

**THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK**

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**Verse By Verse Bible Studies**

**WHO THEN IS THIS?**

**A Portrait of Christ**

**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK**

**VOLUME I**

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*DEDICATION*

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*“Miss Mickey”*

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy”*

*We preach it, she lives it!*

## FOREWORD

A few months after my graduation from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary it dawned on me that I could no longer look to Mississippi College or to the seminary for my discipline in the study of God's Word. For years I had either followed the curriculum or taken elective classes, but now I had to assume responsibility for what I would read, what I really studied, how I would study, and when I would study. Before long, a method of study began to develop around three commitments. (1) There was the commitment to study Scripture, (2) an awareness of the importance of preserving what I had gleaned from my study, and (3) the desire to share what I had gleaned with others. I began by choosing a book of the Bible and preparing a detailed outline with notes. Later, I began to expand some of these studies, and when I got my first computer and Bible software, I expanded them further and refined my format.

There was still another matter that motivated me to put this much time into this study and to follow this format. There are many, many good commentaries available to pastors and lay-persons - far better commentaries than I could ever hope to write. Why should I produce another commentary when I could find far better critical commentaries on one side, and far better devotional commentaries on the other side?

Through prayer and study, I became convinced that there is a need for something, both for the lay-person and the busy pastor, which might help fill the gap between the critical commentary and the devotional commentary - something which would provide some critical commentary and some illustrations and practical applications. I decided to call it *The Bible Notebook*. *The Bible Notebook* is designed to be used with an open Bible. I used this umbrella term as a springboard for sermons which I share with others pastors under the general title, *The Sermon Notebook*.

It is my prayer that this study will help you to better understand The Gospel According to Mark, and to apply it in your daily life. Through your study of this earliest Gospel I trust that you will be able to answer the question that has become the title:

## Who Then Is This?

## INTRODUCTION

The Gospel According to Mark is a fast-moving, action-packed, dramatic account of Jesus Christ - Son of Man, Son of God. In rapid-fire sequence, Mark records events, parables, miracles, and gospel messages that were a part of the earthly ministry of Jesus. Mark is filled with action words and vivid detail.

The gospels are portraits of Christ. Mark makes no attempt to compile a history of Jesus of Nazareth. He gives us the earliest and briefest portrait of Christ. Mark seeks to communicate the meaning of the ministry, death, resurrection, and promised return of our Lord. He, like John, was inspired to write in such a way as to convince people that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the World (John 20:30-31).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke make up the Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic means “seeing alike.” Most of Mark is reproduced in Matthew and Luke. Some have neglected Mark because most of its contents are found in the other gospel accounts - and in greater detail. This is unfortunate. Mark gives us the first portrait of Christ and there is a freshness about it we need today.

## **JOHN MARK**

The author of the Second Gospel has nothing to say about himself. “Christ, himself, and not those who wrote about him, claimed the attention of the earliest believers” [R. Brown]. But glimpses of Mark are found in other places in the N. T. He was the son of Mary, in whose house Jesus and His apostles observed the Last Supper (Passover Meal). The early disciples met in their home on a regular basis for some time after Pentecost (Acts 12:12). He was a young man when Christ was crucified. Early church leaders claimed that Mark was not a follower of Jesus.

Luke and Paul reveal more about this young man from Jerusalem. He had many advantages in his youth at his mother's home. A. T. Robertson and others were convinced that Mark was well acquainted with the “the leading spirits of early Christianity” [ATR]. Visitors in his home would have included the apostles: James, the brother of Jesus; Barnabas, Mark’s cousin; Mary, the mother of Jesus; and Philip, the deacon/evangelist. Mark sat at their feet night after night, listening to the exciting stories about Jesus. There is no doubt that he had an outstanding background for the ministry to which God called him. But, the road ahead would be rough for John Mark. Note some highlights in his life.

1. A Golden Opportunity - A missionary tour with Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:5)..
2. A Low Point - Defection at Perga (Acts 13:13). Luke is very kind to Mark in recording his turning back. Barnabas was understanding. Paul was outraged and unforgiving.
3. Humiliation - Paul refused to take Mark on a second missionary tour because he had withdrawn of the first one Perga (Acts 15:38).

4. A Second Chance - Thanks to Barnabas, who parted with Paul and took Mark with him to Cypress .
5. Making Good with Simon Peter - Peter bears witness to this fact (I Peter 5:13).
6. A Comfort to Paul - By Paul's own testimony (Col. 4:10; II Tim. 4:11). Paul had to revise his judgment about Mark. Had he read the Gospel of Mark while in Rome during his first imprisonment? Some think it is a possibility.

## **INFLUENCE OF SIMON PETER**

It is generally agreed that the "discourses" of Peter became a chief source for Mark (this does not discount the inspiration of the Holy Spirit). Ancient writers agree. One wrote that John had said, "Mark, indeed, became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately as many things as he remembered of the things said or done by Christ, not, however, in order." This does not necessarily mean that the Gospel of Mark was dictated to Mark by Peter and that Mark served as an amanuensis, as Tertius and others had done for Paul's epistles (see Romans 16:22).

## **OUTLINE**

### **PART ONE: MINISTRY OF CHRIST IN GALILEE (CHAPTERS 1- 10).**

Introduction (1:1-14).

His Ministry in Galilee (1:15 - Ch. 9).

Withdrawal from Galilee (Chapter 10).

### **PART TWO (CHAPTERS 11-16)**

Appendix: The Last Week in Jerusalem, 16:9-20.

A. T. Robertson states that in Mark's Gospel "We catch the very atmosphere of the first generation of those who walked with Jesus over the hills and plains of Galilee. A note of wonder runs all through the Gospel of Mark. The people are seen aglow with excitement in the presence of Jesus, the wonder-worker" [ATR ]. Mark was filled with that excitement and preserves for us some of the freshness of the marvelous life and amazing ministry of our Savior.

In studying the Gospel of Mark, use several translations of the Scripture, commentaries, and a good Bible dictionary. A good study Bible or reference Bible can be helpful. Then, consider these two suggestions:

1. Read the Scripture at least once, taking time to meditate, pray and let God teach you. I would recommend the Holman Christian Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible.

2. Read carefully one time, without using other helps, and make notes from beginning to end. Just write down your thoughts, verse by verse. Then, read again, revising, or adding to your notes.

The Ryrie Study Bible notes offers an outline of the ministry of Christ which will aid in the study of the Gospel According to Mark:

<b>THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST</b>	
	Date
<b>Beginning of John the Baptist's Ministry</b> — Matt. 3:1-6; Mark 1:2-6; Luke 3:3-6	26 A.D.
<b>Jesus Baptized</b> — Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23	26 A.D.
<b>Forty Days in Wilderness; The Three Temptations</b> — Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12,13; Luke 4:1-13	26 A.D.
<b>First Miracle: Cana</b> — John 2:1-11	27 A.D.
<b>Nicodemus Visits</b> — John 2:23-3:21	27 A.D.
<b>Heals Demoniac on Sabbath</b> — Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37	27 A.D.
<b>Heals Lame Man on Sabbath</b> — John 5:1-47	28 A.D.
<b>Chooses Twelve Apostles</b> — Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16	28 A.D.
<b>Sermon on the Mount</b> — Matt. 5-7; Luke 6:20-49	28 A.D.
<b>John the Baptist Beheaded</b> — Matt. 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9	29 A.D.
<b>Feeds the 5,000</b> — Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14	29 A.D.
<b>The Transfiguration</b> — Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36	29 A.D.
<b>Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind</b> — John 9:1-41	29 A.D.
<b>The Mission of the Seventy-two</b> — Luke 10:1-24	29 A.D.
<b>Lazarus in Bethany</b> — John 11:1-44	30 A.D.
<b>Last Week: Triumphal Entry, Crucifixion, Resurrection</b> — Matt. 21-28; Mark 11-16; Luke 19:29-24:43; John 12:12-21:25	30 A.D.
<b>The Ascension</b> — Mark 16:19; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-12	30 A.D.

During a telephone conversation years ago, my friend and mentor, the late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, a well known Southern Baptist educator, suggested a title for a study of Mark. It is found in Mark 4:41: "Who Then Is This?" Mark does not attempt to prove the virgin birth, or record the early life

of Jesus. Instead, he seems to say, “I am going to put Him on center stage for sixteen chapters, and then you tell me, ‘Who then is this?’”

## CHAPTER I

### THE PREACHING OF JOHN, 1:1-8

**1:1 - BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL.** *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* The word translated “gospel” means good news. It is a proclamation or a declaration that God has intervened in human history in the person of Jesus Christ. But what exactly does Mark mean by the “beginning” of the Gospel. Does Jesus answer that question for us in Revelation 1:8? He said, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” Jesus is not only the beginning of the Good News, He is the Good News.

In a small corner of the Mediterranean world, Jesus announced the gospel of the kingdom. This announcement came in the midst of political uproar as the armies and politicians of Rome jockeyed for position in these recently annexed territories of Judea and Galilee. Events in this part of the world were of interest to the imperial city of Rome, especially a claim by anyone to be the king of the Jews. And Jews living in the far corners of the Roman Empire certainly followed the news of their homeland. Though only a small corner, Judea and Galilee held a significance greater than their size [Believer’s Study Bible, QuickVerse - BSB].

**JESUS.** God chose the name for His Son, not immediately prior to His Incarnation, but nearly 1400 years earlier when He made the prophetic announcement to Moses about his successor. There was an immediate Joshua. The son of Nun, and then there was the great Anointed One Who would come at a later date. Jesus is the Greek equivalent of Hebrew name Joshua, “Jehovah Saves,” or “The salvation of Jehovah.”

**CHRIST.** Christ, the title of the Lord’s Anointed One, is the Greek equivalent of Hebrew word “Messiah,” which means “The Anointed One.”

“Christ” was originally a title for the Person of Jesus and later became so familiar in association with Him that it became a part of His name. That Mark uses it as a title which identifies Jesus as the Messiah can be seen in 8:29 and 14:61, 62 [BSB].

**SON OF GOD** and “Son of Man” are titles for Jesus and stress both His divine and human nature.

**1:2-3 - ISAIAH.** *“BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE READY*

*THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.*” The quote is actually from Malachi. 3:1 and Isaiah. 40:3. 4-6. There is a progressive revelation of God’s redemptive purpose throughout the Old Testament. By the time of Isaiah, one of the four great eighth century B.C. prophets ( Isaiah and Micah in Judah and Amos and Hosea in Israel), Messianic prophecy reached its highest peaks. There are numerous promises of the coming Messiah in the Book of Isaiah.

**THE MESSENGER.** This denotes John the Baptist. The Jews believed Elijah would appear before the Messiah (Mal.4:5). Jesus identified John as the herald who would announce His coming. We must be clear about one point - John the Baptist was not the reincarnation of Elijah. Rather, Elijah was an Old Testament “type” of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was identified by Jesus Himself as the fulfillment of prophecies of the “forerunner” to the Messiah.

**MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.** When a king was preparing to visit a province, a servant or a slave was sent ahead to herald his coming and to cry out to people along the way to make ready for the coming of the king along their highway. They were to “make his paths straight.” That meant that the people who lived along the road were responsible for road maintenance and, when necessary, construction of a new road. There was no highway department to do the work. They had to fill in the holes, remove litter, cut bushes, drain ditches, and whatever else was necessary to be sure the king’s journey would not be delayed, which might put him in danger, and to make his journey as comfortable as possible.

John the Baptist was a lowly servant who cried for the people to prepare for the coming king. He never confused himself with the Messiah, and he wanted no one else to make that mistake. When asked by the Jews, John declared:

Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3: 28-30, KJV).

**1:4 - BAPTISM.** “*John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness \_preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*” Christian baptism is an outward symbol of an inner reality. It beautifully portrays the inner experience with Christ. It portrays the death burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and as Paul writes in Romans 6:4, it identifies us with His death, burial and resurrection:

“Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (NAS).

**REPENTANCE.** Repentance is a change of mind which is reflected in a change of behavior. It connotes a change of heart, mind and attitude which leads to a complete change in the direction of one's life.

“The Jews practiced self-immersion as a form of baptism, but John immersed others as a witness to their repentance. Christian baptism is performed in the name of the Trinity as a witness to one's faith in Christ. Some who followed John and who later believed in Christ were rebaptized (Acts 19:5)” [RSB].

**FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.** The word means dismissal, release, or forgiveness. Baptism follows the forgiveness of sins, and it is on the basis of repentance and confession of sin that one is baptized. This does not teach baptismal regeneration any more than Acts 2:38 does. Perhaps if we paraphrase it, “upon the remission of sins,” we will be reminded that those who were baptized were those who had repented.

**1:5-6 - ALL THE COUNTRY OF JUDEA.** *“And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey.”* John the Baptist suddenly appeared on the scene, preaching the gospel of repentance. He was like a breath of fresh air in a land stifled by legalism, ritualism, and ceremony.

**1:7 - ONE MIGHTIER THAN I.** *“And he was preaching, and saying, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.”* John is the forerunner whose purpose it was to herald the imminent coming of the long awaited Messiah.

**THONG OF HIS SANDALS.** The thong of one’s sandals was usually loosened by a slave as the guest entered a home. John does not portray himself as the master of the home, but as a slave, who was given the most menial task.

**1:8 - I BAPTIZED YOU WITH WATER.** *“I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* His was a very important ministry, but all John could ever do was to baptize them with water. The Messiah is the One Who “...will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” Here John stresses the preeminence of Christ. The water baptism of John was a symbol of the spiritual baptism of Jesus.

## **THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, 1:9-11**

Why was Jesus baptized? By what mode? The entire life and ministry of Christ was bound up with the Holy Spirit, from His birth to His death and resurrection. What lessons do you see in the temptations of Jesus? What is the significance to you?

**1:9 - JESUS CAME.** *“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by*

*John in the Jordan.*” Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. After His temptation in the wilderness (possibly near Jericho), Jesus returned to His home in Galilee. See also the account in Matthew three and four.

Why was Jesus baptized? Since Jesus was sinless (Heb. 4:15), a baptism of repentance was certainly not necessary. Why then was He baptized by John? At least four reasons seem evident:

- (1) to connect Himself with John, the prophet who prepared the way for the Messiah;
- (2) to identify Himself with the sinful race He came to redeem (see Matt. 3:16-17, note);
- (3) to establish the course of His own ministry; and
- (4) to inaugurate that ministry officially [BSB].

**1:10 - IMMEDIATELY.** *“Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.”* The note in the Believer’s Study Bible is worth noting:

“Immediately’ (euthus, Gk.) is a characteristic word in Mark. It is used 42 times in Mark and only 12 times in the rest of the N.T. This word serves to advance the narrative at a rapid pace” [BSB].

**THE SPIRIT.** The descent of the Spirit to rest upon Jesus as He came up out of the water of baptism was His anointing by God for His mission as the Messiah (the Anointed One).

**1:11 - MY BELOVED SON.** *“And a voice came out of the heavens: ‘You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.’”* Immediately after the descent of the Spirit descended and the Father proclaimed “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.” In Him the Father was totally pleased. It is interesting that the descent of the Spirit and the pronouncement by the Father came immediately after His baptism. Is there a reason for that? Perhaps, this anointing and blessing came at the beginning of His public ministry. It is also possible that this was an appropriate time because there was a multitude there to hear it. Another possibility is that John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah and Jesus were at the same place at the same time. And there is also the possibility that the answer combines two or more of those possibilities.

## **THE TEMPTATIONS, 1:12-13**

**1:12 - THE SPIRIT DROVE HIM.** *“Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.”* Mark’s account of the temptations of Christ is the briefest in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). The Scripture says that the Spirit “drove” (*ekballei*, Gk., implying “impelling force” - the NAS has “impelled”) Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted.

**1:13 - TEMPTED BY SATAN.** *“And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.”* It was obviously

necessary for Jesus to face Satan at the outset of His ministry and win the victory over the adversary, and to establish His qualification to be the Messiah.

“Jesus’ conflict with satanic forces is a prominent theme throughout Mark's Gospel. That Jesus "was with the wild beasts" (v. 13) is recorded only in Mark. The phrase would heighten the character of the desolate, lonely wilderness with all its danger. It might also be included as a subtle word of encouragement to Mark's Roman audience, who regularly heard reports of their fellow believers being savagely torn apart by "wild beasts" in the arena. The Master had gained the victory over the beast in the wilderness, and He would see believers through the trials and struggles they were enduring” [BSB].

## **JESUS CALLS FOUR FISHERMEN, 1:14-20**

From John we learn of a year of work in various parts of the land prior to the Galilean ministry. “Preachers are made out of laymen who are willing to leave their business of the. service of Christ” [ATR].

**1:14 - AFTER JOHN HAD BEEN TAKEN INTO CUSTODY.** “*Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God.*” Ryrie points out that “Between the temptation of Jesus and the imprisonment of John the Baptist occurred the events recorded in John 1:19-4:54. How he came to be imprisoned is told in 6:17-20” [RSB].

