the whole world. In the Greek language, Jesus only gave one command- to make disciples. The Great Commission as this verse is sometimes called, is not a call to tell the Gospel and get people to believe.

Rather it is a commission to make people followers (disciples) of Jesus. Our churches are filled with people who have made a public confession that they believe in Jesus. But if we carefully look at their lives, there is often little evidence that they are seeking to follow Jesus as their Lord. Through their actions or their choices, it is clear that their priority is not the Lord. We must understand that the Great Commission is about making people followers of Jesus, resembling him in how they live and think.

The Greek language also clarifies the calling of every church. It is to take the Gospel to every people group. The word translated "Gentiles" is actually a word meaning all of the tribal groups of the world. Until every tribal group in the world has a vibrant church, no church has the right not to participate in taking the Gospel throughout the world. Any church that is not sending out evangelists to unreached tribal groups is a church living in open disobedience to this command. Amazingly, the book of Acts shows how even the disciples were slow to take the Gospel to other peoples. In spite of Jesus' clear command, the disciples would not leave Jerusalem until God sent persecution to force them to leave Jerusalem for other parts of the world. How tempting it is for churches to think primarily about themselves; their church building and their programs- and forget totally about the command to go to all people groups!

Jesus said that the disciples were supposed to do several things which would turn people into true followers of Jesus.

First, there must be the sharing of the Gospel concerning Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and how sinners can be reconciled to the holy God. In Romans 10:13-15, Paul expressed this need to share the Gospel so that people can believe by asking a question "How can they believe unless they are told? And how can they be told unless there is someone sent?" So the first step to someone becoming a follower of Jesus is the step of hearing the Gospel because someone has obeyed Jesus and shared the Good News with them.

Second, the 11 disciples were told to baptize those who had believed. Throughout the book of Acts we always see that as soon as a person agrees to become a follower of Jesus, they immediately symbolize their washing away of sins and being separated to Jesus by the act of baptism. Becoming baptized is not a choice, but obedience to a command. And its' major purpose is not for someone to become a member of a certain denomination, but to proclaim to everyone that the person has publicly chosen to follow Jesus.

Third, there must be teaching. Much of the Gospels consist of teachings of Jesus describing what it means to follow Jesus. No person knows initially when they believe on Jesus all of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. They don't realize the implications to their walk with God, or to their relationship to their family or neighbors, or how it impacts their job, etc. Being a follower of Jesus means that we are committed to growing in understanding about what Jesus is asking us to be and do. Unfortunately, few churches do a good job teaching the new believers what their choice to follow Jesus means and how it impacts all of their lives. Because this teaching ministry is so weak, our churches are filled with people claiming to be followers of Jesus but who do not resemble Jesus.

Q. 16. a) Explain how Jesus' description of the Great Commission is different from how many in the church understand it. b) How would our witnessing change if we realized that we are asking people to commit to resemble Jesus in all of their lives, not just for salvation? c) What are some people group in Ethiopia that you know of who have little witness about Jesus? d) What do you think God wants you and your church to

do about those people groups? List some specific things your church could do to reach at least one of those groups with the story about Jesus.

When evangelists go out into the unreached tribes with the Gospel, there is often fear in their hearts. "Will anyone listen to the Gospel I am preaching?" they wonder. And when they are thrown in prison or killed, it is easy for followers of Jesus to become discouraged. Jesus taught three major truths which all believers must remember at all times. First, God has given Jesus all authority and power. The authority does not lie in Satan's hands to oppress God's people and defeat them. Nor does it lie in the hands of government or other religious leaders who outnumber them and often persecute them. Jesus insisted that all authority was in his hands. Jesus is on the throne controlling the universe, not Satan and not any human leader. So we can trust Jesus' sovereign control no matter what happens. Second, the whole Trinity is involved in the working in a believer's heart. Although the book of Acts emphasizes that people were baptized in Jesus' name, here Jesus insisted that baptism must be based upon one name (showing the unity of God as one), in three persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). No one can understand how Christians can follow one God in Three persons, but the New Testament expresses this truth so followers of Jesus are to believe it in faith. Third, Jesus is the ever present God. No matter where the followers of Jesus go, to the remotest tribes or in the darkest prison, they are to remember that Jesus is there with them. Christians can never truly say "God, why have you abandoned me?" Jesus promised to always be with all of those who follow him, no matter what the circumstances.

Q. 17. a) Describe a difficult situation a believer, especially an evangelist, might face. b) Explain how these three things would be an encouragement to the believer at that time.

Q. 18. a) Read 1 Cor. 15:5-8. List the different people whom Paul said were witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. Which of these do you think are recorded in the Gospel story? b) Read Lk. 24:50-53 & Acts 1:3-11. 1) How many days did Jesus stay after his resurrection until he went up to heaven? 2) What question did the disciples ask Jesus? 3) What was Jesus' response? 4) Where were the disciples to remain and why?

In his teaching about the resurrection of believers in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul insisted that the resurrection of Jesus is a foundational part of the Gospel. The resurrection verified that Jesus' death was acceptable to God the Father; otherwise he would not have raised him from the dead without the assistance of another human. But it was also the foundational truth which confirmed that followers of Jesus would also one day rise from the dead. Jesus' resurrection body would be the pattern for how our future resurrected bodies will look like. To emphasize that the resurrection of the dead was not a story made up by followers of Jesus, Paul listed some of the appearances of Jesus. A few of these appearances we know about since they are recorded in the Gospels. But many of them we do not know about indicating that the stories found in the Gospels are only some of the stories that were available to the early Christians. For instance, we do not know when Jesus showed himself to his half brothers, and yet something happened to them so that they turned from unbelief to believing in Jesus in those 40 days when Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection. (Acts 1:14)

5. Jesus' final appearance to the disciples and his ascension to heaven (Acts 1:3-11, Mk. 16:19-20, Lk. 24:44-53)

We do not know how long the disciples remained in Galilee and how often Jesus appeared to them there. Perhaps that is where Jesus appeared to his brothers and they finally put their faith in him, and

maybe he appeared to the large crowd of over 500 people. Sometime toward the end of the forty days that Jesus made frequent appearances to his disciples, the disciples returned to Jerusalem. To the Jew the figure "forty days" had rich meaning. Frequently throughout the Old Testament, the figure forty was used for a period of time when God met with people, such as Moses on the mountain (Ex. 24:18) and Elijah traveling in the wilderness (1 Ki. 19:8). Here Jesus is meeting with his followers for forty days. Since Pentecost was fifty days after Passover, this would mean that Jesus left his disciples about 10 days before the Holy Spirit descended on them.