**JESUS CAME INTO GALILEE.** Jesus returned to Galilee following His baptism. His first great sign or miracle was the changing of water to wine at the wedding feast at Cana - a sign that declared that the Law and the Prophets were at that moment fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The water of Judaism was changed into the wine of Christianity.

**PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF GOD.** Jesus preached as no man ever preached (the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matt. 5-7, is the greatest sermon ever preached). While a major focus of the ministry of Christ was His preaching, it is hard to imagine Jesus preaching the way some preachers preach today. It is hard to imagine Jesus passionately reading a sermon manuscript, with little or no eye contact. It is equally difficult to imagine a theatrical performance with little attention given to the content. Jesus challenged Peter to “feed My sheep.” He did not say, “entertain My sheep,” or “traumatize my sheep.” He said, “feed My sheep.” The preaching of Jesus was without a doubt dramatic, strong, disturbing, and at points mildly entertaining, but any study of the preaching of Jesus shows that he preached for results and taught for the edification of believers.

**1:15 - THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND.** “*Saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*” After thousands of years of waiting, the time for the announcement has finally arrived: “*The time is fulfilled!*” This is the moment to which the great Old Testament prophets had looked. This is the time for which Israel had waited. This was the hope that kept them going even during the darkest days of subjection to Babylon,

Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. They often lost hope but God would send a prophet to challenge them to refocus on the Messianic Covenant.

**REPENT.** The word used here means a change of mind that is demonstrated in a change in one's behavior. It means to do an about face and go in the opposite direction. Repentance is often associated with great emotions, but there is no true repentance that does not involve the mind - "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

**BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.** Faith and repentance are like two sides of the same coin. The one who repents is the one who believes in the Gospel, and the one who believes in the Gospel will repent.

**1:16 - AS HE WAS GOING ALONG.** *"As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen."* These words remind us that much of Jesus' ministry was spent walking through the hills of Galilee or Judea, or along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. In fact the very word "disciple" carries the idea of following a teacher to learn from him.

**SIMON AND ANDREW.** Simon and his brother Andrew were fishing near the shore, casting their net into the sea. Andrew would become known for bringing people to Jesus. Simon Peter would become a part of the inner circle of apostles. He would preach the first ever sermon preached under the special anointing of the Holy Spirit after the Spirit came upon the believers at Pentecost. The Lord had a special purpose for Simon Peter, one Simon could not have imagined at this point.

**1:17 - FISHERS OF MEN.** *"And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."* What an invitation! Jesus is recruiting His first disciples with this simple invitation. There is nothing exclusive in this invitation. We are all called to become fishers of men. The Great Commission demands it. This is what the late Dr. Roland Q. Leavell, called "The Divine Imperative."

**1:18 - IMMEDIATELY.** *"Immediately they left their nets and followed Him."* Can you think of anything more amazing than this? They left their boat and followed Jesus - immediately! They left their living, their occupation, their work to follow Him. But follow Him where? There must have been something very compelling about Jesus and Peter and Andrew must have been blessed with an incredible faith. Had they heard Jesus before? Had they seen Him before? Had they heard about His baptism and the proclamation that He was the Messiah? One thing we know for sure, Jesus chose them and they followed Him, without a doubt because the Lord was working their hearts and minds.

**1:19 - JAMES...AND JOHN.** *"Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets."* The first four disciples (to be names apostles) were simple fishermen, not trained scribes or rabbis. What qualifications did the Lord see in them? Remember that He knew what was in every man. Note the details the Scripture provides. Simon and Andrew were casting their nets. James and John, who would be known as the "Sons of

Thunder”, were mending their nets. The details do not prove the veracity or authenticity of the account, but they do testify to it.

James would become the first of the apostles to be martyred for Christ (A.D. 44). John would outlive all the other apostles by many years, during which time he would be inspired to write a major block of the New Testament Scripture, become the elder statesman of the church, and be exiled to Patmos for the sake of the Gospel. He wrote the Evangelistic Gospel, the letter of assurance (First John), two small epistles, and the Revelation.

**1:20 - IMMEDIATELY.** *“Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.”* Again, Jesus calls two fishermen to follow Him, and again, they immediately follow Him. In order to follow Jesus they must leave behind people they love and things that were important to them. What observer could have imagined what lay ahead for these four fishermen? Who could have been greater fishers of men than these four?

Peter, James, and John would form the inner circle (at the Transfiguration, in Gethsemane). Andrew would be known as one who brought people to Jesus. James would become the first apostle to be martyred. Peter would, according to tradition, be crucified upside down by his own request during the persecution of Christians under Nero. John, as already noted, would survive all the others by many years, writing the Gospel of John, the three Epistles of John, and the Revelation long after the others had laid down their lives for the Lord.

## **MAN WITH EVIL SPIRIT, 1:21-28**

**1:21 - THE SYNAGOGUE.** *“They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach.”* Capernaum, located on the north west shore of the Sea of Galilee, was at the time an important town on the caravan route from Egypt, through Jerusalem, to Damascus. Its importance as a city was associated with its importance to Rome. It was the site of a customs station (2:14) and a Roman garrison was headquartered there (Matt. 8:5-13). It was also the home of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

The synagogue was the center of Jewish worship and could be organized almost anywhere by 10 married Jewish men. Men were separated from women and children at the synagogue. Services began with a reading from the Law and a reading from the Prophets.

**1:22 - AUTHORITY.** *“They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”* It may seem strange that the people were so amazed at the teaching of Jesus, but it is understandable in light of the traditional teaching in the synagogue of the day. Their teachers normally taught by quoting traditions of the Jews or respected rabbis or scribes. Jesus taught with authority rather than quoting some famous scribe or rabbi.

The word authority is a key to understanding the portrait of Jesus in the Gospel According to Mark.

Jesus assumed authority when He taught the people. He assumed authority over diseases, afflictions, elements, weather, death, and sin. Pay careful attention to the times and the manner in which Jesus assumed authority under various circumstances.

**1:23 - AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT.** *“Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out...”* Anyone who reads the Gospels will be keenly aware of the influence of demons in Jesus’ day. Some modern scholars do not believe in Satan, so they must “explain away” demons. The logical thing for many in the age of psychology is to identify the “unclean spirit” with some psychological disorder. I sat under professors who did not believe in the existence of Satan, and while they were denying his existence Satan was, in the modern vernacular, “getting traction” on the streets of America.

The Bible reveals Satan to be a real person. Jesus recognized Satanic activity during His earthly ministry, and demons recognized Jesus. They not only recognized Him, they were afraid of Him. A fair question might well be, where have all the demons gone? If Jesus saw demon influenced, or demon possessed persons every where He went, why do we not see them today? Every demon who was active during the First Century is active in the Twenty-first Century. Why do we not see them? Some people claim to see them everywhere, while others see them nowhere. One reason we do not see demons or evidence of demonic activity is that too many people who claim to be Christians are either lost or they are carnal believers. Another reason we do not see as strong a reaction as Jesus saw is that the demons feared Jesus and they do not fear us.

One of the signs that the return of our Lord for His church is drawing near is the increase of satanic activity in our day. This activity is manifested in the growing interest in astrology, games which open minds and hearts to demonic influences, and the extreme opposition to Christianity and the Bible in our society today. A good example of demonic influence is seen in the all but incomprehensible opposition to the Mel Gibson movie, *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST*, which was immediately labeled anti-Semitic - by the same people in the media who have been touting Islam over Judaism ever since radical Muslim terrorists launched their attack on America on September 11, 2001. The major networks may well be manifesting the influence of the devil in taking the side of radical Muslims, including the Palestinians, against Israel. There can be not doubt about the obsession with the war being waged against Christianity in America today in the media, in education, and in politics.

**1:24 - THE HOLY ONE OF GOD.** *“Saying, ‘What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!’”* The unclean spirit knew His name - Jesus. They knew He was from Nazareth. They knew He was “the Holy One of God.” Was that a confession of faith? James writes, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder” (James 2:19).

**1:25 - BE QUIET.** *“And Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him!’”* Jesus did not need the confessions of a demon, nor would He tolerate it. “Be quiet” is literally, “be muzzled!” (Like an ox).

**COME OUT.** Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. This implies literal demon possession, not simply a force of evil in the world - or the personification of evil in the world.

**1:26 - CRIED OUT.** *“Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him.”* The unclean spirit had a powerful hold on the man and he did not want to give up the claim he had on him. When Jesus commanded him to come out he came out, as we might say, kicking and screaming. Jesus manifested His authority over demons.

**1:27 - THEY WERE ALL AMAZED.** *“They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.’”* There is little wonder that the people were amazed. Jesus taught with authority and He had authority to cast out demons. This is not the way the scribes taught, and we can be sure it is not the way religious leaders of the day dealt with demons.

I had heard preachers say that they had seen people in services where they who were demon possessed. I had wondered why I had never been sure that I had seen demon possessed people in services. There was a time when someone sat in services and looked as though he or she hated me with a passion. I wondered about what was behind the attitude. Some time later a number of people confided in me that they were aware of this and they were convinced the individual was demon possessed. On another occasion I saw a woman react to something a young man said in a business with such intensity that I had to look at her the third time to realize who she was. I had known her for several years, but at that point I did not recognize her. Was it demonic influence or demon possession that distorted her face to the point that I did not recognize her? There were three different visitors over a period of times who left services commenting on the oppressive spirit in services. To be more accurate, there was one individual, one couple, and a group of people, all at different times. Satan is real and so are demons. However, if you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you can resist the demons and they will flee from you.

**1:28 - NEWS ABOUT HIM SPREAD.** *“Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.”* News of this spread quickly by word of mouth. This would attract a following by those who were anxious to see more miracles as well as those who would be wondering if this was the long awaited Messiah. Sadly, many who prayed for the Messiah were not looking for the kind of Messiah God had sent to them. They would love a military messiah who would drive out the Romans and reestablish the kingdom of David. They were not prepared to follow a Messiah who came to suffer and die for their sins. They wanted a political or military messiah, not a Savior.

## **JESUS HEALS PETER’S MOTHER-IN-LAW, 1:29-34**

Jesus seems to have made Peter’s house His headquarters while in Capernaum. Mark probably heard Peter tell the story many times. The Holy Spirit inspired Mark to include it in this Gospel account.

**1:29 - IMMEDIATELY.** *“And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.”* Once again, in this fast moving account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, Mark was inspired to use the word “immediately”. They went directly from the synagogue to the home of Simon and Andrew in Capernaum. It has been suggested that Andrew lived there with Peter’s wife. No mention is made of a Mrs. Andrew, but Paul tells us that Peter traveled with Mrs. Simon Peter. “With James and John” shows that James and John were guests, as well as followers of Jesus.

**1:30 - SIMON’S MOTHER-IN-LAW.** *“Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Jesus about her.”* There are those who insist that Peter could not have been married, but this verse tells us that he had a mother-in-law. “They” may denote Peter and his wife, but others may have joined in asking Jesus to help her. The identity of those who spoke with Jesus is not the question - the question at this point is what they expected Jesus to do.

**1:31 - HE ...RAISED HER UP.** *“And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them.”* This is one of the earlier miracles of Jesus, but not the first. The first miraculous “sign” was the changing of the water to wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Peter’s mother-in-law was healed immediately when Jesus took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Mark adds, “she waited on them.” This would mean that she was completely healed - immediately healed.

There is nothing more popular in some circles than physical healing. Faith healers make some incredible claims, some making a great show of healing members of their audience. I personally witnessed a “faith healer” at work when I was a teenager. Television came along just in time for two preachers who would help shape television services for the next fifty years. One was Billy Graham, whom I saw every Sunday afternoon at one o’clock when I was a teenager ). By that time, I had already heard M. C. Waldrup preach at 9:00 A. M. and R. G. Lee (on TV) at 11:15. I have often said that M. C. Waldrup fed me more than either of the others. Incidentally, If I could hear any one person preach I would like to hear Charles Haddon Spurgeon. If I could hear one sermon I would choose R. G. Lee’s Pay Day Some Day. I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Lee preach Pay Day Some Day in person when I was a teenager. I was also blessed to have been able to hear a young, dynamic Billy Graham in the early fifties, and then the aging Billy Graham as late as Christmas-time, 2004.

The second TV preacher was Oral Roberts. It was during that period that Oral Roberts came to Memphis and the television stations covered his healing meetings, and the Memphis “Commercial Appeal” carried stories about all the lines of people who were being healed.

A family from our community took their grown daughter to the Oral Roberts crusade to see if he could heal her. This, we realized would be a real test because Virginia was both deaf and mute (or sound and speech challenged, to be more politically correct). The family had written for permission and directions to have Virginia included in the line. Oral Roberts popped the palm of his right hand on her forehead and pronounced her, “HEALED!” But she was not healed. They watched Virginia

for several days and there was no change. They wrote to the Oral Roberts association and told them they had seen no change. They got a letter from someone in the Roberts ministry explaining that she probably got out of her place in line. If that was the case, I cannot help but wonder what happened to the person whose place she took and!

I have great faith in divine healing. It is the faith healer that disturbs me. The preoccupation with physical healing in some of these ministries also concerns me. There was a time when I had sustained an injury to one foot and by the time a series of doctors got through with me I had to have a wheel chair when I made hospital calls in larger hospitals. One day my son John was pushing me through a large Mall when a man stopped me and told me he was going to pray for me and I would be healed. Of course, I was not healed. But the thing that disturbed me was that this man did not know but what I had a far more serious problem than the physical problem that made me dependant upon that wheel chair for some period of time. I thanked the man, but I really wanted to ask him why he did not ask me if I had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

**1:32 - WHEN EVENING CAME.** *“When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed.”* The information Mark adds is significant. “When evening came, after the sun had set” means that the Sabbath had ended. They could now carry burdens, travel beyond a Sabbath mile, and do other things not permitted on the Sabbath.

**THEY BEGAN.** First one, then another, then many came to see Jesus, bringing to Him their family members and friends who were ill, and those who were demon-possessed. Jesus began healing all who were ill and delivering those who were demon possessed.

**1:33 - THE WHOLE CITY.** *“And the whole city had gathered at the door.”* All one has to do is watch Fox News telecasts from Iraq or Jerusalem to see how quickly the streets can fill up with citizens when something exciting is happening. The Palestinians fill the streets, shouting, shaking their fists, and firing rifles at the least provocation.

**1:34 - HE HEALED MANY.** *“And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.”* Mark tells that Jesus healed many who were ill, regardless of the disease or infirmity. There is no illness that is too great for the Agent of Creation (John 1:1ff)

**CAST OUT MANY DEMONS.** Jesus had the power and authority to cast out demons. There are demon-possessed people today, and there have been many people who have been delivered. There was a report a few years ago about a young girl who was a part of a witches coven, who was given the assignment of joining a local church youth group. She made friends and was invited to attend a conference at one of the largest conference centers in the world. During one of the worship services she began shouting profanity and obscenities. Some of the leaders took her aside and began praying for God to deliver her from demon possession. After she was delivered she confessed her involvement with witchcraft and her assignment to seduce Christian young people.

There are many helps for those who want to know more about the occult today. Early in my ministry I discovered a series of books by the German author Kurt Koch, who had examined something like twenty thousand cases involving the occult. I would recommend those books as well as many newer books to anyone who is interested in the subject. The Interfaith Witness Department of the Southern Baptist Convention offers valuable assistance in understanding the occult. My brother-in-law, Jimmy Furr, led conferences for the Interfaith Witness Department for twelve years. He discovered that when he led conferences on the occult at Ridgecrest or Glorieta, Southern Baptist conference centers, his conferences were the first to be filled. There is a lot of interest in demonic activities today, and there are a lot of people who are looking for help in dealing with the occult. I would caution anyone who begins a study of the occult to remain focused on the Word of God and pray without ceasing for God's protection while they are making their study. If you study satanic material you open yourself to attacks from Satan. If he had the gall to tempt Jesus he is certainly not afraid of you.

Satan cannot possess a born-again believer, but he can tempt them, influence them, and oppress them. We are warned that Satan is a threat to every soul created in the image of God.

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world” (1 Peter 5:8).

Believers are promised a victory over Satan through their faith in the Lord:

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:7-8).

## **JESUS PREACHES ALL OVER GALILEE, 1:35-39**

**1:35 - WAS PRAYING.** *“In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.”* We are told very little about this preaching tour of Galilee. However, if Jesus sensed such a need to pray about His work, should we not spend more time with the Father? Most of us, if pressed, would confess that there have been times when we have seen someone with a program that has put a sufficient number “nickels and noses” on their board, and we asked our church to adopt their program and then ask God to bless it. It is called pragmatism - if it works, do it. The simple truth is, if we get our program from the Lord and implement it in the power of the Holy Spirit, He has already promised to bless it. Any program that gets between us and the Word of God is a dangerous program. We must begin with prayer and the Word of God.