On the final day that Jesus was on earth, Jesus had one final meal with his disciples. He used this time to talk about his spiritual kingdom. Jesus was not interested about talking about earthly blessings but about God's spiritual kingdom, his reign over his people.

Jesus also focused upon the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, commanding his disciples that they were supposed to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. Three years earlier John had foretold that Jesus would perform a greater baptism than John, a baptism not of water but of the Holy Spirit and fire. Interestingly, Jesus did not mention the baptism of "fire" but only the Holy Spirit. This would seem to indicate that the "fire" was a reference to Jesus second coming, when he would bring judgment upon unbelievers. It was very difficult for the disciples to understand that Jesus' kingdom reign would be delayed. No matter what he taught them, they kept asking Jesus whether he would not start the political kingdom of the Messiah, ruling over the Jews and delivering them from the Romans.

But Jesus warned his disciples to not worry about the "when" of his return. Many Christians need to remember this. There are some Christians who are so focused on trying to determine if Jesus is going to come on a certain day that they do little work for Jesus. Jesus tells his followers that they are to leave the timing of his return in the hands of God. Instead of asking when that return would take place and thinking about that, the disciples were supposed to emphasize taking the Gospel throughout the whole world. This is the third time that Jesus gave his Great Commission. He broke that great commission down into three geographical regions- Jerusalem (where the disciples were currently living), Samaria (geographically close among people with a similar culture), and to the end of the earth (distant people with very different cultures).

From this section we can learn two important lessons:

First, the coming of the Holy Spirit is again linked primarily with witnessing about Jesus, not to spectacular spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit would do miracles, but his most important work is to enable the followers of Jesus to witness to all people so that he can perform his greatest miracle, the salvation of people. Be careful that in seeking the spectacular gifts of the Holy Spirit, that you don't forget his most important reason for the Holy Spirit's coming to live in believers.

Second, each church is responsible to actively witness. The primary role of the church is not to build a large building or enjoy gathering to worship. Rather, the focus of the church is always supposed to be taking the Good News about Jesus to people outside the church. And each church is to not only be concerned about its immediate vicinity. Rather, it is to be taking the Gospel continually to the surrounding people (its Jerusalem), to neighboring people with similar cultures (its Samaria), and to all people (its ends of the earth). It is important to note that this is not just the responsibility of western missionaries who have more money. Rather it is the responsibility of every church, in every culture.

Q. 19. a) Why do you think Jesus emphasized the need of the Holy Spirit in witnessing? Why do you think few believers today focus upon this ministry of the Holy Spirit? b) Make a list of what would be equivalent to your Jerusalem, your Samaria, and your ends of the earth. How well do you think your church is doing in reaching to each of these three areas? If they aren't sending missionaries to all three areas, what do you think your church should do to fully obey Jesus' commandment?

Shortly after giving his disciples this final command, Jesus took his disciples from Jerusalem to a small hill near Bethany called the Mt. of Olives. When they reached the mountain, Jesus stopped and turned around to his disciples (probably about 120 people- see Acts 1:15). He raised his hands and blessed them. And then as they were watching, he slowly ascended into heaven until he was covered by the clouds. It is unlikely this cloud was ordinary clouds like we see in the sky. Throughout the Bible, clouds are closely linked with God when he comes to reveal himself with mankind. (Ex. 16:10) God had earlier met with Jesus on the mountain in a cloud. (Lk. 9:34-35) Jesus had also predicted that he would return with clouds. (Mt. 24:30) So these clouds are the clouds of glory that surround God. Shocked, the disciples continued to look up into the sky, perhaps hoping he would return to them.

Two angels appeared and told the disciples that Jesus had gone back to the Father. But one day he would return and then he will reign on the earth with absolute authority. His return would be similar to his departure. In other words it would be visible for all to see. Jesus will come in bodily form. And there would be clouds to accompany him. Maranatha! Come quickly Lord Jesus. Are you ready for his return? (Note: Jesus had warned his disciples before he died that there would be a time when the king would be absent. [Mt. 24-25])

Q. 20. a) Do you think followers of Jesus are waiting with expectation for Jesus to return for them? b) Describe how the attitudes and actions of believers would change if they expected Jesus to return for them at any time—perhaps this week.

Thus ended the earthly life of Jesus. This does not mean that the work of Jesus is ended. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that he is in heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father, ruling as prime minister over God's kingdom. As Rev. 5:1-6:1 shows, God the Father has given Jesus the scroll of history to unfold. Romans 8:34 tells us that he is there ever interceding for us. Rev. 19 reminds us that one day King Jesus will return from heaven to earth with his army of saints. At that time, he will establish his kingdom and rule over the earth. We live in the days between the first coming of Jesus to rule in the hearts of men and women and the second coming of Jesus to rule in absolute authority over the earth. Let us faithfully follow our king now as we patiently wait for that perfect kingdom. As Jesus told his disciples, blessed is the one who is found faithfully working for Jesus when he suddenly appears (Mt. 24:45-47). Are you faithfully serving him so that you will hear from him "well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your master's happiness?" (Mt. 25:21-23)

THIRD DAY

REVIEW OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Q. 21. Make a list of major lessons you have learned about being a follower of Christ from this study on the life of Christ.

We have come to the end of our journey of studying the life of Christ. Each of the four Gospel writers describes the life of Jesus from different perspectives, but each had two major purposes in writing; a) to describe for us who Jesus is and how he paid for our sins by dying on the cross, and b) to explain what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Although the Gospels give historical truths, they were primarily teaching documents to show what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus of Nazareth.

1. WHO IS THIS JESUS WHOM CHRISTIANS WORSHIP?

"Believe on Jesus and you will be saved." is often what we tell non-Christians. But who is Jesus, the one they must believe in? Saving faith always includes having correct knowledge about that in which we are putting our faith. The four Gospel writers wanted Christians to have a clear understanding of who Jesus is.

Q. 22. From your study of the life of Christ, list his characteristics that the authors wanted the followers of Jesus to understand.

Q. 23. Read Jn. 1:1-5, 18. Summarize what these verses teach about who Jesus is.

a. Jesus' existence in eternity past

A proper understanding of Jesus does not start with his birth in the stable in Bethlehem. Unlike all other humans, Jesus did not have a beginning. The Apostle John teaches that Jesus, as the "Word," lived in eternity as God, together with God the Father. He is God's unique and special Son, equal with God. He is also the Creator of all things that exist. Jesus was God long before he became man, and when he was born and took on human flesh, God visited this earth as a human.

b. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament

God's eternal plan of salvation appears first in Genesis 3:15 when God told Satan that although one day Satan would be able to strike the heel of the seed of the woman, that seed would crush the head of the serpent. Over the years, God revealed more information about this coming seed of the woman to the Jews. He told Abraham that through his seed (i.e., from the Jewish nation) all nations of the world would be blessed. (Gen. 22:18) God later told David that his descendant would become the eternal king of the Jews. (2 Sam. 7:11-16). Jesus was called the son of David, which reflects his coming from David's line, and he is also called the king of the Jews, the rightful heir to David's throne and the one over God's eternal kingdom. The Jews later gave this special son of David the name "the Anointed One" (which is the word "Messiah" in Hebrew or "Christ" in Greek) [Ps. 132:17]. This would become the Christian's favorite title for Jesus. Hundreds of years before his birth, the prophets later predicted that Jesus would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). These are just a few of the prophecies of the Old Testament that the Gospel writers explained that Jesus fulfilled. As Jesus taught the two on the road to Emmaus, all of the Old Testament points towards the Lord Jesus Christ, predicting his death, burial, resurrection, and coming reign.

c. Jesus is the Savior, releasing humanity from bondage to sin and eternal condemnation

Who is Jesus? People give different answers to this question, but the Gospel writers predominately insist that above all, Jesus is the Savior, the one who came to deliver people from sin and God's judgment. Over 1/3 of each of the Gospel stories describes the death of Jesus on the cross. There are some preachers who claim that Jesus came to bring political liberation from oppressive rulers or economic salvation from poverty. Although the Gospels do foretell a time when Jesus will defeat those who oppress the people of God (Lk. 1:67-75) and a time when those who are downtrodden will be lifted up (Lk. 1:51-53), their primary emphasis is that Jesus came to save people from their sins. It was on the cross where Jesus died in our place and the sins of mankind were paid for. The possibility of the gift of eternal salvation for all who trust in Jesus was accomplished, rather than earning salvation through a person's own efforts.

Q. 24. Reflect on the last time an invitation was given to believe on Jesus in your church. Which type of "salvation" was emphasized there? Why do you think many evangelists emphasize Jesus as the answer for physical problems (sickness, lack of riches) rather than focus on the cross of Jesus and how he died to take away our sins?

d. Jesus is Lord over all

Although the Gospel writers each report that Jesus was human, entering the world as a baby like every other child and had human needs like being thirsty and needing to eat, they insist that Jesus is the Lord who should be worshipped. Even when he was a baby, the shepherds and wisemen worshipped him. The disciples soon realized that he was more than a simple human as they knelt in awareness of his holiness and power (Lk. 5:8) and later openly confessed that Jesus was God's very Son (Mt. 16:16). After the resurrection, they would honor him as Lord and God (Jn. 20:28). Jesus openly claimed to be one with the Father, the one who fully understood the mind of God and fulfilled his will (Jn. 10:30). Although it is difficult to explain the mysterious truth that Jesus is both God and man, throughout history, Christians have believed this truth. The Gospel writers, however, wanted the followers of Jesus to go beyond just believing that Jesus is God, they wanted everyone to understand the need for submitting their lives to Jesus' lordship. As Jesus asked, "Why do you call me Lord and don't do what I say?" (Lk. 6:46)

Unfortunately, many Christians try to separate the truth that Jesus is Savior and Jesus is Lord. They joyfully accept Jesus as Savior of their sins, but they resist submitting to living in obedience to him. They willfully sin against God, and yet want to run and confess their sins in church to gain forgiveness. But the Bible does not allow us to separate these two truths. Paul warned that salvation comes to those who confess (with both their mouths and their lives) that Jesus is Savior and Lord (Rom. 10:9-10). Jesus warned that on the day of judgment he would punish those who claimed to be followers of Jesus, but did not live in obedience to Jesus (Mt. 7:21-23).

Q. 25. a) Describe how many Christians separate the truth of Jesus being Savior and Jesus being Lord and seek salvation but not obedience. b) What are the negative effects that can be seen in their lives? c) How would you change your presentation of the Gospel to keep these two truths about following Jesus together?

2. WHAT DID JESUS DO?

Q. 26. a) Read Lk. 4:18-19. List the things that Isaiah said the Messiah would do. Explain how Jesus fulfilled these things. b) Read Jn. 20:30-31. What did John call the miracles of Jesus? c) List major works that Jesus did while ministering on earth.

"Who is Jesus and what can he do?" are important questions that all followers of Jesus need to understand. If this is not clear to them, they will have a difficult time leaving their old beliefs and overcoming their fear of evil spirits and continue to visit witchdoctors. The Gospel writers wanted the followers of Jesus to be convinced that no matter what the problem, Jesus is the solution. They do not need to turn to anything (like amulets, magic, curses) or anyone else (like angels, evil spirits, witchdoctors) for help. The Apostle John said that everything Jesus did was a "sign." Like signs on a road tell us how many more kilometers to the next town, so all of the things that Jesus did were signs telling us who Jesus is and what he can and will do for us. In our study we have seen the following:

a. Jesus has complete authority over creation

With only a spoken word, Jesus could calm the storms and still the winds (Mt. 8:23-27). He was even able to tell the disciples where to catch fish (Lk. 5:1-11). We live in a world filled with natural disasters like famines, earthquakes, and floods. As followers of Jesus, we do not have to fear any of these, for we know that he controls them to fulfill his will.

b. Jesus has complete control over any evil spirit

Satan is powerful, and it is natural for people to fear him. Some people also fear the spirits of their dead ancestors. So they go to witchdoctors, offer sacrifices under trees, put amulets on their children, or cover babies so that the buda spirit won't attack the child. They live in fear that their neighbors or a witch has cursed them and made them sick. The Gospels repeatedly demonstrate that no matter how strong the evil spirit might be, even if there a thousand spirits living in one person (Mk. 5:1-20), with a simple word they must obey Jesus and leave. As Jesus said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Mt. 28:18).