The Trinity is a critical and essential doctrine for the serious student of the Word of God. There are theologians who advocate a unitary theory of God, and offer illustrations and explanations to support

their view. For example, they claim that God was playing the role of the Father in the Old Testament, the Son during the earthly ministry of Christ, and the Holy Spirit from Pentecost until the present. One Person, playing different roles. They may illustrate by saying, "I am the son of my father, the husband of my wife, and the father of my son. I am one person but I relate to others in three different ways."

Francis Shaeffer stated many years ago that it was the doctrine of the Trinity that led him from agnosticism to that of a theism. He reasoned that if God had to create man in order to have someone with whom He could have a relationship, then God would have been incomplete. However, if there was perfect horizontal fellowship in the Godhead, He was not incomplete, but created man for His pleasure or for some other specific purpose.

Someone may argue that the word Trinity does not appear in the Bible. I would respond that I have never found the word "theologian" in the Scripture. I have never read about the Internet, software, hard drive, or a website in the Bible. I have never read about automobiles, trains, airplanes, rockets, or space ships in the Bible (well, maybe spaceships!).

The word Trinity may not appear in the Bible, but the concept is found throughout the Scripture, from Creation to end-time events. The Father commanded Creation, the Son was the Agent of Creation, and the Spirit hovered over that which God created, energizing it. At the baptism of Jesus, the Son was baptized, the Spirit descended, and the Father spoke.

If the unitary theory had any merit, when Jesus withdrew to pray, to whom was He praying? If there was no Father to whom He could pray He was perpetrating a hoax on His followers. God is one in essence, three in Person. I cannot explain it. I cannot adequately illustrate it. But the Scripture clearly reveals God to be "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity."

**1:36 - SEARCHED FOR HIM.** "*Simon and his companions searched for Him.*" It must have seemed strange to Simon, Andrew, and others when people began coming to see Jesus and they discovered that He was not in the house (or on the roof, as might have been the case in that day). They had to search for Jesus because He had withdrawn to be alone with His Father.

**1:37 -THE FOUND HIM.** "*They found Him, and said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for You.'*" Simon and his companions searched until they found Jesus and then told him that, "Everyone is looking for You." Who did they mean by "everybody"? They probably meant many of the people who had come to see Jesus the previous evening plus others who were hearing about what had happened. The people of the town had come the night before, but now people from the country-side, villages, and other towns were coming to see and hear Jesus.

**1:38 - LET US GO.** "*He said to them, 'Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.'*" Jesus was always in control during His earthly ministry. He commanded and the true disciples followed Him. Thus Jesus began a preaching tour that would take him throughout Galilee.

**SO THAT I MAY PREACH.** Jesus probably preached open-air sermons as well as sermons in

synagogues. He taught from the OT Scriptures, with special emphasis on Messianic prophecies.

**1:39 - CASTING OUR DEMONS.** *“And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.”* It was not uncommon for a scholar to be invited to speak in a synagogue. Paul would be invited to speak in the synagogues wherever he went on the three missionary journeys. Jesus not only preached, he healed the sick and cast our demons. How amazing that these people had the opportunity to hear the Son of God preach; they saw Him cast our demons; and yet very few of them really believed Him. They were interested in the miracles, as in the case of the multitude who sought Him out after He fed the five thousand men plus women and children.

Multitudes followed Jesus as long as He was healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead. When they learned what He was all about, many turned and followed Him no more. Only one hundred, twenty people waited in the upper room for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

### **CLEANSING OF A LEPER, 1:40-45**

**1:40 - A LEPER.** *“And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’”* How can we read this verse without sensing the desperation in the leper’s appeal: “beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him.” The leper had the faith to believe Jesus could heal him - if only He was willing. I once heard Stephen Olford say, “Faith is not believing God can do it, faith is believing God will do it.”

We can always pray a “Thy will be done” kind of prayer, letting God off the hook in case our friend is not healed, or when we do not see how our petition is answered. Perhaps we are denying ourselves a blessing by saying, “If you are willing you can help me.” That is not to minimize the importance of seeking God’s will. We seek God’s will in prayer, praying with confidence, knowing that His will is exactly what we want and what we need.

**1:41- MOVED WITH COMPASSION.** *“Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’”* Jesus was often moved with compassion. Any Christ-like person is often moved with compassion. President George W. Bush left some people wonder what he was talking about when he declared himself to be a compassionate conservative. He is indeed a man of compassion and he is basically conservative. God’s people, who are being conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29) must manifest the compassion of our Lord. No one is justified in claiming any measure of Sanctification if he is not being conformed to the image of Jesus. What better definition is there for Sanctification than being conformed to the image of our Savior?

**I AM WILLING.** Jesus was willing, but He did more than simply state His willingness, He acted. He said, “Be cleansed.” That is all it takes from the One Who could speak the world into existence.

**1:42 - IMMEDIATELY.** *“Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.”* There is that word Mark uses so often: “immediately.” Movies have often portrayed people being healed in

stages. This leper was healed immediately. It was against the Jewish law to touch a leper - they were outcasts. Jesus demonstrated His authority over leprosy (a symbol of sin and all its train of evil).

**1:43 - STERNLY WARNED HIM.** *“And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away.”* There was no show of His power or His compassion. Some modern tel-evangelists, rather than sending them away draw them in front of the camera and show them off to their audience.

**1:44 - SAY NOTHING.** *“And He said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’”* Jesus did not want this man, who was probably familiar to most of the local people to broadcast the miracle in such a way as to attract people to Him for the wrong reasons. The result of the leper’s failure to obey is seen in verse 45.

Jesus, respecting the Law, sent him to see the priest so that he might be declared clean. This would also be a testimony to the priests. Can you not imagine the reaction of the priest upon seeing a known leper completely cleansed? You can be sure he had never seen anything like it before. Jesus sent the healed man to the priest to have the man honor the command of the Mosaic Law. It was a testimony to “them” (the commands of Moses). It grieves me to think how many modern day tel-evangelists would “market” this to attract people to their ministry. Jesus did not want to make a show of this act of healing. He wanted people to come to Him for reasons beyond their physical needs.

**1:45 - THE NEWS SPREAD.** *“But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.”* If this verse had been left off we would be left wondering why Jesus had told the man very sternly to tell no one. It was only natural that the man would want to tell everyone, but when he spread the story he hindered the ministry of Jesus.

My first reaction years ago when I read this was that Jesus was going everywhere preaching and proclaiming the Gospel. A little publicity of this kind would surely draw more people to Him. A circus can draw a crowd. The Super Bowl draws a crowd. A crowd is attracted to the spectacular, but a crowd cannot always be trusted.

When I was still a young pastor a rather worldly man attended a few services, knowing that it would mean a lot to his mother. When they got home one Sunday his mother asked what he thought about the service. He said, “I can take a guitar and go out to one of the joints in the curve at the edge of town and draw a better crowd than that.” He was absolutely right. Sadly, some churches use the world’s music and the world’s methods to pack their pews. Others use spectacular testimonies and dramatic performances to attract people. Drama can be used effectively, but it may become a distraction. Music is wonderful, but my father in the ministry told me when I was a teenager that the devil can get into the church through you music quicker than any other way.

Preaching is essential, it is commanded by God, and if the preacher is preaching a message the Lord has given him (in the power of the Holy Spirit), lost people will be won to Jesus Christ and saved people will be edified and blessed. However, if the preaching is compromised to please people or to glorify the preacher, God is not glorified, His kingdom is not built up, and believers suffer from spiritual malnutrition.

## CHAPTER II

### HEALING A PARALYZED MAN, 2:1-12

**2:1 - BACK TO CAPERNAUM.** *“When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home.”* He is back in Capernaum after the first tour of Galilee. “At home” may well mean the home of Peter and Andrew. Andrew may have lived with Peter and Peter’s wife at this place. As we have seen, Jesus made their home His headquarters when He was in the area.

**2:2 - MANY WERE GATHERED.** *“And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them.”* His fame was growing and the crowds were increasing to the point that there was not enough room for them in the house.

**2:3 - A PARALYTIC.** *“And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men.”* Jesus had been healing people in Capernaum before He began his tour of the towns and villages of Galilee, and word probably came from those villages that He was healing people everywhere He went. Those with physical problems, whether diseases or handicaps, came to Jesus in hope of being healed. The paralytic man could not come on his own so four friends brought him.

**2:4 - REMOVED THE ROOF.** *“Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.”* When the four friends could not get in to see Jesus through the door they climbed the steps to the flat roof and dug through the clay and branches which had been laid over the beams or joists. This must have been a great surprise to those in the house, though not as great a surprise as if they had torn through the roof of a modern house.

**2:5 - SEEING THEIR FAITH.** *“And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”* Note that the Scripture does not say that Jesus saw the paralytic’s faith. He saw the faith of his four friends. The faith of the paralytic may be implied, and probably should be inferred because of what Jesus says next: “Son, your sins are forgiven.” This is hardly what they were expecting.

**2:6 - THE SCRIBES.** *“But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts...”* The scribes were obviously there to observe what was going on, as well as what Jesus was teaching. Jesus may have avoided a lot of trouble if He had simply healed the paralytic. Instead, He

declared his sins forgiven. This was going to shake things up not only in Capernaum but also in Jerusalem.

**2:7 - BLASPHEMING.** *“Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?”* It is understandable that they would be surprised at what they had just heard. They rightly reasoned, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

**2:8 - AWARE IN HIS SPIRIT.** *“Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?’”* Jesus was “Immediately” aware in His spirit what they were reasoning within themselves. Jesus knew what they were thinking and immediately questioned them about it. He not only knew what they were thinking, He was not afraid to confront them with it. While He would not throw His life away senselessly, in the wrong way, or at the wrong time, He knew that by confronting the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees He would eventually bring things to a head.

**2:9 - WHICH IS EASIER.** *“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’?”* Jesus did not minimize a paralytic’s physical problems, but asked the logical question under the circumstances. Many people need to answer the same question today.

**2:10a - THE SON OF MAN.** *“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”--.*” The Son of Man is a favorite title for Jesus. It is used 14 times in the Gospel According to Mark. Just as He had assumed authority over sin, He assumes authority over a serious physical problem.

**2:10b-11 - I SAY.** *“He said to the paralytic I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.”* Immediately after asking the scribes to tell Him whether more power was required to forgive one’s sins or to say to the paralytic, get up and walk, He tells the man to get up and go home.

**2:12 - PICKED UP THE PALLET.** *“And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’”* The healed man “immediately” picked up his pallet and left for home. All the people were amazed and continued glorifying God. We are not told that the scribes agreed with the people. The entire procedure was irrefutable as it was amazing. It was unnecessary for Jesus to refute the scribes any further.

## **JESUS CALLS LEVI, 2:13-17**

**2:13 - PEOPLE WERE COMING.** *“And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them.”* At this point the crowds were continuing to follow Jesus. No doubt, they were excited about the miracles and they did not want to miss out on anything. At the same time they must have been anxious to see if He would declare Himself to be

the Messiah.

**2:14 - LEVI.** *“As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he got up and followed Him.”* If the calling of four fishermen to be His inner circles of disciples (apostles) was a surprise, the choice of a tax collector was enough to blow the minds of the religious leaders of the day. Tax collectors were despised by the people for serving the hated Roman government. Some were obviously cheating the people and trusting the Roman soldiers to enforce the assessment and collection.

**2:15 - IN HIS HOUSE.** *“And it happened that He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him.”* This is not the kind of Messiah for which they were looking - nor was it the kind of Messiah the religious leaders were willing to accept. Levi invited other tax collectors to dine with Jesus and many others joined them. The scribes could not believe Jesus could be the Son of God and eat with sinners and tax collectors (which they grouped together).

**2:16 - SCRIBES OF THE PHARISEES.** *“When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, ‘Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?’”* The scribes, who belonged mainly to the sect of the Pharisees, were held in high esteem. Theirs was a highly honored profession. Ryrie points out that “They were professional students and defenders of the law (scriptural and traditional), gathering around them pupils whom they instructed in the law. They were also referred to as lawyers because they were entrusted with the administration of the law as judges in the Sanhedrin (cf. Matt 22:35)” [RSB].

**2:17 - WHO NEED A PHYSICIAN.** *“And hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘it is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”* Jesus was not intimidated by these scribes and His response must have amazed the average citizen. An elderly woman who had been an active member of her church for many years looked with disdain upon several children a Sunday School teacher had brought to church. The Sunday School teacher had picked them up and taken them to her Sunday School department and then after Sunday School she seated them at the front where she sat for the worship service. Her friend said, “I wish you would look at those children. They are not our kind of people.”

There are lost people who do not believe they would be welcomed in some churches because they believe their lifestyle would disqualify them, or they feel that they are stuck on the wrong rung of the socio-economic ladder. Jesus has an answer for these people: “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.” He came to seek and save the lost, not the righteous. Of course, there is none righteous, though some are not willing to admit that.

## ON FASTING, 2:18-20

**2:18 - FASTING.** *“John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, ‘Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’”* The Pharisees demanded to know why Jesus and His disciples were not fasting as John and his disciples did. It was not John’s place to change, or fulfill the Law. He observed the same law as the Pharisees. This confrontation may have come on one of their fast days.

**2:19 - JESUS SAID.** *“And Jesus said to them, “While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.”* There is nothing more important to the followers of Jesus Christ than that which Jesus said. His answers transcends time, religion, and customs. His answer demanded their answer. Is He really the bridegroom? If so, why do they not follow Him?

**2:20 - THE DAYS WILL COME.** *“But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.”* His disciples should cling to Him for fellowship and edification as long as He was with them. There would be time for fasting when He was gone. Neither the Pharisees nor the disciples understood the significance of this statement at the time. The Holy Spirit would call this and other such statements to the minds of His disciples after His death, burial, and resurrection. This is a primary ministries of the Holy Spirit.

## **THE OLD RELIGION, 2:21-22**

**2:21- A PATCH.** *“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results.”* They lived at a time when clothing was often repaired. They understood exactly what Jesus meant. If they sewed an unshrunk patch on a robe made from shrunk material the patch would pull away or a worse tear would occur.

**2:22 - OLD WINESKINS.** *“No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”* He is telling them nothing they did not already know. They just needed to be reminded of the application. Illustrations often involve down to earth and practical things which are used to help people understand spiritual truth. Jesus was a great story teller, a teller of parables, and a master of metaphors.

## **THE SABBATH, 2:23-28**

**2:23 - THE SABBATH.** *“And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain.”* This passage makes a clear statement on the Sabbath. That statement is not that we can do anything we want to do on the Lord’s Day. The Lord’s Day is a sacred day and God expects us to keep it holy. Then what is Jesus teaching here? The Pharisees were trying to make the Son of God a slave to the Sabbath, when He is the Source of the Sabbath observance, the Lord of the Sabbath.

**2:24 - NOT LAWFUL.** *“The Pharisees were saying to Him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” A Sabbath Day’s journey was allowed, and those who knew the law best often found a way around the law of which they boasted. For example, one of these very Pharisees might reason, “I am three Sabbath Day’s journeys from home and the law says I can only travel one Sabbath Day’s journey. But the law does not say how many times I can travel that Sabbath Day’s journey. So, I can stop my donkey and unload him, and then put the load back on him and go another, and another until I get home.”*

A Sabbath Day’s journey could easily have taken Jesus and His disciples through a grainfield, and it was a simple matter to reach over an pull off the head of grain and munch on it as they walked. But this was just the kind of thing the Pharisees were looking for in their effort to accuse Jesus before the people.

Little did they realize, in their self-righteous zeal for the law that they were condemning the Lord of the Sabbath for breaking the Sabbath Law. Obviously, they rejected the clear testimony that Jesus was the Messiah. They used religion to attack God. That is exactly what the Muslims are doing today - and let us face it, many Jews today reject Jesus on religious grounds. Many Jews today are quick to identify themselves as secular, or not religious.

**2:25 - WHAT DAVID DID.** *“And He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry.” They were well aware of the incident to which Jesus referred (see 1 Sam. 2).*

**2:26 - ATE THE CONSECRATED BREAD.** *“How he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?” Both the religious leaders and the people knew story. This was an emergency and David did that which he normally would not have done. God did not strike him with leprosy as he did Uzziah. What was the difference? It would have to be either what was in the heart of the king, or the desperate hunger of David and his people.*

There is no contradiction between the author of 1 Samuel, who identifies Abimelech as the priest, and Mark's reference to the priest Abiathar (2:26). Abiathar, as the son of Abimelech, was evidently involved in the incident also. Because of the close association of David with Abiathar, it was natural for both Jesus and Mark to mention his involvement. Both Abiathar and Abimelech would have been in service as priests at the time of the incident [BSB].