A follower of Jesus does not need to fear Satan or any attack of evil spirits. We must be alert to the many ways Satan can attack us, our ministry, and the church. But Jesus said that he has given his authority and power over spirits to us (Lk. 9:1, 10:19). When we pray "in Jesus' name," we function as Jesus' ambassadors, using his authority to command Satan to leave- and he must obey Jesus' power. However, we must be careful that we are working as obedient ambassadors. If we do not obey Jesus, then Satan has the ability to oppress us. As long as we are living in disobedience, we lose the authority to command evil spirits to leave us alone. We must first repent and return to an obedient life, and then we can effectively use Jesus' authority to command Satan and demons to leave. One author compares our sin to garbage and states that as long as there is garbage in a house, then rats will always be there. But if you get rid of garbage from the house, then the rats will leave. In the same way, when we get rid of the sin (garbage) in our lives, then the evil spirits (rats) quickly leave since they lose their right to influence us.

c. Jesus has complete authority over all disease

Everywhere Jesus ministered, he healed the peoples' diseases. There is no case where a sickness was too difficult for him to cure. When they are extremely sick and doctors cannot help them, many people go to witchdoctors. They sacrifice chickens and sheep, hoping to be healed. But the Gospels insist that for followers of Jesus, this is wrong. Belief in Jesus, the healer, means that we turn to him for healing. His

power to heal is greater than anyone else's. As ambassadors, Jesus has also given us authority to use his name to pronounce healing (Lk. 9:1). We must be careful when going to Christian healers that our focus is upon Jesus using them to heal us, not on them. They have no power in themselves to heal- it is only when Jesus chooses to work through them that Jesus' healing comes to us. A water pipe which brings water into our house is not the source of water; rather it is the well or spring that is the source of blessing. Jesus may choose to use people to heal or he may directly answer a sick person's prayers for healing. Or there are times when Jesus chooses to allow us to suffer from disease just like he allowed Paul to have a "thorn in the flesh." (2 Cor. 12:7-10) But if we are really followers of Jesus, we must turn to Jesus as the all-powerful healer.

d. Jesus has authority over death

The enemy that people fear the most is death. During the times when the Gospels were being written, some Christians, like James, Peter, and Paul, were killed because they chose to follow Jesus. In order to be faithful followers of Jesus during times of persecution, believers must conquer this fear of death. Jesus demonstrated to his followers that he had power over death. He easily caused the widow's son (Lk. 7:11-15) and Lazarus (Jn. 11:38-44) to rise from the dead. For Jesus, death was just like sleep, something that one wakes up from in the morning. Therefore, it is not something any believer should fear. Although death still causes the pain of separation from loved ones, for the believer, it is the instrument God uses to bring us into his presence. As Paul wrote, it is better to die and go to be with the Lord than to continue to live in this sinful earth (Phil. 1:20-26). As long as we live on this earth, as followers of Jesus we are supposed to seek to use our lives as ambassadors of Jesus to further God's kingdom. But when our time to leave this earth comes, we can face it with peace and joy, knowing that God has prepared a place for us in his eternal home (Jn. 14:1-3).

Q. 27. Review these four areas of authority that Jesus had. a) Explain why it is important for all believers to understand and by faith believe that Jesus controls these four areas in our lives. b) List some wrong things believers often do because they forget or don't apply in faith the authority that Jesus has.

3. WHAT DID JESUS TEACH ABOUT BEING HIS FOLLOWERS?

Q. 28. From this study about the life of Jesus, list some of the major truths that Jesus taught that clearly explain what it means to follow Jesus.

Jesus was also a teacher. When people heard him teach, they marveled that he could teach with authority, unlike any other teacher they had ever heard (Mt. 7:28-29). Although Jesus did teach those who were not his followers, much of his teachings in the Gospels were to explain to his disciples what it meant to follow him.

a. Jesus revealed the character of God the Father

A wrong understanding about the character of God leads to a wrong understanding about being followers of Jesus. So Jesus sought to correct people's understanding of God. In fact, the writer of Hebrews states that Jesus gave the most accurate and complete revelation of who God is, not only in his words but through his life. (Heb. 1:1-3) Like many in Ethiopia, the Jews thought God was distant from their lives, or they thought that God was angry at them, waiting for them to do something wrong so that he could quickly punish them. Rather than enjoy a close relationship with God, they began to think that they could satisfy God by keeping a long list of commandments, much like some people think they can appease the

spirits or ancestors by pouring out coffee on the ground before drinking some or leaving food or another sacrifice under a tree. Jesus revealed the following things about a believer's relationship with God:

1) God wants a close fellowship with his spiritual children similar to the relationship between a father and a little child. John wrote that by believing on Jesus, we become children of God (Jn. 1:12). The Jews were so afraid of God that they would not use his name. So they were shocked when Jesus taught them to call God "Ababa" when they prayed, the term used by small children for their father (Mt. 6:9, Rom. 8:15-16). Although Jesus insisted that we honor, respect, and fear God; Jesus also wanted his followers to know that they could have a close loving relationship with God. Like a loving father who enjoys listening to his small child, God our Father takes pleasure in listening to us.

2) Jesus wants his followers to love God more than anything else in life (Mk. 12:29-31). When asked what was the most important out of the 613 commandments in the Old Testament and the thousands of commandments religious leaders had added to Scripture, Jesus said that ultimately there are only two commandments that people must focus on. The first is loving God with all of their mind, strength, soul, and heart and the second is loving others as much as they love themselves. Every other command is contained within these two commands. Jesus simplified how his followers are to understand obeying God by focusing upon three important truths:

a) Followers of Jesus must focus upon loving God with a love that is based upon a close relationship with God and seeking to please him. The first two commandments in Ex. 20 remind us not to have any "gods" beside God. If we love anyone or anything more than we love God, then we are worshipping an idol. We can tell that something has become our god if we choose it rather than follow what God desires for us. This was so important that for a rich man whose money was his god, Jesus told him to give all of his money to the poor before he became a follower of Jesus (Mt. 19:16-24).

b) Love for God encompasses our whole life, not only our worship. Everything we do should be done in a way that honors him (Col. 3:17).

c) Love for God cannot be separated from love we should have for all people. We sometimes think God is only interested in our worship and service of him. However, Jesus refused to allow his followers to only think about their relationship with God; his followers must always seek to maintain loving relationships with all people. And as John reminds us, love must include practical help when others are in need (1 Jn. 3:14-18). As the story of the good Samaritan teaches us, this love is not only for our family, friends or people from our tribe, but for everyone we meet whom God reveals to us needs our help. (Lk. 10:30-37).