**2:27 - MADE FOR MAN.** *“Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” The Sabbath was given so that man might honor God and glorify His name, not abuse it or treat it as another day. At the same time, man was not created to be a slave to formal Sabbath ritual. We must not make a religion of Sabbath observance. At the same time, many in the church today treat the Lord’s Day just like any other day - just as soon as the get the church service out of the way! How do you tell a twelve year old boy to worship the Lord when you have spent more time planning the Sunday afternoon ball game than preparing for Sunday School? When one’s*

Sunday noon and afternoon schedule are on one's mind during Sunday School and the morning worship service the Lord is not honored.

There seems little danger that the average church member today will adopt a Pharisaic attitude toward the Sabbath. We have moved in the opposite direction. It is, however entirely possible for us to let religious rules get between us and the Lord - even today.

**2:28 - LORD OF THE SABBATH.** *“So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”* If anyone else had made this statement the Pharisees would have been justified in the shock they no doubt experienced. This is a doctrinal truth that needed to be proclaimed and Jesus did not hesitate to proclaim His lordship over His day. That is just it - it is His Day.

Jesus assumes authority over diseases, disabilities, demons, sins, and now over the Sabbath. Jesus Christ is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus claims lordship, even of the Sabbath. He was not a slave to the Sabbath, as were the Pharisees, but Lord of the Sabbath.

## CHAPTER III

### MAN WITH A CRIPPLED HAND, 3:1-6

**3:1 - A SYNAGOGUE.** *“He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered.”* Jesus is still going to the synagogue. The synagogue had been a part of His life since early childhood. It is inconceivable that He would quit going to church today if someone criticized Him, or a deacon did not speak to Him.

There was a man in the synagogue that day who had a withered hand. Did he go there because he knew Jesus would be there and that He might heal him? Had some of the critics of Jesus encouraged him to go? Possibly some of the man's friends had encouraged him to go, hoping he would be healed.

**3:2 - THE WERE WATCHING.** *“They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.”* Who does Mark mean by “they”? Were the people watching to see if Jesus would heal the man on the Sabbath, or does this denote the Pharisees and Scribes? We do know from what we read in verse 6 that the Pharisees were the ones who took advantage of this incident to begin conspiring against Jesus.

There was an article in the February 28, 2004, News Star (Monroe, LA) in which the author sought to defend the Pharisees. According to her, the Pharisees have been treated unfairly. She gave a number of reasons to support her thesis, most of which are weak or false. Modern day rabbis did not grow out of the Pharisees of Jesus' day, there had been rabbis around a long time (Hillel and others were quoted often in Jesus day). Jesus was called Rabbi.

The simple fact is that Jesus was born into a culture that had a form of religion, but the leaders had turned the Temple into a den of thieves. They had boasted of their righteousness but showed no compassion for the less fortunate. A part of their righteousness was condemning others.

The Pharisees and Sadducees strongly opposed Jesus, and before too long they were plotting to kill Him, lest they lose their position of leadership among their own people. The Sadducees were more political and the Pharisees were more religious, but both stood to lose their position if the Romans determined that they could not maintain order. The Sadducees apparently had more money and owned more property. They also had more political clout. The Pharisees were the religious elite of the day and they would conspire to have Jesus killed to preserve their position.

The writer of that article also employed the B.C.E. (before common era) and the A.C.E. (after common era) rather than B.C. (before Christ) and A. D. which is traditional. The secularists are pushing the new designation, not to observe the Jewish calendar, but in opposition to Jesus Christ.

**3:3 - HE SAID.** *“He said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Get up and come forward!’”* Jesus was not naive where these religious leaders were concerned. He knew what they were thinking. He could have waited until after the Sabbath but He knew that would only be postponing the inevitable conflict. As a matter of fact, if He had played it safe He could have avoided the persecution and the Cross all together. That, however, was not why He came. He told the man to “get up and come forward.” Jesus might have healed the man silently, or He might have determined that the man should have been healed as soon as the Sabbath was over.

**3:4 - HE SAID.** *“And He said to them, ‘Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?’”* But they kept silent. Jesus’ question was designed to focus attention upon the real purpose of the Sabbath. They sat “in sullen silence and helplessness before the merciless questions of Jesus as the poor man stood before them all” [ATR].

He is still in charge. They are not forcing this on Jesus, they are observing Him to see what He would do. He knew what He would do, but once again, He challenges them with a question. It should be stressed that Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, not only knew what He was doing, He knew the implications and the possible consequences. At the same time, He did not set aside Sabbath observation as He set aside food restrictions (ch. 7).

**3:5 - ANGER.** *“After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.”* Jesus was angry? It was not the only time (He cleansed the Temple in anger). With Jesus this is righteousness indignation at the calloused attitude of the Pharisees. They could not have cared less for the man with the withered hand. They only sought to trap Jesus. Jesus shows righteous indignation in its truest sense. He is the Man of Sorrows and the present participle brings out the continuous state of grief whereas the aorist participle for angry shows a necessary angry look. Jesus showed compassion for the afflicted man and demonstrated his authority over the affliction and His Lordship over the Sabbath. The man was healed on the spot.

The Bible tells us that we should be angry and sin not. It also teaches that the wrath of man does not honor God. So, is it a sin to be angry? Not necessarily. It is a sin to sin when you are angry! It may even be a sin not to get angry under some circumstances. To fail to become angry when one molests a child, trades in pornography, involves a child in pornography calls into question one's commitment to the Word of God and to personal holiness. Michael Reagan's book, TWICE ADOPTED, underscores the damage child abuse and child pornography can do to a child. After reading his testimony if you do not become angry at the thought of child abuse there is something missing in your heart.

During the presidential race of 2004, liberals attacked President Bush with a viciousness that betrays the civility with which campaigns in the past have been conducted. There are people who hate President Bush because of his faith in Jesus Christ. Someone explained it this way: secularists had become so successful in pushing Christianity out of the public arena that they were smug in their success. Then, when it seemed that they were on a roll, winning victory after victory over Christians, President Bush was elected and began talking about God, promising to pray for people, and quoting Scripture. Someone said that George W. Bush is the most spiritual president in over one hundred years. They probably mean that his testimony is the clearest since Abraham Lincoln.

At the burial service for President Ronald Reagan, Michael Reagan amazed me with the clearest statement of faith in Jesus Christ I heard through several days of television coverage, including the funeral service in Washington. Then, Ron Reagan came to the speaker's stand and condemned those who "wear their religion on their sleeve," especially condemning President Bush. It grieved me that Ron Reagan dishonored his father, disputed his brother, and betrayed his own lack of faith. That was mild compared with what others were saying. The liberal media attacked President Bush and liberal politicians like Senator Ted Kennedy and Senator Hilary Clinton became even more vicious than his opponent, Senator John Kerry. The victory by President Bush has caused liberals and enemies of Jesus Christ to try to redefine moral issues. They are trying to say that, though they fight for the right to kill unborn babies, and for homosexuality, they are more moral than the president because they want to protect the environment.

Every time I hear some vile, profane, vulgar Hollywood entertainer crusading for clean air, while they are polluting the airwaves with enough filth to turn every face in Sodom red, I become angry. When I see the ACLU attack Boy Scouts of America because they believe in God, I become angry. When I see liberals join hands with the ACLU in an all out assault on the Pledge, coins, and history books that mention God, I become angry. When I see the ACLU attack former Chief Justice Roy Moore of Alabama, I become angry. Once I become angry, however, I must ask the Lord to channel that anger in such a way that His name is honored, not dishonored.

**3:6 - CONSPIRING.** " *The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.*" The Pharisees had seen what they obviously wanted to see, and when they saw it they went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Jesus. Politics made strange bed-fellows even then. The Herodians were a Jewish party who favored the Herodian dynasty, the party some have called the peace at any price

party. They were determined to appease Rome.

The Pharisees, zealously defending the Sabbath, go out and plot with their bitter enemies, the Herodians, to kill Jesus. And that on the Sabbath. Think about it, the zealous defenders of the Sabbath are plotting to kill the Lord of the Sabbath. There is no mercy in them, no desire to manifest the nature and character of God, just narrow-minded religious bigotry. Believe me, there are plenty of people like that in our world today. The enemies of the Cross are not all Communists, Muslims, or secularists. Every time the ACLU attacks another Christian institution, the Rev. Barry Lynn, a minister in the United Church of Christ, and president of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, is invited to come on yet another cable news network to defend the ACLU.

## **CROWD BY THE LAKE, 3:7-12**

**3:7 - JESUS WITHDREW.** *“Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea.”* Periodically, Jesus withdrew, or tried to withdraw from the multitudes that crowded around Him. As usual, they found Him or someone saw where He was going and before long there was a great multitude following Him. It is interesting that these people were from both Galilee and Judea. These people must have been expecting Him to declare Himself to be the Messiah for whom they had waited.

**3:8 - A GREAT NUMBER.** *“And from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him.”* As the word spread, multitudes from all over the region were coming to Galilee to see and hear the One Who just might declare Himself to be the Messiah and drive out the Romans.

**3:9 - A BOAT.** *“And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crowd Him.”* Seeing the crowd, Jesus instructed His disciples to get boat ready. He knew the Pharisees were conspiring against Him and it is possible that He was concerned for His safety - but I do not believe that was the reason he requested a boat. He was not planning an escape. A boat was a simple matter - Peter and Andrew had a boat in the area and Zebedee, the father of James and John may have had more than one.

Jesus looked at the crowd and saw that they would not be able to see him as they crowded around him by the sea shore. Up on the mountain side he might have found an elevated place where they could both see and hear Him. At this location they would be able to see and hear him if He got into a boat and stood up, or sat on some of the gear so that he would be above the people on shore.

**3:10 - PRESSED AROUND HIM.** *“For He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed around Him in order to touch Him.”* Anticipation that He would announce that He was the Messiah and begin a rebellion against Rome would bring out many people, but for many there was a more immediate need. They were seeking healing for themselves or for loved ones.

**3:11 - UNCLEAN SPIRITS.** *“Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down*

*before Him and shout, 'You are the Son of God!'* Whenever people with evil spirits saw Jesus they... “kept on falling down before Him and crying.” And He “kept charging, or rebuking them.” All imperfect verbs. Everywhere Jesus went He encountered unclean spirits, or demons - and you can believe that they knew Him. What would people say if someone told you today that he had seen people with unclean spirits in our of our worship service? He may well have seen people possessed by an evil spirit, but did they recognize them. We have to avoid two extremes. We must be careful in assigning demons responsibility for everything we do not like, and we must be careful not to dismiss the whole concept of demonic activity.

I can recall a number of times when someone came to me and told me they were convinced that there were people in their church who were causing trouble because they were demon possessed. Well, if a lost church member was possessed by demons what would you expect him to do? There are unclean spirits in the world today and you can be sure that a lot of the trouble that has come to a lot of churches has been encouraged by Satan and his demons. Satan used people he does not possess. There is demonic possession, demonic obsession, and demonic influence. Satan influences a lot of people who are not demon possessed, as well as people who are not obsessed with demons. He even uses people who say there is no devil, or demons.

We must take the occult seriously. A lady told me about the hold drugs and the occult had on her daughter for several years. She went to stay with a relative who was in a Bible school somewhere in the north, possibly Minnesota. She wrote back and asked her mother to go into her room and take down all the occult symbols and burn them. The mother told me they burned everything until they got to the Ouija board and it would not burn. They stopped and prayed for God to destroy it and then they put it back into the burn barrel it was immediately ignited.

The whole time the daughter was gone a witch (Mammy) from a nearby town called to asked about her. This woman was bringing the boys and girls together and overseeing sex for drugs transactions. The daughter returned home after being a way for many weeks and they went to a nearby city to eat lunch at a Cafeteria (where I have eaten a number of times). They went through the line, got their food and moved to a table and began to eat. After a few minutes the daughter suddenly jumped. The mother asked her what was wrong. She said, “Mammy is here!” The mother looked all around and assured her daughter that Mammy was not there. The daughter insisted, “She is here. I know it!” After several attempts to dissuade her, the mother turned and looked toward the window in time to see Mammy walking along the sidewalk. She had been behind a brick wall when her daughter became aware of her presence.

They had prayed for deliverance but the mother wondered what was about to happen when Mammy came in and went through the line and got her meal. She came from the end of the line right by their table and glanced at them and did not even recognize the young girl who had once been a slave to her drugs and occult control. God had delivered her from Mammy’s control- and demonic control.

**3:12 -WARNED THEM.** *“And He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was.”* Why did Jesus not want their testimony? Jesus does not need the testimony of demons. The demons, though afraid of Jesus, would have loved nothing more than to upstage Him, or to create trouble for Him.

He has a far greater testimony than that: The Father, the Holy Spirit, His works, His servants.

## **JESUS CHOOSES TWELVE APOSTLES, 3:13-19**

**3:13 - SUMMONED THOSE.** *“And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him.”* From the crowd by the sea, He invited a select group to follow Him up a mount. They formed a sort of spiritual body-guard around Him as He continued all night in prayer. We are not told specifically that Jesus invited only twelve men to join him, so the door is open for speculation that there might have been more than the twelve apostles who were “summoned” to join Him as he went up upon the mountain.

**3:14 - HE APPOINTED TWELVE.** *“And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach.”* He appointed twelve from the select group which He had summoned to the mountain top. These, of course were the twelve apostles. The word means one sent out. The modern equivalent is the missionary. The word disciple denotes both a follower and a learner, thus one who follows after to learn from a teacher. The apostles all had certain things in common: they were followers of Jesus, they saw him personally, and He called them to a new office, the office of Apostle.

**3:15 - AUTHORITY.** *“(A)nd to have authority to cast out the demons.”* Jesus had many disciples, some of whom were summoned to join Him on top of the mountain. From that group He appointed twelve apostles, whom he gave incredible authority in this world. The authority Jesus gave the apostles included authority over demons. To be sure, if apostolic authority included power over demons it would cover many other things. For more on that, look at the authority Paul was given in dealing with the church at Corinth.

**3:16-19 - HE APPOINTED TWELVE.** *“And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter) and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, “Sons of Thunder”); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.”* “There are four lists of the apostles given in the NT (see also Matt. 10:1-4; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13).

Peter heads the list, possibly because he was older than the others. There is an organization within the twelve, with Peter, James, and John always listed as the top three, possibly denoting inner circle, but maybe revealing the fact that Jesus had the twelve organized in such a way that responsibilities within the group could be delegated.

## **JESUS AND BEELZEBUB, 3:20-30**

**3:20 - THE CROWD.** *“And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal.”* The crowd reassembled quickly upon His return from the mountain. Word spread quickly and the crowd gathered again, this time a much larger crowd. As you watch news stories from the Middle East you may be surprised at how quickly the streets fill up with people when anything happens. One wonders how the news gets out so quickly even with radio and television. One may also wonder what all these people do for a living. In Jesus’ day the news was spread by word of mouth. According to church history, when George Whitfield came to a new area an incredible number of people came together in a very brief period of time to hear the great evangelist.

**3:21 - HIS OWN PEOPLE.** *“When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, ‘He has lost His senses.’”* This denotes His relatives, not His friends. None of Jesus’ brothers followed Him during His earthly ministry. James received one of the post-resurrection appearances and the brothers of Jesus were a part of the one-hundred, twenty people in the Upper Room praying and waiting for the fulfillment of the Lord’s Promise that He would send His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

**3:22 - THE SCRIBES.** *“The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul,’ and ‘He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.’”* Scribes from Jerusalem are creating most of the opposition at this point. The scribes were recognized authorities on the Law, often aligned with the Pharisees or Sadducees in their opposition to Jesus.

It is interesting that the Scripture says “The scribes came down from Jerusalem.” We often say if a person is going north he is going “up north”, or if he is going south he is going “down south.” When anyone left Jerusalem he or she would have to go down from an elevation of some 1280 feet to lower ground, but this term carried a greater significance. To the faithful Israelite to leave Jerusalem to go to any other place he was “going down from Jerusalem” regardless of where he was going or what the elevation was.

**POSSESSED BY BEELZEBUL.** The Ryrie Study Bible Notes offer the following comment on Beelzebul (or Beelzebub, NKJV):

“Beelzebul means “lord of flies,” a guardian deity of the Ekronites (2 Kings 1:2), but used by the Jews as an epithet for Satan. The name may have been a mocking Hebrew alteration of Baal-Zebul, a local archdemon of northern Palestine and Syria. For Jesus’ enemies to allege that He was possessed by Beelzebul was the worst kind of blasphemy (Mark 3:22)” [RSB].