3) God has a deep longing to see his wayward children return to him, and when they do, he rejoices over their return (Lk. 15:7) and graciously receives them back into fellowship. One of Jesus' most powerful parables was about a son who left home and fell into a life of sin (Lk. 15:11-32). When he was miserable, he realized that even his father's slaves lived better than he did. The son decided to return to his father, asking only to be treated as a servant. His father had been longing for his youngest son's return, and seeing him, ran and quickly demonstrated his love, forgiveness and reconciliation. No matter what their sin, this story teaches us that God is always longing for sinners to return to him in repentance. Sometimes followers of Jesus think that someone is too evil for God to love and forgive. Or believers who have fallen into sin think they have done something so bad that God no longer loves them. Jesus wanted his followers

to remember that like the father, God is eagerly waiting for each sinner to return. In fact, God is like the one who leaves his 99 sheep to look for the one sheep who wandered away (Lk. 15:3-6). The Gospel story tells all that God seeks to do, even to the point of sending his Son to die on a cross for our sins, in order to bring each sinner back into a close relationship with God (Jn. 3:16).

4) As a God of holiness and justice, God holds people accountable for their actions. He does not forgive those who refuse to accept him as their Savior and Lord. If they choose to reject him, his wrath is upon them (Jn. 3:36) and they will face eternal condemnation (Jn. 3:18, Mt. 25:41). But God is also holding his followers accountable for how we use our time, money, spiritual gifts, etc. for his sake (Mt. 15:14-30). He generously rewards those who have lived their lives serving Jesus but disciplines those who squander the resources he has given them.

Q. 29. Review these four major truths Jesus taught about God the Father. a) Explain why it is important for followers of Jesus to know these truths. b) Which of these truths do you struggle to apply in your life? c) List some other truths about God the Father that Jesus taught or revealed.

b. Jesus revealed what following him consists of

Jesus was known as the "friend of sinners" (Mt. 11:19), yet he was sinless. Those people society considers to be blatant sinners, like prostitutes, felt loved and welcomed by him. Jesus sought to draw sinners back to God through love, not through harsh words of accusation. And yet, when people came to the point of choosing to follow him, he wanted them to think carefully about the implications of that choice. He told his followers that just as a wise person first considers his ability to build and complete a house before starting the work, so also everyone who seeks to follow him must think through what following Jesus means (Lk. 14:25-33). He describes two paths of life, the one of disobedience being wide and easy to follow and the one of following Jesus as being a narrow difficult path. Jesus admitted that only a few were willing to follow the narrow, difficult path of being his followers (Mt. 7:13-14). He even said that it took great effort of will and sacrifice to enter into the way of salvation (Lk. 13:24). Jesus did not mean that people had to do a lot of things that would earn their salvation. Rather, Jesus understood that it is very difficult for humans to openly admit that they are sinners, repent of their rebellious ways, and choose to become followers of Jesus. Jesus said that following him involved risk, like selling all they had to buy the pearl of salvation (Mt. 13:45-46). Jesus warned those who considered following him that this path was the way of the cross, the daily crucifying of the world's teachings and their sinful selfish desires and submitting to follow the Master (Lk. 9:23-26). Anyone who was not willing to put Jesus first in their lives, was not worthy of becoming his follower.

Q. 30. a) Contrast Jesus' teaching on becoming his follower to how we often present the Gospel in church. Explain what is similar or different. b) What do you think would happen in our churches if we explained that choosing to follow Jesus as a difficult, narrow road rather than an easy broad way?

How different the teaching of Jesus is to the way we often explain the way of salvation. We want to make the path of salvation broad so that people can easily follow it. Therefore, we invite people to become followers of Jesus so that they will be healed or receive material blessings. It is as if we are giving a bribe to get them saved. We rejoice in the multitude of people who claim to be Christians even if their lives reflect no desire to submit to his control over their lives. However, Jesus would rather have a few faithful

followers who live totally under his control than millions of so-called followers who continue to act like unbelievers.

c. Jesus encouraged his followers to examine not only their actions, but also their hidden motives

We often look at external actions to decide whether or not someone is following Jesus. Do they drink and dance? Do they attend many services and prayer meetings? Do they fast and pray? Do they wholeheartedly and emotionally worship? But Jesus taught that the primary evidence lies deep in a person and it is impossible for others to know this evidence. It was out of the heart that both good and evil comes (Mt. 15:16-20). In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7), Jesus illustrated this in different ways. It is not enough to avoid committing adultery, one has to get rid of lust; anger and insulting others was a sin just as murder was. Why one prayed or fasted or gave money was as important as the action of praying, fasting or tithing. If our motive is to cause others to think we are spiritual, then it is of little value. Spirituality, or the demonstration of our love and obedience to God in times of worship, is a heart issue, and if the heart (attitudes, motives) is not correct, then the worship is not acceptable to God. Jesus stated that actions like giving are measured by God not in how much money a person gives, but in how much of a sacrifice an individual is making to give. So a widow's 10 cents was actually a greater gift than a rich man's thousand birr (Mk. 12:41-44).

d. Jesus demanded that his followers demonstrate compassion upon those who are less fortunate than they are

Jesus reflected the heart of God when he showed special compassion for those who faced great challenges in life. The Gospel story shows how he went out of his way to raise the widow's only son from the dead (Lk. 7:11-15), or relate to women who were despised by men, even women who were immoral (Jn. 4). Whereas most people thought children were insignificant, Jesus demonstrated the importance of children, by allowing them to come close and blessing them (Mt. 19:13-15). In fact, Jesus felt so strongly about this, that he claimed that those who did not help those who were hurting would be punished (Mt. 25:31-46). If Jesus lived in Ethiopia today, I wonder who he would emphasize in his ministry. Would he reach out to the street children, the beggars, and those women who carry wood into Addis Ababa or sell a small pile of bananas by the side of the road seeking to get enough money to buy food for the day? Would he be displeased by how many churches honor the rich merchants and government officials and educated, indirectly despising the poor and uneducated? The Gospel story demonstrates that Jesus' ministry focus would be different from what many of us think is important.

e. Jesus emphasized that his followers were to be active witnesses wherever they are of the salvation God offers people

When a couple has their first baby boy, they do not keep quiet about the news. They joyously tell everyone who will listen to them. Friends come and congratulate them. Jesus insisted that his followers should have this type of excitement when telling others about Jesus who died for their sins and rose again. He repeatedly told them to be witnesses, not only to their neighbors, but throughout their nation and throughout the world (Acts 1:8). Just like Jesus sent out the 12 and later the 72 disciples, God asks his followers to send out people to joyously share about how sinners can be restored into fellowship with God the Father and receive the gift of eternal life. We are to be like the Samaritan woman who immediately told her whole town about Jesus (Jn. 4:39-42) or the man delivered from many demons whom Jesus commanded to tell those in his town about the deliverance he received (Lk. 8:38-39). Paul later wrote that

each of us has been commissioned as ambassadors of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:18-20). We are to speak on behalf of God, pleading with people to be reconciled with God.

Q. 31. a) Do you think most people claiming to be followers of Jesus joyously share the Gospel with others? If not, why not? b) Explain the similarity between the work of the ambassador of Ethiopia to England and the ministry of followers of Jesus to the world. What do you think church leaders can do to help each believer become a better ambassador of Jesus?

No doubt, there are many other important teachings that Jesus gave about being his followers. If we claim to be disciples of Jesus and not only believers in Jesus, it is important that we study what our master, Jesus, taught about the narrow road of discipleship. I trust God has used this book to encourage you in your journey of following Jesus.

If you are a church leader, spend time asking God to show you how you can teach all of the members of your church what it means to be a follower of Jesus. List your thoughts and then discuss them with the others leaders. Remember, Jesus said to those whom much has been given (like the knowledge of the Gospel), much is required (Lk. 12:47-48). Use your greater understanding of following Jesus to help others also understand how to be true disciples of Jesus.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

1. The early church proclaimed that the Gospel was not only about the crucifixion of Jesus but also his resurrection. a) Explain why the resurrection of Jesus is an important part of the Gospel. b) List the different appearances of Jesus and explain how they prove that Jesus has risen. c) Explain how the truth of the resurrection of Jesus can encourage Christians facing death from either persecution or disease.

2. Jesus chose women to be the first to witness his resurrection. a) Why do you think he honored them in this way? b) What does this truth teach us about God's understanding of women and their importance in the church? c) Describe ways women in your church can be encouraged to become more active in their witness of what God has done in their lives. d) What are things your church could change to make women be or feel more accepted and equal to men?

3. Jesus quoted the Old Testament Scriptures to show how he had to die and rise again. Make a list of those Scriptures that you think Jesus used to demonstrate how he is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

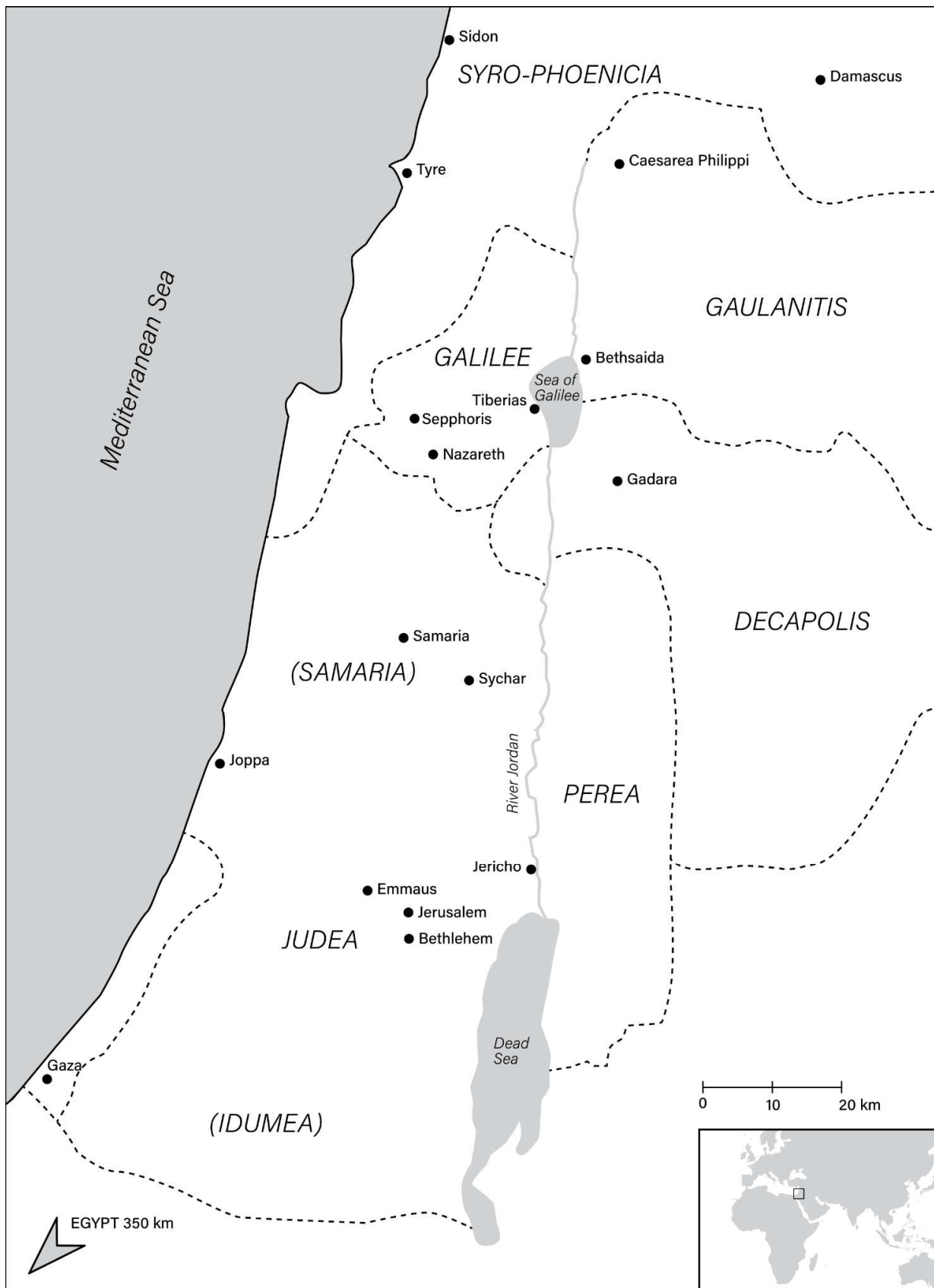
4. Before his ascension, Jesus repeatedly told his disciples to take the Good News throughout the world. a) Discuss what role your local church and denomination has in taking the Gospel into your neighborhood, into your tribe, into your nation, and into the world. b) What are other things they could do to advance the kingdom of Jesus?