**3:23 - IN PARABLES.** *“And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan?”* Jesus was the ultimate story teller or illustrator, using parables, metaphors, and word pictures to make a point, or as here, to answer a critic. In crisp, pungent thrusts that exposed the inconsistencies of the scribes and Pharisees, beginning with the question that is obvious to us, and you would think it would have been obvious to those scribes: “How can Satan

cast our Satan?" Intelligent, even brilliant people can be so committed to a cause they often miss the obvious. It may be that the reason is not that they cannot see but that they will not see. The scribes were blinded by their hatred for Jesus. Before you ask how that could be, ask how so many well educated people in America can hate Him today. They not only hate Him but they hate those who are open in their commitment to Him. The hatred some people have for President George W. Bush is an example of this. Liberals and secularists have made every effort to have "religion" confined to the church or synagogue and to the home (of course, they do not seem to have a problem with Islam or New Age religions). Then President George Bush was elected and began talking about God, faith, prayer, and Scripture. There is no doubt in the minds of many evangelicals that his faith is one factor in the intense hatred many liberals hold for him

**3:24-26 - IF A KINGDOM IS DIVIDED.** *"If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished!"* No one has ever answered critics as did Jesus. His logic is refutable, except to those who will not hear the truth. Having eyes they do not see and having ears they do not hear.

The point is that if Satan rises up against himself his kingdom is divided and cannot stand. Of course, if you do not believe that Satan exists you will probably dismiss this as some kind of mind game. I sat under professors who did not believe in the existence of a personal devil - he is simply the personification of evil. While theological professors were denying the existence of Satan in the classroom he was getting a foothold on the streets of America. The church of Satan was established, the Satanic Bible was published, and occult groups sprang up all over the country.

You can be sure Satan does not permit his kingdom to be divided by his minions. However, he is the great deceiver, a liar from the beginning, and as such may well try to mislead us. Witches, or as they now prefer to be called, Wiccans, deny that witchcraft is satanic. They even deny the existence of Satan, even though they receive their power from him.

**3:27 - A STRONG MAN'S HOUSE.** *"But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house."* People often make one of two mistakes where Satan is concerned, as we have already seen. They see him in everything or they do not see him at all. They ascribe to him power approaching omnipotence, or they deny that he has any power at all. Satan is real and he has supernatural power, but that power is very limited compared to God. James promises that if we will draw near to God He will draw near to us and in the power of God we can resist the devil and he will flee from us (James 4).

**3:28 - WHOEVER BLASPHEMES AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT.** *"(B)ut whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."* I had heard preachers talk about "The Unpardonable Sin", and when I was a Junior at Mississippi College I convinced myself that the people I was serving as student pastor needed to hear a sermon on the subject. I did have enough sense to know that I needed to be well prepared so I went to see Dr. E. R. Pinson and told him I was preparing a sermon on the Unpardonable Sin and asked his advice.

“Pick another subject!”, he replied.

That let the wind out of my sails but after I got over the shock I knew I was indebted to that great Bible teacher. What we do know is that there is an unpardonable sin, and that sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is the unpardonable sin, and it can be committed today. Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil. It is not cursing God. It is not rejecting Jesus Christ - though if one does not repent it will lead to the same end. The Holy Spirit came to convict sinners of their sin and to convince them to trust Jesus Christ for His salvation. If one continually and stubbornly rejects Jesus Christ he is turning a deaf ear and a blind eye to the Holy Spirit. He is attributing the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to some satanic activity. If he persists he may not only find himself blind and deaf to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he may even reach the point that the Lord may cooperate with him in the hardness of his heart as he did with Pharaoh.

Do you know anyone who has committed the unpardonable sin? What would you tell anyone who is concerned that he or she has committed this sin? There is one thing for sure - if they are worried about it they have not committed it! If they desire a relationship with Jesus Christ they have not committed the unpardonable sin. Unbelief is not the unpardonable sin - we all were unbelievers until we were forgiven.

I have a deep burden for an elderly Jewish man who realizes that his time on earth is limited. He says, “I wish I did believe there is something after death, but I am a scientist and I took all those classes in evolution. I am not even sure I believe in sin.” When I mentioned Moses and Joshua, he said, “Those names don’t mean a thing to me. I am not sure I believe they ever lived.” He has willfully blinded himself so long that he is now blind to the Light of the World.

## **JESUS’ MOTHER AND BROTHERS, 3:31-35**

This is a rather pathetic picture. But in another way, we find a beautiful picture as Jesus, explains His new relationships.

**3:31-32 - HIS MOTHER AND HIS BROTHERS.** *“Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.”* There is no question about it, Jesus not only had an earthly mother, He also had brothers. The Bible teaches very clearly the virgin birth but nowhere does it proclaim a perpetual virginity for Mary. Mary and Joseph had a number of children after the birth of Jesus.

There are a number of points of interests in this account. First, Joseph is missing, and presumed dead according to tradition. Second, the brothers of Jesus have grown up and are probably married by now. Third, they were in touch with each other and with Mary. Fourth, Mary, who had been so anxious to help Jesus get his ministry off to a good start at the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee, has decided by this time that He has gone overboard on religion (President Bush is attacked for “wearing

his religion on his sleeve”). Fifth, they still love Him and want to take Him home to avoid criticism or persecution (or, do you think they were embarrassed by Him?).

A lot of people would have followed Jesus if he had conformed to their idea of what the Messiah should do. Those people surely were ignorant (or misguided) weren't they? This reminds us of what is happened all over America today. They would have followed someone who could turn stones to bread, walk on water, raise the dead, or feed a great multitude with a child's lunch. They did not want the kind of Messiah who would not conform to their preconceived ideas of what He should do.

**3:33-34 - MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS.** *“Answering them, He said, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”* There comes a time in the life of each young man when he must separate himself from his mother to the point that he can function as an individual man. Ideally, He will seek to establish a wholesome relationship with his family. Jesus obviously loved His family deeply, but they had to understand that their relationship must now be different.

When Jesus and His disciples went to the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2), they ran out of wine and Mary, His mother came out to Him and announced that they had run out of wine. Did she expect Him to go somewhere and buy more? It is obvious that there is more to it than that. She must have known that Jesus was finally beginning the work for which He came into the world. He was from ten to fifteen years beyond the date when young men would have been about their life's work, but He had not begun His ministry. It seems that Mary anticipated the beginning of His ministry at this time and sought to give Him an opportunity when they ran out of wine. When she came out and announced that they had no more wine, Jesus asked, “What does that have to do with you and Me?” There seems to be a gentle reminder in his response that, even though She had been His mother until now, there must be a new relationship between them. He must be the Savior and she must be the servant.

Here, Jesus is not denying his mother and His brothers, but establishing the new relationship that must exist between them. Furthermore, He identifies the relationship that from this time forward would exist between Himself and His followers.

**WHO ARE MY MOTHER AND HIS BROTHERS?** At the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee Jesus tenderly and graciously reminded His mother that she could not be in charge of His ministry. Now he includes his brothers, as well as all others as He reveals just what His relationship with others would be from that time forward. Jesus knew better than any person who has ever lived who His earthly family was. No disrespect is intended. He is not rejecting his family, but declaring the significance of spiritual relationships.

**BEHOLD MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS.** Our relationship with Jesus Christ supersedes all earthly relationships. Throughout eternity those who have been born again by grace through faith will be His brothers and sisters. How do we get to be a brother or sister of Jesus

Christ? By being born again, by doing the will of God, which begins with a personal relationship with Him.

Pastors have been asked through out the ages, “Will I know my husband (wife, child, brothers and sisters, or friends) in Heaven. I loved R. G. Lee. I met and heard him preach in person a number of times. When I was a teenager we got home from our mission church in time to her Dr. Lee every Sunday for several years. Once Dr. Lee said someone asked him, “Will we recognize one another in Heaven?” He said, “Do you think we will be dumber in Heaven than we are here?” You never knew what Dr. Lee might say. Once, back when air conditioning was first being installed in facilities in the Memphis area, a lady saw him and announced in a very condescending manner, “We have just here from Chicago and we are looking for a comfortable church. Is your church air conditioned?” Dr. Lee said, “No. And Hell’s not either!”

It is understandable that we will want to see the people we love when we get to Heaven. I have a mother and father in Heaven and I am excited about the opportunity to see them. However, if we become too focused on that we will miss something very important. When we are born again by the grace of God we are adopted into the family of God. We are joint heirs with Jesus. What this means is that in Heaven we will have deeper, fuller, more meaningful relationships than we have here - and they will not be limited as they are here. Solomon taught that in many relationships there is ruin. Many people have been hurt emotionally by people they love. Others have been ruined financially by people they thought they could trust.

In relationships here on earth we experience both joy and pain. Those whom we love most can hurt us the most. A husband is unfaithful to his wife - or simply inconsiderate. The wife loves her husband but cannot resist putting him down in front of her friends. A neighbor is a good friend but when around certain other friends he has a tendency to put you down. A daughter comes in and announces that she is pregnant. A son calls, “Daddy, I am in trouble.”

When I had a heart attack I was on the table in the emergency room. I quickly gave the nurse my son’s number at the District Attorney’s office. When he arrived at the hospital, the nurse gave him a sheet of paper with a list of things to do. Later, he joked, “That is just like Daddy. Even while he is having a heart attack he is giving me a list of things to do!” I knew I could count on him to call his mother and brother. For the next few weeks family, friends, and church members visited, prayed, sent cards, called my family, and visited. Relationships can bring pain or joy here on earth. In Heaven all relationships will bring joy, and that joy will never be broken by pain or disappointment.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PARABLES OF THE SOILS, 4:1-20**

In the New Testament, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. This is among the most easily understood of the parables. It answers the question, If Jesus is the Truth from God, why

do not more people believe Him?

**4:1- HE BEGAN TO TEACH.** *“He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land.”* The modern preacher can learn a valuable lesson from these words. Jesus demonstrated His authority over the elements, over diseases, over death, sin, and even the Sabbath. Masses were attracted to Him because of His miracles and that is one reason He performed those signs and miracles. The modern reader may well be more attracted to the signs and wonders than anything else. If so, that is unfortunate. A major part of His ministry involved the preaching of the Gospel and teaching of the Word of God. Those are two major emphases of the New Testament: preaching and teaching.

**LARGE CROWD.** The crowd, attracted by his teachings as well as the miracles, followed Jesus wherever He went. Here, as Jesus began teaching the people, more and more people came out to hear Him. There was a fishing boat nearby and Jesus got into the boat and sat down and taught the people who were standing along the shore. The fishing boat would have put Jesus above the people so that they could both see and hear Him, even when He was seated, either on some of the fishing gear or on the side of the boat.

**4:2 - PARABLES.** *“And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching...”* A parable is a story set along side (parallel to) a truth for the purpose of illustrating it or amplifying it. Jesus often taught in parables, not because He did not know the method of the rabbis, but because the people would remember the parable. After graduating from seminary, it was my privilege to spend a considerable amount of time with Dr. Leo Eddleman, who had been president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I mentioned a professor who had taught church history. I mentioned the fact that I was taking Hebrew, Greek, and History of Christianity at the same time and History of Christianity was my hardest class because had to memorize so many dates, individuals, places, and events. Dr. Eddleman said, “That is the worst method of teaching history there is. The best method is biographical. People remember it that way.” I had been reading a series of historical narratives and realized that he was right.

There is little doubt that Jesus used the parables to hold the attention of the crowd and to be sure that they would remember what He said. I would like to believe Jesus held most of his audience spellbound with these parables.

**4:3 -THE SOWER.** *“Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow.”* It is possible that even as Jesus spoke to these people He could look off to the side and observe a sower broadcasting seed over his field. If there was no sower, there probably was a recently seeded field. Jesus used practical illustrations.

One of the first sermons I ever preached was based on an outline I saw in a book I bought at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center when I was in high school. The sermon outline had been prepared by Dwight L. Moody. He called it GOD’S LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING. While driving a tractor on our Mississippi delta farm, seven miles west of Sledge, Mississippi, I observed

the field as I was plowing, complete with the grass, weeds, and vines that threatened our cotton crop in those days before pre-emergence chemicals. I used that field to illustrate a major point in that sermon. I preached that sermon, not only in churches but also at the Hinds County Jail in Jackson and many times at various camps at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. The prisoners in those days chopped cotton, in the spring and picked it in the fall. They understood the points I was making.

**4:4 - SOME FELL BESIDE THE ROAD.** *“As he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up.”* The sower was broadcasting his seed, and having done a little of that in my youth when we needed to sow grain in a very small field, I can picture some of the seed falling on the road and some beside the road. I spend a number of summers working for the USDA. Once while driving down a very high turn-row beside a canal which separated the dirt road from a rice field, I observed an airplane seeding the rice field. Golden grain glistening in the sunlight was easy to follow as it fell on the field in sheets. I really watched with a sense of appreciation as the grain fell on the field, but as the plane neared the end of the field he began to climb quickly to clear the willows which had come up along the bank of the canal. With a slight shock I watched as a solid sheet of grain fell into the canal and spread across the road before it was cut off completely. To have cut it off early might have meant that the field would not have been seeded all the way out to the edge, but for a few minutes all I could think about was what a waste I had witnessed. Jesus used visual aids with which the people could identify. It is possible that birds were indeed picking up grain from a roadway or path as Jesus was speaking.

**4:5-6 - OTHER SEED FELL ON ROCKY GROUND.** *“Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.”* Having grown up on a cotton field in the Mississippi Delta I have a problem picturing rocky ground anywhere, let alone in the field. However, in hill country rocks can be a serious problem, especially when there is a layer of rock that is either totally exposed or just under the surface of the field. If there was a little moisture in the thin layer the seed would germinate but in short time the sun would dry out the moisture in the soil and the plant would die. After a rain you may see some tiny grass spring up on a sidewalk or the edge of a highway in a thin layer of dust. You know it will not survive very long.

**4:7 - THORNS.** *“Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.”* Some of the seed, broadcast along the edge of the field, would fall in the weeds and thorns invariably found in uncultivated ground. Farmers today spray the ditches and turn rows with chemicals to kill undesirable vegetation today but they had no such chemicals in those days. Any seed falling among the weeds, bushes, and thorns would germinate but could not compete for sunlight or nutrients.

**4:8 - GOOD SOIL.** *“Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”* The “good soil” was the tillable field, cleared and maintained by years of cultivation. Seed sown in this soil would germinate, grow, and produce a harvest, which would vary according to the quality of the soil and growing conditions. I always pay attention to crops growing alongside the highway, especially in the delta areas of

Mississippi and Louisiana Delta. I always expect to see beautiful cotton and soybeans growing in the alluvial soil near the Mississippi River. In my youth I listened to farmers discuss the difference between the cotton land of the Mississippi Delta and the hill farms in north central Mississippi. There were “hollows” (meadows) where the soil was fertile enough to produce over a bale of cotton per acre, but delta soil normally produced from one to two bales to an acre. When farmers began fertilizing their crops they began producing more. I worked summers for the USDA for several years while I was in school and then I worked some crop surveys after graduating. We made field counts and we discovered soil in the delta region that produced three bales per acre. We also found some fields that did not produce anything like that much, no matter what nutrients were added to it. The harvest, to a great extent, depended upon the soil.

**4:9 -HE WHO HAS EARS.** *“And He was saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”* He has given them the story, and now He challenges them to consider the meaning. By the expression, “He was saying” we might infer that the disciples often heard Him use this expression when He wanted to be sure they “got the message.” Of course it may mean that he kept going over it.

**4:10 - BEGAN ASKING.** *“As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables.”* The story was simple enough, but what did it mean? Was there some hidden meaning in the parable? As soon as the disciples were alone with Jesus they “began asking Him about the parable.” For some reason, they understood that they had heard something significant and various disciples began asking questions about the significance of it.

**4:11-12 - MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.** *“And He was saying to them, ‘To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN.’* Paul would be inspired to explain the significance of Jesus’ statement:

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:14-16).

What Jesus “was saying” (continually explaining) was that the mysteries of the Kingdom of God are spiritually discerned and only those who are filled with the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, would be able to discern the deeper meaning, not only of this parable, but also of all the Scripture. In John 14, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to convict lost people of sin and convince them to come to Jesus for His salvation. The Holy Spirit would then indwell each believer to empower, to convict, to encourage, to guide in moral decisions, and to teach the deeper things of the Word of God: “ But the

Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26).

**4:13 - DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND?** *“And He said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?’”* Jesus was a great teacher and He knew the Rabbinical methods, but no one had ever heard anyone teach as Jesus taught. This is an example of His method of getting the attention of his disciples, not only for the moment, but for future sessions.

**4:14-15 - THE WORD.** *“The sower sows the word. These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.”* Once they had the key to the interpretation, the parable was really very simple. The key point is that the sower is the one who proclaims the Word of God and the seed is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The seed that fell on the hard packed road or on the side of the road might germinate but it stood no chance of bearing a harvest. Many lost people will hear the Gospel but because of the hardened condition of their heart it will never bear any fruit.

**4:16-17 - IN A SIMILAR WAY.** *“In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.”* The very word “parable” implies a parallel. Here is the spiritual parallel to the story they had just heard. Remember that the seed sown is the same, regardless of where it falls. The Gospel is the same. That which determines the results will be the condition of the soil, as well as other factors that may prevent a harvest.