5. Review together John 21:15-23. a) What are some lessons from this story about following Jesus? b) What are some lessons about serving Jesus? c) What are some lessons about comparing ourselves to other Christians?

6. Have each person share the major things they learned during the study of the life of Christ about who Jesus is, what he did, and what he taught about following him. Why are those lessons important for followers of Christ to know and apply?

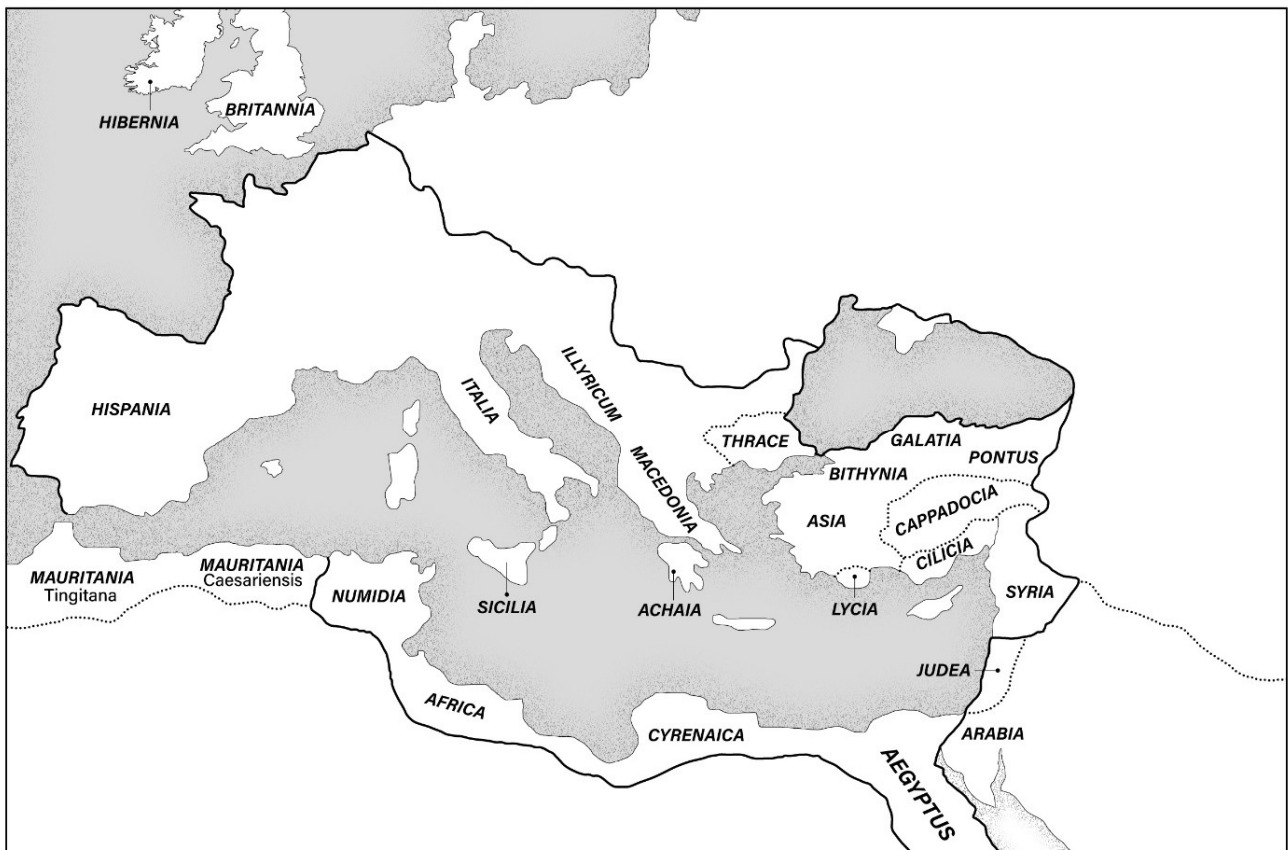
Appendix A

Map: Land of Israel at the time of Jesus



Appendix B

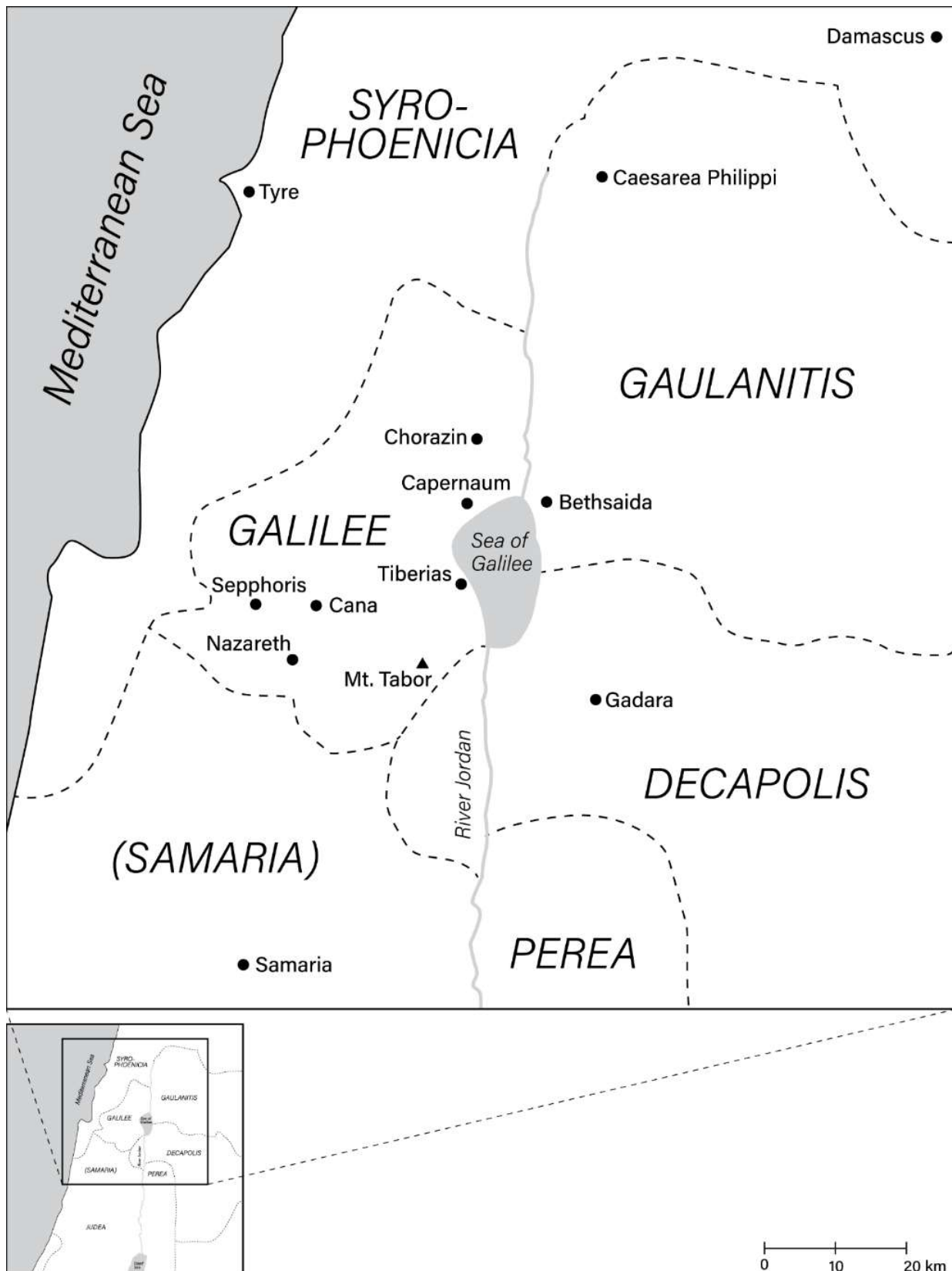
Map: The Expansion of the Roman Empire during the time of Christ