When I was a student at Mississippi College I led a Baptist Student Union (BSU) mission trip to the Hinds County Jail in Jackson for two and one-half years. During the latter part of this time I also preached at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman every Sunday morning at 8:00 A. M. I had the privilege of witnessing to a lot of people who needed to know the Lord. As I looked into the eyes of these men I observed some who looked at me with intense interest, some who seemed to see the service only as something to break the monotony, but a few showed nothing but contempt. I went to Camp 4 at Parchman and told the officer in charge that the chaplain had sent me to hold a service. Chaplain R. B. Hicks knew I was from Sledge, Mississippi where two of his nieces had taught me in high school. When I arrived each Sunday morning we would visit before he assigned me a camp for that morning. After a few months Chaplain Hicks said, “Johnny, when you get here from now on, just go to any camp you want to and tell them I sent you.”

I went to Camp 4 and told them I was there to hold the service. The officer went to the door of the barracks and called, out, “Church service.” The prisoners lined up and walked through the door between the barracks and the lobby, turned to the door facing, put their hand to the right side of their mouth and called out the number: one, two, three, and so on until they had reached something like one hundred thirty-nine. They marched into the mess hall for the service but the officer came in and told them to return and come again. They were one short! Some one had mixed up the count, either accidentally or intentionally. Believe me, either was possible.

We finally got to start. I looked out and saw Tommy, a man who had committed a brutal murder in Jackson months before. Tommy had called on the Lord to save him when I visited him at the Hinds County Jail. At the close of the service the men lined up to go back to their barracks and they always came by to shake hands with me, most of them thanking me for coming. One man stopped and asked me, "Were you in Jackson last Spring?" I paused and then said, "I was at Mississippi College and I went to Jackson often." He asked, "Did you ever go the Hinds County Jail?" When I told him I did, he held up a New Testament, the cover turned back so I could read what I had written in it before I gave it to him. I was permitted to go into maximum security where I could look Tommy in the eye, but with Mr. Taylor I had to stay outside the door and peep through a heavy wire mesh. He said, "I couldn't see you but I remember your voice." Both Tommy and Mr. Taylor were now born again believers.

Then, there was the young man who made a point of waking toward me in a manner that suggested that he wanted to meet me, or possibly express an interest in the message. Just as he came close enough to shake my hand and speak he gave his left shoulder a sudden jerk in my direction, jerked his head around and walked on by me. He seemed to put all the contempt possible into the gesture, the only act of defiance possible under the circumstances. He did not have to attend the service. He could have stayed in the barracks. He wanted to come for some reason he may not have understood himself. I have no idea what satisfaction he got out of his gesture, or what he thought he may have conveyed to me. He may well have been putting on a show for another prisoner but if that was the case I did not see anyone else who even noticed what he had done.

I remember another time that as I looked at the men who were filing by me in one of those services in Camp 4, I saw a tattoo on the arm of one young man that read, BORN TO GO TO HELL. My first thought was that no one is born specifically to go to hell. But as I recall the behavior of the young man who made such a point of showing contempt for me or for the message, I am well aware of the fact that when the Gospel is preached Satan is there trying to distract the listener.

**4:18-19 - SOWN AMONG THORNS.** *"And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."* Again, the parallel should be easy to follow. Perhaps various illustrations of this soil condition come to mind.

A man showed up in a service many years ago with his wife. I had visited him in his home a few years earlier, but he had a different wife then. I had heard about how he had become involved with another woman, a married woman from the area. Both couples divorced and then they got married. At the close of the service this man was under deep conviction of sin, and I felt that his great guilt had to do with what he had done to his first wife. The new wife seemed totally unconcerned, friendly, possibly intrigued - but definitely not interested. They came to services for several weeks and at the close of the service this man would break down, tears flowing down his face, unable to get up from the pew. His wife sat by his side waiting for him to "get over it." One Sunday, she looked over at me and said, "I don't know what's wrong with him." A few weeks later they stopped coming at all.

When two deacons knocked on their door the man came to the door and spoke with them but would not invite them into his home. The man was under serious conviction of sin but fought off that conviction, refusing to repent. The wife was under no conviction at all. For a number of years I would see this man around town but I never saw him under conviction again.

**4:20 - THE GOOD SOIL.** *“And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”* Tommy, the

young man who had brutally killed that young woman in Jackson, Mississippi, had been born again in the maximum security cell in the Hinds County Jail. I spoke with him on my first visit after his arrest without seeing any discernable results. I found out later that after I left the man in the cell next to him had said, “When Johnny comes back next Thursday, you listen to him. He is telling you the truth.” Tommy had grown up in the Catholic church but when he told someone he wanted to see a priest the man who showed up introduced himself and gave him a tract and said, “You read that and when I come back in a week I will give you a little test on it.”

Tommy said to the jailer, “Don’t let that priest back in here again. I need more than that.” That was when his neighbor urged him to listen to me. Tommy wrote me a letter and sent it to me at Mississippi College. I will never forget his words, “Johnny, I am trying to find God.” I immediately wrote back to assure Tommy that he would never have known his need for God if God had not revealed his need to him. Tommy was saved on the next visit. I have a Christmas card in my desk right now from Tommy. He even drew a sketch of me on the card.

One Sunday morning after I had preached at Camp 4, Tommy stopped by to tell me that he was reading his Bible and praying. He added, “When I get out of here I want to serve the Lord.” He had received a life sentence but hoped someday to receive a pardon. I assured him that he did not have to wait until he got out to begin serving the Lord.

### **A LAMP UNDER A BUSHEL, 4:21-25**

The purpose of this parable was to teach the disciples the importance of revealing the truth. Jesus told parables, which even when not understood, would stick in their minds. Even concealed messages would be revealed. He charged His disciples to declare the truth fully after His ascension.

Jesus promised that when He had gone back to Heaven He would send the Holy Spirit Who would bring all these things to their remembrance.

**4:21 - A LAMP.** *“And He was saying to them, ‘A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand?’”* Jesus, the master Teacher, used illustrations from everyday life. “The lamp in the one-room house was a familiar object along with the bushel, the bed, the lampstand” [ATR]. I once had a professor who prefaced many statements with the words, “It goes without saying.” Students often commented that what he said at times could have gone without saying. Jesus states the obvious here, but He knew exactly what He was saying.

**4:22 - NOTHING HIDDEN.** *“For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light.”* A. T. Robertson wrote

“Here in Mark it is stated that the temporary concealment is for final manifestation and a means to that end. Those who are charged with the secret at this time are given the set responsibility of proclaiming it on the housetops after Ascension” [ATR].

**4:23 - LET HIM HEAR.** *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”* Teachers often call attention to the importance of what they are saying. Perhaps you had a professor who would say, “Now you need to know this,” or “You may be seeing this again so you had better pay attention.” Jesus stresses the importance of what he is saying.

**4:24 - TAKE CARE.** *“And He was saying to them, ‘Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides.’”* Luke 8:18 has “how you hear.” We not only need to pay attention, we need to know what to give our attention - and we need to know how to hear. What is heard should be worth hearing, and it should be heard with a mind to obey.

**STANDARD OF MEASURE.** After making it a point to get their undivided attention, He make a profound statement: “By the measure you use, it will be measured and added to you” (HCSB). The principle is stated in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged. For with the judgment you use, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matt 7:1-2, HCSB).

**4:25 - WHOEVER HAS.** *“For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.”* The person who does not acquire truth is in danger of losing what he thinks he has acquired. I was often amazed by my mother’s grasp of the Word of God. She grew up in the Great Depression and because of that and other circumstances she did not finish high school. However, she never ceased to study the Scripture. I often visited my parents but I was still surprised when a malignant tumor on her brain put her in the hospital. She had surgery and though the neurosurgeon said the longest any patient of his has lived with that particular tumor after it reached that stage was nine months, Mother lived eight years. During her illness we had to go through some of her records (she owned a store and my parents owned a farm). I was surprised to discover that Mother had taken her GED and was planning to enroll in college. She also took all the seminary extension classes possible. We also discovered that there were many people who had gone to her for counseling for many years. A local business man told me twelve years after her death that she was among the greatest women he had even known.

Sadly, I have talked with many people who had a greater opportunity than my mother who did not take advantage of their opportunity to study the Word of God. I have known people who knew more about the Bible at age 18 than my mother did, but at age fifty she could have taught them. Jesus states the principle and my mother affirmed it.

## PARABLE OF THE GROWING SEED, 4:26-29

The purpose of this parable is to show that seed sown will ultimately bear a harvest - as seeds sown in good soil. The emphasis is upon waiting.

**4:26-29 - THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** *“And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows--how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”*

The beauty of the parable is in its simplicity. Who cannot identify with it? I grew up on a cotton and soybean farm in Tunica County, Mississippi - long before the gambling industry invaded Tunica (or should we say “gaming” industry). There is an interesting picture that returns to my mind from time to time. It is a Sunday afternoon in May, and while my father never worked on Sunday, he would walk out into a field near the house and look down the planted cotton rows. There was no sign of new plants but you could see little tiny cracks in the surface, a slight bulge in the drill. Daddy would pull out his pocket knife, open, bend over, gently push the end of the knife blade into the drill, and carefully lift a little flake of dirt and tilt it back. He was looking to see if the cotton seeds had begun germinating. I well remember the satisfaction I could read in his face after he made several checks. He would look down the rows knowing that by the next Sunday there would be a green line from one end of the row to the other.

We had some exceptionally fertile soil on that ridge, but if we did not have enough moisture to cause the seed to germinate there would be no crop. But even when all conditions were right, something must happen inside those seeds to enable them to germinate, come up, grow, and produce a harvest. This is a miracle from our Creator.

Seeds sown will ultimate produce a crop, assuming that conditions were right. However, after the seeds are planted one must wait for the harvest. Spiritually speaking, we must wait for the harvest, and while there may be crop failures in this world there will never be a crop failure in the spiritual realm.

## PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED, 4:30-32

At that time the kingdom was numerically small. But Jesus is saying, “Just wait.” It was destined to fill all the earth.

**4:30 - THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** *“And He said, “How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it?”* The emphasis Jesus places on the Kingdom of God is a testimony to its importance. In the parable of the Growing Seed (4:26-29), Jesus began the parable

with the words, “The kingdom of God is like...” Here, He asks, “How shall we picture the kingdom of God?” Each parable is important, each portrays something significant about the Kingdom of God.

But there is something else I have observed: in the Bible, repetition stresses importance. When God repeats Himself we had better pay attention. The Kingdom of God should be of interest to all believers and Jesus uses back to back parables to pull back the veil so that we might gain a deeper insight into His kingdom.

**4:31-32 - LIKE A MUSTARD SEED.** *“It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE.”* The Kingdom of God is here likened to a mustard seed, one of the smallest of seeds, and perhaps the smallest seed found in Palestine. Though it has one of the smallest seeds and is an herb, the mustard plant grows to a height of 10-12 feet in the Holy Land. It pictures the phenomenally rapid spread of Christianity from a small beginning. The progress reports recorded in the Book of Acts proves the point. On the day of Pentecost three thousand souls were added to the church. At first, we read the great numbers were added unto the church. Before long we move from addition to multiplication.

## **PARABLES A TEACHING TOOL, 4:33-34**

**4:33 - MANY SUCH PARABLES.** *“With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.”* Jesus employed parables as His teaching method when addressing the multitudes. Then in private he explained them to His disciples. Many people would hear the parable and wonder about its significance. These disciples, having been taught by Jesus, would be able to teach others, especially after they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

## **JESUS CALMS A STORM, 4:35-41**

**4:35-36 - TO THE OTHER SIDE.** *“On that day, when evening came, He said to them, “Let us go over to the other side. Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him.”* The only way to escape the crowd was to get into the boat and row over to the other side (the eastern side) of the Sea of Galilee. Pressing crowds presented opportunities for Jesus, but at times they created the kind of problems one might expect. He wanted to preach to the masses, but it was absolutely essential for Him to rest, spent time with the Father, and instruct the disciples. They left most of the people on the west side of the lake but many followed him in other boats. There would have been many fishing boats along the shore.

**4:37 - FIERCE GALES.** *“And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.”* Cyclonic gusts fall suddenly from Mt.

Hermon down into the Jordan Valley causing violent waves on the Sea of Galilee. Such storms were expected on the Sea of Galilee, but this storm was particularly intense. James, John, Peter, and Andrew were seasoned fishermen, not men to be easily frightened by a little wind or whitecaps on the lake. This was a “fierce” storm. The imperfect tense reveals that waves were rolling over the side of the boat.

**4:38 - JESUS WAS...ASLEEP.** *“Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?’”* We must understand two things here. First, Jesus must have been exhausted (or He was totally at peace). Second, these disciples feared for their lives. They were not feint hearted week-end fishermen but career commercial fishermen.

Tom and Louis Carlisle, were our neighbors when I was growing up in the Green River Community seven miles west of Sledge, Mississippi. They were farmers but from time to time they did a little commercial fishing after the cotton was picked and soybeans cut. Louis told us about one really scary experience. They had made an oversized john boat to use in the Mississippi River and Tom had bought a motor that should have been more than adequate. One night, after running their lines, they had started back to the landing when they were suddenly caught up in one of those whirlpools for which the Mighty Mississippi is known by those who spend a lot of time on the river. Louis told us that he was sitting in the front of the boat and Tom was operating the motor when suddenly the whirlpool began spinning them around with such force that they could not immediately pull out of it. He looked to his side and could not see the surface of the river, only a round wall of water. Tom did not fight the current but kept running the boat with the whirlpool, inching higher and higher as he made the circle until he was finally able to cut across the edge of the whirlpool and level out on the surface of the river. These men were seasoned commercial fishermen but they were frightened. They knew they were but seconds from drowning - perhaps a single miss of the engine.

**4:39-41 - HE....REBUKED THE WAVES.** *“And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Hush, be still.’ And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?’ They became very much afraid and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?’”* Jesus rebuked the waves, and then His disciples. I can understand their fear - and after thinking about it, I can understand why He rebuked them. They had the Lord of the wind and waves in the boat with them! They were learning but they had a lot to learn. Fear undermines faith. How could those disciples have doubted Jesus. How could they have panicked when Jesus was in the boat with them? May I ask a more disturbing question? How can we let fear paralyze us today? How can we panic when we should be praying? Why would we panic while we are praying? I have had a lot more experience with this kind of fear than I like to admit. When I was lying in ICU following a severe heart attack a number of years ago I was totally at peace with the Lord. I realized that I might never leave the hospital - I really did not believe that, but I faced the possibility. I was prepared but I wanted to continue with the church and with my family. If someone had told me I would still be serving full time as a pastor eight years later I would have gladly settled for that. I also remember concluding that after what I had been through I would never again fret over little things. However, I have had to go to the Lord for forgiveness time after time when my faith has faltered in the storms of

life. I know I am in Jesus Christ and I am as secure as He is. I am in His boat and He is in control. All I can say, is “Father, forgive me.”

## CHAPTER V

### JESUS HEALS THE GADARENE DEMONIAK, 5:1-20

**5:1 - GERASENES.** *“They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes.”* The NKJV has Gadarenes. This was the area east of the Sea of Galilee was mostly inhabited by Gentiles.

**5:2-4 - MAN...WITH AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT.** *“When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him.. Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones.”* It may seem strange in the age of psychology to read about people being possessed with an unclean spirit or demons, but the greatest proof of demonic possession is the Scripture. For anyone interesting in making a study of the subject, The Believer’s Study Bible Notes on this passage is a good place to begin:

Mark and Luke mention one Gadarene demoniac, while Matthew mentions two (cf. Matt. 8:28-34). There is no contradiction. Luke and Mark choose to mention only the more prominent figure, while Matthew adds the details of the demoniac's companion. Though the precise location of the incident is not clear, the east bank of the Sea of Galilee apparently is the general area intended. Several important truths about the demoniac should be noticed: (1) As to origin, demons are unclean spirits, apparently fallen angels expelled from heaven as a consequence of the satanic rebellion (cf. Matt. 12:24; Luke 10:18; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:7-10). Some of these fallen angels are confined. Those allowed to continue activity among men are called either demons or unclean spirits in the Scriptures. During the Great Tribulation, the entire evil horde will evidently be unleashed against the inhabitants of the earth (cf. Rev. 9:1-11). (2) All of these fallen spirits will eventually be judged and cast into hell. (3) Some of these demons possess men. Demons are numerous and exercise strange control over the human bodies which they inhabit (5:2-9). Demons are unclean spirits and are distinct from the devil. The work of demons is to control a human personality, and in some instances to bring bodily affliction or mental disorder (cf. Matt. 12:22; 17:15-18; Luke 13:16). Since true Christian believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they may be confronted by demons, but cannot be possessed by them. (4) Since Satan cannot stand where God stands, the believer cannot be possessed. (5) Jesus and the apostles practiced exorcism of demons, as in this passage, but in no case was elaborate ritual used or prolonged discussion with the malignant spirits

held. The announcement of the spiritual superiority of Jesus is enough to force evil spirits to flee [BSB].

In my study on Luke I asked the question, “Where have all the demons gone?” When we read the Gospels we find that Jesus found demons almost everywhere He went. Why do we not see more of them today? Well, of course there are some believers who see them everywhere today and do not hesitate to point them out. In reality, Jesus did encounter demons everywhere He went. They do exist and He would have been far more sensitive than we as to their presence. Furthermore, they knew Him and reacted violently to His presence. Jesus did not eliminate all the demons, so they must still be with us. One problem is that we obviously do not bother them as much as Jesus did. However, the more we are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (being sanctified, Romans 8:29) the more we may anticipate opposition from these servants of Satan.

**5:6 - SEEING JESUS.** *“Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and shouting with a loud voice, he said, ‘What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!’”* The man saw Jesus from a distance, ran to Him, and addressed Him by name. The man had never seen Jesus before but the demons that possessed the man knew Him well. This man would not have known Jesus but the demons would never forget their past experience with Him. If He could kick them out of Heaven He could do anything He wanted to with them now.

What is especially enlightening here is that the demons not only know they are in the presence of a powerful enemy, they address Him as “Jesus, Son of the Most High God.” Their awareness of Who Jesus is and His relationship to the Most High God is amazing when you consider the limited knowledge of His followers. It is amazing how many people there are who will not acknowledge Jesus as the “Son of the Most High God.” Satan knows something they do not know.

**5:8 - COME OUT.** *“For He had been saying to him, ‘Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!’”* Jesus immediately recognized the indwelling demons who totally controlled this man, and demanded that they come out. The whole subject of Satan, demons, and the occult in general may be frightening to us, but they held no terror for Jesus. These demons had supernatural power - they could even empower the man they indwelt to do things that amazed other people. However, their power was all but non-existent before Jesus.

**5:9 - WHAT IS YOUR NAME?** *“And He was asking him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said<sup>^</sup> to Him, ‘My name is Legion; for we are many.’”* The Roman legion consisted of three to six thousand soldiers. That, to some, would indicate the number of demons that indwelt the man. The demons were numerous, if not innumerable.

**5:10-13 - HE BEGAN TO IMPLORE HIM.** *“And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain. The demons implored Him, saying, ‘Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.’ Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea.”* The

man is speaking but the demons are crying out from within him. The possessed man is giving expression to the evil forces that possess him. Their fear of Jesus is not without basis. They knew that He could do as He wished with them.

There are a number of remarkable aspects to this story that raise some serious questions. First, do demons really exist? Jesus had numerous encounters with them - and HE ALWAYS DEMONSTRATED HIS POWER AND AUTHORITY OVER THEM. Second, can demons indwell people? The answer is obvious from the control they exercised over this man and from the fact that they readily identified Jesus by name. Third, can demons indwell pigs? It is doubtful that they have any desire to indwell any creature that is not created in the image of God, but in this case they may be trying to deceive Jesus. They made a request AND HE GAVE THEM WHAT THEY ASKED FOR! Fourth, what happened to the demons after the hogs drowned? Beats me! But I can assure you Jesus knows. He also knows their eternal destiny.

**5:14-16 - REPORTED IT.** *“Their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. And the people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the ‘legion’; and they became frightened. Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine.”* The herdsmen who were watching the swine ran back to the city to report what had happened to the owners of the swine. Only Gentiles would have owned swine and the Gentiles would not have had the same background in Scripture that the Jews had - which is why Jesus continued with the Jews even after most of them rejected Him.

We might ask, why did Jesus permit this to happen to the swine? Modern New Agers or Postmodernists who place the same value on pigs as they do humans may have a serious problem

with this. This was a major loss for the owners of the swine - but this was a great opportunity for them - if they had only known!

**5:17 - IMPLORE HIM TO LEAVE.** *“And they began to implore Him to leave their region.”* They had seen a demonstration of the power of this man over demons. Possibly, they had heard that the demons had addressed Him as “Jesus, son of the God Most High.” They did not want the Son of the God Most High, they wanted their hogs! How foolish those people were! And how foolish people are today who permit “things” to keep them away from Jesus.

Joe was a friendly, personable young man of twenty when I knew him. He lived with my aunt and uncle and worked for them. The girls discovered Joe as soon as he moved to the community. They didn't think they had ever seen a more handsome young man. Everyone loved Joe and he loved everyone. Most of all, Joe loved having fun, having a good time. One day my grandfather tried to witness to Joe and told us that Joe had dismissed what he had to say with a wave of the hand and the comment. “I am having too much fun now. When I get older I may think about it.” Granddaddy tried to warn him about the danger of putting off the Lord. Three days later, Joe drowned in Cold Water River, west of Sledge, Mississippi. My grandfather told us that he had witnessed to three

different men (including Joe) in his life time who had said basically the same thing Joe said. He added, “Not one of them lived more than three days. I was called to shave one of them while he was on his death bed. His fever was so high that when I tried to shave him the skin was coming off with his beard.” I didn’t see that happen, but I knew my grandfather. Though a practical joker, he was often known to tell the truth! Joe’s death was not an easy thing for him. Joe said “No” to Jesus and had his wish granted forever.

**5:18 -EVERYONE WAS AMAZED.** *“As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him. And He did not let him, but He said to him, ‘Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.’ And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.”* The man who had been delivered from demonic possession wanted to accompany Jesus but Jesus sent him back to be a witness to his own people. He returned to Decapolis and began proclaiming to everyone he saw what Jesus had done for him. Who would have needed the gospel more than those who were begging Jesus to leave? Mark tells us that everyone who had witnessed these events and all who had seen what had happened to the man were amazed.

To many today, those demon possessed people Jesus encountered were mentally ill. They do not believe in Satan, so they must reject the whole concept of demons and demonic possession. The answer to them is in psychology. Kurt Koch, who is mentioned else where in this study, spent a lifetime studying and writing about the occult. Many others have written on the subject but Koch approached some 20,000 cases from the perspective of a theologian, a psychologist, and a medical doctor. He concluded that if medicine and psychology do not work and prayer delivers the individual, then it was demons. Demons do not respond to analysis. The psychologist has no power over demons - unless he/she is a Christian who calls on the Lord to deliver the person.

## **JAIRUS' DAUGHTER AND AN AFFLICTED WOMAN, 5:21-43**

**5:21 - CROSSED OVER.** *“When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore.”* Having left the land of the Gerasenes, after casting the demons out of the man ( often called the Gadarene demoniac), Jesus and His Apostles rowed back across to the western side of the Sea of Galilee. Luke calls it the Lake of Galilee. First, it was a fresh water body of water. Second, Luke was familiar with the Mediterranean Sea, the Adriatic Sea, and the Aegean Sea. To him, the Lake of Galilee was no sea.

Jesus made his headquarters in Galilee at the home of Simon Peter in Capernaum. Remember, Jesus had healed Peter’s mother-in-law in his home. Andrew may have lived with Peter - at one point it is called the home of Simon and Andrew. It was natural for Him to go back to Capernaum on the northwestern side shore of the lake at this time.

**5:22-23 - JAIRUS.** *“One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him,*

*fell at His feet and implored Him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live.’* Jairus was an administrator in the synagogue at Capernaum, probably the synagogue Jesus attended when he was in the area. His little daughter was at the point of death and the desperate father pleaded with Jesus to come with him and lay His hand on her the she might recover. Regardless of what Jairus thought about the claims of the teachings of Christ, he was desperate and he had seen Jesus heal other people.

My little granddaughter, Abigail, was two months premature and she had to spend three weeks in NICU at St. Francis Regional Medical Center in Monroe, Louisiana. Her parents were there for all visiting hours during the day and at night my wife and I were there. We prayed for her and held her and talked with her. When Abigail was three years old she was back in St. Francis Medical Center because of a digestive problem that was not responding to medication. To see a precious little girl hooked up to the IV and confined to a bed touches the hearts of her family, and her condition was not life-threatening. One can only imagine the desperation Jairus was experiencing.

**5:24 - HE WENT WITH HIM.** *“And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him.”* Not surprisingly, Jesus immediately responded to the appeal to go to the home of the Synagogue official and lay His hands on his little daughter. If there is a preaching point here it may well be that many people do not receive God’s blessing because they do not go to Him. They do not present their case to Him. They do not petition Him for His help. We deny ourselves when we do not call on Him.

There is the story about the old reprobate who seldom ever went to church and never showed any interest in the Lord. One day while he was repairing the tin roof on his barn his feet slipped and he dropped down on the steep tin roof, near the top. He began to slid toward the edge and there was nothing to stop his slide. In fact, he was picking up speed as he slid toward the edge of the barn. In a state of panic, he cried out, ““Lord save me!” About that time the seat of his overalls caught on a nail head and brought him to a sudden stop. Instantly, he said, “Never mind, Lord, this nail’s got me.” Some people are denied blessings because they do not go to the Lord. Others receive blessings and do not acknowledge Him.

**5:25-28 - A WOMAN.** *“A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse-- after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. For she thought, ‘If I just touch His garments, I will get well.’”* Jesus drew crowds everywhere He went. One might picture a street scene in the Middle East today and imagine what it was like in the First Century as people milled about the market place, or walked to and from the market place. This woman had suffered for years and we can be sure she had sought help from ever source available, but to no avail. When she saw Jesus she felt compelled to reach out and touch his robe as He passed by her.

**5:29 - IMMEDIATELY.** *“Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.”* Wow! “Immediately” she was healed. This is no dramatization like some of the miracles portrayed in movies. She was totally healed - immediately.

When I read something like this I thank God that I spell the name God with a capital “G.” Francis Shaeffer was right - there is nothing more meaningless than the word god spelled with a small “g.”

**5:30 - PERCEIVING IN HIMSELF.** “*Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched My garments?’*” The woman was healed immediately, and immediately Jesus knew power had gone out of Him. He turned and asked who had touched Him? This must have been a shock to the woman, and a mystery to others.

**5:31-33 - THE WHOLE TRUTH.** “*And His disciples said to Him, ‘You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’ And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.’*” Jesus never ceased to amaze His disciples. They had seen him demonstrate His power over, sin, over the elements, over demons, and over diseases. This was something they had not seen before. The woman’s faith had led her to reach out and touch Jesus’ robe. Immediately, she was healed, and immediately Jesus knew power had gone out from Him.

**5:34 - YOUR FAITH.** “*And He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.’*” Jesus announced that her faith had made her well. There is nothing here that hints of occult healing techniques. The woman acted in faith and God responded to her faith. We do not have a problem or a need that is not a faith issue. If we really have faith in Jesus Christ we will take our problems to Him.

**5:35 - YOUR DAUGHTER IS DEAD.** “*While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, ‘Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?’*” Messengers came with news that the girl was dead. They did not expect Jesus to raise her from the dead, even though He had raised the widow’s son at Nain. To them the trip would be pointless.

**5:36 - ONLY BELIEVE.** “*But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, ‘Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.’*” Jesus heard the servants and immediately spoke the words no one else on earth could say with full knowledge of the consequences. Only Jesus could know that the little girl would live again. Only Jesus could say with authority, “Do not be afraid, only believe.” Others might say it, but only Jesus could determine the outcome.

**5:37 - PETER AND JAMES AND JOHN.** “*And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James.*” Many people who have made a study of the importance of organization and administration in ministry have noted that there was an organization within the Twelve. Peter, James, and John form the inner circle. Peter, possibly the oldest of the Apostles is often seen as the leader of the group. John was possible the disciple closest to Jesus, “the disciple Jesus loved.” Andrew, Peter’s brother is not included in this group, either here or in other places, but there is no indication that he was offended or that he was jealous. In this he was a remarkable man with an attitude that equipped him for his ministry.

**5:38 - A COMMOTION.** *“They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing.”* In the days before news networks had crews located in hot spots all over the world, preachers and missionaries tried to describe to us the emotional makeup of many of the people of the Middle East. Now, we can turn on the television and see demonstrations in the streets of various countries, from Iraq, to Iran, to Saudi Arabia. Then there are the Palestinians who seem to be able to flood the streets within minutes after anything happens in the region, especially when it involves Israel. Watching the news reports from various cities in the Middle East, I have often wondered if these people ever work or if they spend all their time watching the Arab New Network, Al Jazeera.

The people seem more demonstrative in that part of the world than in America. When there is a wedding they celebrate, when there is a death they grieve - and when they grieve, they really grieve. It is not surprising that when Jesus arrived he saw “a commotion.”

**5:39 - THE CHILD IS NOT DEAD.** *“And entering in, He said to them, “Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep.”* Jesus asked the question to calm them down. He knew why there was a commotion, but He wanted to silence those who were wailing and mourning. The next statement shocked those mourners: “She is not dead, but is asleep.” Actually, as far as this world is concerned she was dead and no one on earth could ever bring her back. But Jesus knew what was about to happen and He could speak of what was about to happen as though it were a completed action.

Sleep has often been used as a metaphor for death and the reason is understandable. The body is laid out with the eyes closed as one who is asleep. However, one must never take the metaphor beyond what is intended and infer soul sleep. The body may be asleep, but the Scripture is very clear about one this: “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

**5:40 - THEY WERE COMPLETELY ASTOUNDED.** *“They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “Talitha kum!” (which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded.”* First, they laughed, then they were astounded. Sometimes we may look back from our vantage point with a certain amount of amusement at the attitudes and behavior of ancient people, but human nature had not changed. We have not evolved millions of years since the First Century! People today would laugh at the words of our Savior - in fact they are laughing at His words all the time. Right now in American there is a war going on against Jesus Christ. The enemies of the Cross cheer Islam, New Age religions, and other religions that offer “diversity.” They are suing to have Christian symbols removed from public places. A judge ordered a Bible removed from a building in Texas and someone applauded the move because it promoted freedom of religion!

Jesus took the child’s hand and said, “Little girl, I say to you, get up.” This is truly amazing. Jesus speaks to a corpse and it obeys Him! That is a much better response than He is getting from most

church members. Henning Andrews was pastor of the Lula Baptist Church, Lula, Mississippi for fifteen years. He was called to a church some thirty miles away, in the edge of the Hills. At the time there were very few cemeteries in the Mississippi Delta. Most people, like my parents, had moved from the hills of north Mississippi to the Delta, mostly because of the rich soil, which would produce two or three times as much cotton as the same amount of land in the hills. However, when someone died they usually took the body back to the hills for the interment.

Henning Andrews drove back to Lula for a visit and when he stopped at a service station the owner said, "I heard you moved to Peach Creek. I have a lot of family members who are buried in the Peach Creek cemetery." Andrews said, "Yeah, and I am getting the same response from them that I got from you for fifteen years."

The Gospels often provide a little extra evidence that what we are reading here is real history, not just a collection of fables. Mark tells us that girl got up immediately, that she began to walk around, and that she was twelve years old. He adds "immediately they were completely astounded." The touch of the Master's hand is still raising people from death today - from death to eternal life. We should all be "completely astounded" at what He is doing.

**5:43 - STRICT ORDERS.** *"And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat."* Can you imagine a modern televangelist making a statement like that? Many of the so-called faith healers use Madison Avenue methods to advertise their services. When I was about thirteen or fourteen years old Oral Roberts came to Memphis and his services were quickly publicized all over the region. We had never heard of this man but we got reports about all sorts of miracles. A lot of people were "completely astounded" by these reports. A lot of people from our community drove to Memphis to see what was happening. These were Christian people who wanted to see what the Lord was doing.

The tent was crowded and many people were sitting outside for one of the services. I was sitting with two friends when a photographer stepped in front of us with his camera. The flash bulb went off and before we regained our sight he asked, "Isn't he the greatest preacher you have ever heard?" My friends answered, "Yes sir." I said, "No. I hear Brother M. C. Waldrup ever Sunday and I had rather hear him." A few weeks later we received a magazine in the mail, and there we were, three teenagers who proclaimed Oral Roberts the greatest preacher we had ever heard!

My wife, Becky, and I attended an area-wide crusade where a very well known evangelist was beginning a revival on Sunday evening. We were visiting with friends and when the service concluded the evangelist asked all preachers to come down to the front and line up. Then he asked all the people who wanted to have a good revival to come by and shake hands with us and tell us they would be praying for the revival. We were told that there were three thousand people there.

After the first few hundred people, I had to take my college ring off and drop it into my pocket. Many of these people were farmers who were used to working with their hands and they were crushing my fingers. Then, I looked up and saw a photographer standing in a chair photographing all those people who were "walking the aisles."

A friend called me one day to tell me he had just come from a meeting at his church. He and a number of others had met with the pastor of a mega-church in a large city. The pastor had spent a lot of time talking about how they were “marketing” young people and comparing their success with two other churches in the city, one on either side of them. He said that one of the churches has nineteen thousand members. The pastor said, “We are going to have to do a better job marketing young people as they are at other churches in the area..” Let’s see, the Lord said, “You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall go out and market people in Jerusalem, in Judea.....”