Legend: All territories within the bold borders were Roman provinces ruled directly by Roman authorities. Some regions like Judea (and others marked by the dotted line) were governed indirectly through allied vassal kings at the time of Jesus' birth. But this didn't last. Cappadocia became a Roman Province in AD 17 after the last king died, Lycia was annexed in AD 43, Mauritania in AD 44, Thrace was annexed after internal leadership struggles in AD 46. And Jerusalem was conquered after an uprising in AD 63, though the province of Judea still saw military conflicts to establish Roman control until AD 70.

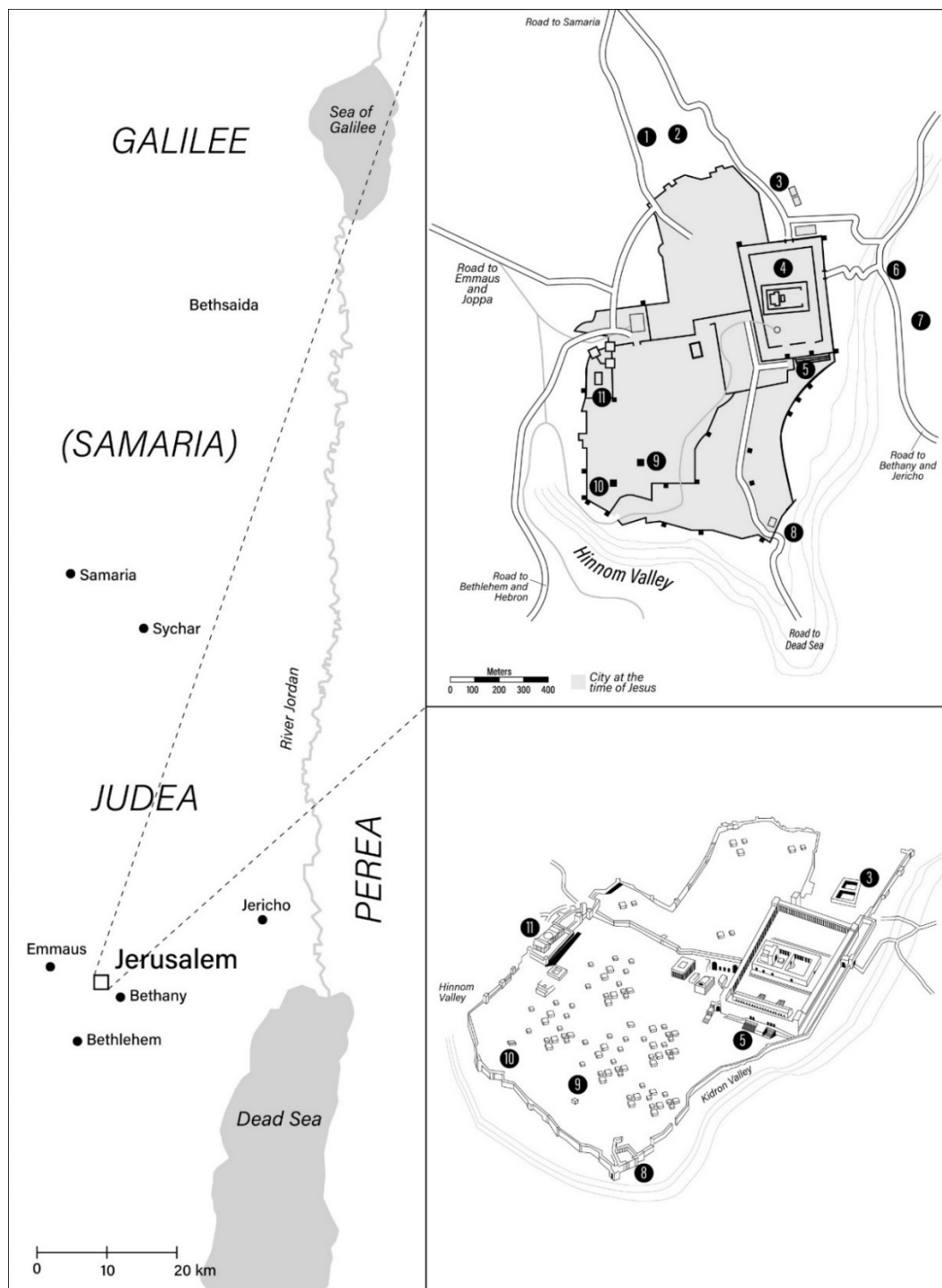
Appendix C

Map: Galilee during the time of Jesus



Appendix D

Map: Jerusalem the time of Jesus



Legend:

1: Golgotha	5. Stairs to the Temple	9. Upper Room
2. Garden Tomb	6. Garden of Gethsemane	10. House of Caiaphas
3. Pool of Bethesda	7. Mount of Olives	11. Herod's Palace
4. Temple Complex	8. Pool of Siloam	

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