Jesus made it a point to ask people not to spread this story. The question is why He made that request. Jesus was trying to avoid the kind of publicity some of these exhibitionists promote. No, He never tells us not to publicize our services. In fact, it has been demonstrated that it helps to publicize our services. However, we must be careful with that publicity. The Lord must receive the glory and we must focus on that which glorifies Him. We must not “market” the pastor or any other staff member. There is a large billboard along side a major highway which advertises a local church. Below the name of the church I read a number of words, the last of which were FELLOWSHIP, FUN! There is a sign near a highway in Arkansas that reads, WHERE IT’S HAPPENING. Are we marketing churches?

Jesus had a specific reason for His request that they keep this story to themselves. For one thing, He had a date with the Cross, and He had certain things to do before He kept that appointment. Too much of the wrong kind of publicity could force things to a head before He was ready. For another thing, He did not want people following Him for the wrong reason. Satan had already told Him how to build a big following - just major in the spectacular. Change stones to bread, leap from the pinnacle of the temple.

Jesus knew the focus of His ministry and He would not be distracted by the reaction of the masses. Many followed Him because of the miracles but when they heard the message they turned and followed Him no more. We can know the ministry He has for us today. If we remain focused on the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will lead us. There are people who spend most of their time in a quest for the Holy Spirit, or in an effort to know the mind of the Holy Spirit. Let me suggest something. Get alone with your Bible. Pray for guidance. Ask the Father in the name of the Son and the Holy Spirit will guide you. He will not lead you in any way that is inconsistent with the Word of God. If you humbly and meekly open the Word of God and read it you will never have to worry about “finding the Holy Spirit”, or “getting the Holy Ghost.” The Holy Spirit is the divine Author of the Word, the divine Preserver of the Word, and the divine Illuminator of the Word.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **REJECTED BY HIS OWN RELATIVES, 6:1-6a**

**6:1 - HIS HOME TOWN.** *“Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His*

*disciples followed Him.*” Immediately after He raised the daughter of Jairus, the Synagogue official at Capernaum, He and his disciples went to his hometown of Nazareth, twenty miles to the southwest. Nazareth is about sixty miles north of Jerusalem as the crow flies. The twelve apostles were disciples, but all disciples were not apostles. The word disciples denotes a follower and a learner, thus one who follows after another to learn from him.

**6:2-3 - LISTENERS WERE ASTONISHED.** *“When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at Him.”* In another passage the Scripture says that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was His custom. What a blessing it is to know that there are certain people you know you will see at church every Sunday morning, and certain people you will see there every Sunday evening if they can possibly be there. When the Sabbath came, Jesus was in the synagogue. Where else would He be? Where else should His disciples be?

**HE BEGAN TO TEACH.** No one ever taught like Jesus. The people were amazed because He taught with authority. Of course, He taught with authority - He had the authority in Himself to proclaim the message of redemption. Now let us try to reconstruct what must have happened.

The Outreach Minister and the Outreach Team conducted an extensive survey in which they went from door to door asking people to tell them what they wanted when they came to the synagogue. Then they went back and prepared an order of service. Then they went over the order with Jesus, explaining that they were going to have some fun. We are going to throw out everything traditional - piano, organ, hymnals, and older people. We are asking older staff members to retire (oh, we will pay them to keep quiet - excuse me, we will help them to adjust financially as long as they do not mention the conditions of the agreement). We will spend the first half of the service singing a lot of fun choruses. Hey, we are going to have a blast! We have promised our new members and visitors that they will not have to listen to any songs about the blood or any thing else that is gory. We are going to keep the worship part of the “service” light and exciting. Now we want you to do your part. Keep it brief, keep it lite, keep it humorous, keep it interesting. After all, these people are coming in feeling good and we want them to leave feeling a whole lot better. Don’t mention money (confidentially, we expect our older members to give enough to pay the bills). By the way, they expect to hear modern terms, so be sure to tell them Isaiah was really cool. Ours is an upscale synagogue so be sure you do not mention alcohol, drugs, gambling, adultery, or homosexuality. After all the only sin we are concerned about is the sin of being judgmental. And by all means, don’t mention the fact that men and women worship separately - and while we are on the subject, don’t mention the fact that Gentiles must stay in their place. The big thing here is diversity. And there is one more thing: don’t say anything that might be construed as political. We think you should know that a lot of people do not approve

of John the Baptist. He lacks dignity, he wasn't trained in the right school, and we do not sure about his seminary training. There is one more thing - don't say anything that may offend the Scribes, Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the - well, you get the picture. Just play it safe. You know, you have already lost some of your followers. Healing on the Sabbath?!! Associating with sinners?!! You can teach here today but you had better be cool!

**THE CARPENTER.** Evidently Joseph had died and Jesus had carried on the business and He was now thought of as "the carpenter" of Nazareth. Early Christian tradition claims that He was a master carpenter.

**LISTENERS WERE ASTONISHED.** This is not at all what they expected. After all, they had watched Him grow up in their little village. They had seen Him working in the carpentry shop for many years. They had seen Joseph, His father, teaching him how to make a yoke for oxen, a yoke that would fit perfectly. They had seen him in the synagogue since He was an infant. Where did He get these things He was teaching them?

These people were truly amazed them. He taught with a wisdom they could not fathom and they were astonished by His miracles. They had known his mother, Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon for years. His sisters lived in their village. One would think they would have been impressed by one of their own who had made good! However, the Scripture says they were offended. That is actually an understatement. They were highly offended.

**6:4 - JESUS SAID.** *"Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household."* Jesus was always aware of what was going on around Him. After all, the Bible tells us, He knew what was in every person; He knew what they were thinking. These people had in their synagogue the One Person Who fulfilled all their hopes, all the Law and the Prophets. He is Prophet, Priest, and King - and they dishonored Him. It seems that it is true that familiarity breeds contempt.

A number of years ago I looked at a program at a state convention and saw a name that brought back a lot of memories, and none of them good. When we were students at one of the great Christian schools of America, I stood with a number of other students one evening and watched this young man do something to two young men from another school which I thought was dirty and cowardly. He was literally jumping onto the convertible in which they were riding and hitting them anywhere he could, across the back of the head and neck and on their shoulders. It was over before anyone could act because as soon as students got out of the front of the car they accelerated and fled to safety. Immediately after these two young men got out on the highway someone cut across the road in front of them and caused them to swerve to miss them. In swerving, they turned the car over. There was a police investigation but I never learned the details. The student who had been hitting them was not the driver of the car.

This man had moved to my state to become pastor of a large and respected church. And now I am going to have to sit and listen to that man preach? It helped a lot when this man acknowledged his

sinful background and stated that he knew that people who had known him when he was a young man would be surprised to see him in the pulpit.

These people had never seen Jesus do anything dirty or cowardly, and they still dishonored Him. His former neighbors were not the only ones who were upset with Him. Members of His own household were offended and probably more than a little embarrassed.

We may want to note at this point that Jesus had four half-brothers and a number of half-sisters. This blows the whole concept of the perpetual virginity of Mary, a non-biblical doctrine held by our Catholic friends that will not stand the test of Scripture. These are never called His foster brothers and sisters, they are His brothers and sisters. Joseph was their father and Mary was their mother. The threat to this doctrine was enough to cause the Catholic church to dispute the so-called ossuary of James. That ossuary, or burial box which held the bones of deceased Jews in Palestine had an inscription that read, JAMES, SON OF JOSEPH, BROTHER OF JAMES. Many assumed that this was the ossuary of the half brother of Jesus. It was not surprising that the deceased person would be identified with his father, but for his brother's name to appear on the ossuary he would have had to be a person of some importance. Tests led many to question the authenticity of the ossuary, which may be a hoax, but we do know that the Jews and the Catholics who saw the box had a reason to reject it even before the tests were run. More tests are anticipated.

**6:5 - NO MIRACLES.** *“And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.”* The question here is, could Jesus not have done more miracles if He had chosen to do so, or did He simply see that it was not expedient for Him to perform more than these simple miracles? Any limitation was on the part of the people of the synagogue, not on the part of Jesus.

**6:6a - HE WONDERED.** *“And He wondered at their unbelief.”* Here He “marveled” (NKJV) at their unbelief. He marveled at the faith of the Roman centurion, Matt. 8:10. It is far better for Him to marvel at our faith than our unbelief.

## **JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE, 6:6b-13**

**6:6b - TEACHING.** *“And He was going around the villages teaching.”* This was His basic method of teaching the people in general and his Apostles in particular. This was another of His tours of the villages in the region.

It is absolutely amazing how modern day readers can read the Gospels and underscore the miracles, parables, metaphors, wise sayings, and even the sermons and lessons, and still miss something here that is of utmost importance. Jesus went on teaching tours of the villages in the area. There are some modern day evangelists who “wouldn't be caught dead” teaching. To many of them, a preacher who spends his time teaching people does so because “he couldn't preach his way out of a wet paper bag.” Is it any wonder that Stephen Olford spent so much of his time trying to get

preachers to preach expository sermons. If you preach expository sermons you will be teaching people the Word of God - and believe it or not, when they learn the Word of God it is going to stay with them a lot longer than our sermons. When the time comes to make decisions in life people are going to be ill equipped to make those decisions if all they can recall is that “Brother Paul used to tell us to do thus and so;” or “Brother Billy used to tell this joke about....” Or, maybe someone will recall that “Brother Jim believes...” In a time of crisis, God forbid that someone’s first thought is that “Brother Johnny used to tell a story about...”

If our people are to be prepared they must know the Word of God, but sadly if many believers are going to know the Word of God they are going to have to learn it on their own. Jesus taught the people, a people who could not pull out their study Bible or insert a CD and listen as they traveled. I walked into a senior adult men’s classroom a number of years ago as men were coming in for the class. Someone brought up a question and Mr. Russell Bracey said, “Well, the Bible says...” And he summarized the sermon I had preached the previous Sunday. He didn’t even remember that I had preached what he was saying. He was focused on the Word of God. Teach the people, preach expository sermons, and they will quote Jesus, not “Brother Tim.”

**6:7 - SENT THE OUT.** *“And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.”* Jesus walked from village to village teaching in the synagogues and probably in homes on the streets. After their initial training it was time to send them out. I worked for the Quitman County ASCS (USDA) each summer for several years while I was in school. Each summer we began with a school for reporters. After the class work, we went out into cotton fields to measure and plot some fields on an aerial photograph. Someone in the office would run a planimeter around the field to determine the acreage. Every line was critical because we were dealing with a farmer’s business. We had to have a sharp, fine line on the map and the planimeter operator had to stay in the center of the line or the acreage would be off. Believe me, that farmer knew exactly how many acres were in that field the previous year.

The first time I went out into the field the supervisor stopped and watched some of the young men as they plotted the fields on the “map.” He surprised me when he asked, “Johnny, how many of these boys do you think are going to make it?” I was surprised because I was trying to be sure that I would be one of them. He assured me I would, even as we began the field practice that day. I did have the advantage of having grown up on a cotton farm.

The third year I worked the supervisor gathered us together and announced that he was dividing the men into two groups. He would take one group and let them work one field and I would take the other group and measure and plot another field on the photograph. The point is, you can teach all you want to in the classroom, but at some point the students must be sent out into the field to see if they could do the work. There are people who can do the classroom work but cannot grasp what you are doing when you go out into the field.

Jesus wanted His disciples to have the training they were receiving at the feet of the Master, but He also wanted them to have actual field experience. When I was a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, we studied missions and evangelism, but no one ever graduated because he made the grade in missions and evangelism in the classroom. Every student had to participate in

field missions in New Orleans in order to meet the requirements for graduation. I worked in a rescue mission, visited for an inner city church, and worked in street missions in the inner city - a place that would be very dangerous to go today. I had received some good training for that work through BSU missions while at Mississippi College. I worked in a rescue mission and then led the mission trip to the Hinds County Jail for two and one-half years. In addition, was a student pastor for two years and for one year I preached at various camps at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman.

It is good to know theology. It is good to study Greek, Hebrew, and the History of Missions. At some point, however, one needs to get out of the classroom and work with people on the street or in institutions where they are really needed. Our church members need to study the Bible in Sunday School and attend missions studies at church. But what good is that if they never “go out and bring them in?” What have we accomplished if we never feed the hungry and clothe the naked?

**6:8-13 - HE INSTRUCTED THEM.** *“(A)nd He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff--no bread, no bag, no money in their belt- - but to wear sandals; and He added, ‘Do not put on two tunics. And He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them. They went out and preached that men should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.”* Jesus had been teaching the disciples all along. Now he gives them specific instructions and sends them out in to the villages. They preached repentance, taught people, ministered to sick people, and cast out demons.

Six pairs of disciples went throughout Galilee preaching, teaching, and healing. They went to go out in simplicity, avoiding luxury and burdensome equipment that would hinder them. It is interesting that they cast out demons and anointed with oil. Luke (10:34) mentions pouring in oil and wine upon wounds. It was the best medicine the ancients had and was used both internally and externally. Jesus knew what He was doing when he made the assignments, but it would be interesting to know which apostle was assigned Judas as a partner.

## **DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST RECOUNTED, 6:14-29**

**6:14-15 - JOHN THE BAPTIST.** *“And King Herod heard of it, for His name had become well known; and people were saying, ‘John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him. But others were saying, ‘He is Elijah.’ And others were saying, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.”* There were no “talking heads” on television to tell these people what was going on, and no columnists who were trying to persuade the people to adopt a certain position on the issues of the day. News was spread by word-of-mouth. One can only imagine the rumors that were circulating about Jesus.

John the Baptist has been a very popular figure with many of the common people, but he created a problem for religious leaders and he got crossed up with the wrong politician. Interestingly, on the

front page of the Monroe, Louisiana's THE NEWS STAR, there is a picture with the caption: CAVE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST? Archaeologists are debating the evidence as to whether or not the cave with 28 steps leading down to a large cistern was the cave in which John the Baptist lived (or worked). There are no inscriptions that would solve all the problems in making such a claim. My first reaction is that if John the Baptist was in the vicinity, I feel sure that he was familiar with most of the caves in the area. However, there is little doubt that this cave was used by many different people over a period of many centuries. One thing mentioned in the article was of special interest to the archaeologists was a stone stool - which they assumed was used for ceremonial foot-washing. My first thought in response to that was that John the Baptist had been dead for some time before Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. That is not to say that future generations of believers did not use it for that purpose. Furthermore, there is a large cistern deep within the cave. In a hot, barren wilderness one would imagine that many people knew about the water and used the cave and the cistern. The AP article did state that there is strong circumstantial evidence that the cave was used by John the Baptist.

It seems that later inscriptions and drawings sought to keep alive the memory of John the Baptist. Is there any wonder that John the Baptist was still on the minds of the people of that day? Other people speculated that Jesus was Elijah. Some had also thought that John the Baptist was Elijah.

**6:16 - HEROD.** *"But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!"* Herod knew he had been pressured into having John beheaded and this vile act was still playing on his mind. We might say, he was haunted by the memory.

**6:17-21 - HAD JOHN ARRESTED.** *"For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not do so; for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him. A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee."* Herodias had been married to Herod's brother, Philip (not the same Philip mentioned in Luke 3:1). Herodias, the daughter of Aristobulus, one of the sons of Herod the Great and Mariamne, married her uncle Philip, a brother of Aristobulus.

Herod Antipas, the ruler in Mark's account, was the half brother of Philip. Though married to another, he lived out of wedlock with Herodias. Despite his general character, Herod Antipas was apparently fascinated with John the Baptist (cf. v. 20). When the Baptist denounced the scandalous private life of Herod, the king was embarrassed, and Herodias was enraged. The resulting execution of John is recorded in Mark 6:27, 28 [BSB].

These verses recount the arrest and execution, or murder of the man for whom Jesus had the highest praise: "No man born of woman has ever been greater than John the Baptist." John the Baptist was the long awaited forerunner to the Messiah. How was he received? Many followed him but he got

into trouble with the authorities and they put him to death. He died for his faithfulness to the Lord, of whom he proclaimed: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” John had many followers but when he got crossed up with the authorities they put Him to death. We can draw some parallels between the life, teachings, and deaths of John and Jesus - however, these are almost coincidental compared to the distinctions that can be made. Everyone observed the different lifestyles, but that insignificant when compared to their deaths. John’s life was taken from him. No one could take Jesus’ life from Him, he gave Himself for us. John died for Jesus, Jesus died for us.

John the Baptist condemned the adulterous relationship between Herod and Herodias, who had been married to Philip, Herod’s brother. “Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe,” but Herodias loathed him and wanted to see him put to death. When the opportunity presented itself she did not hesitate to plot the death of the Lord’s faithful servant. That opportunity came when a banquet was scheduled in honor of Herod’s birthday.

**6:22-23 - THE DAUGHTER.** *“And when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, ‘Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you.’ And he swore to her, ‘Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom.”* Caught up in the spirit of the party, complete with alcohol, ego, self-glorification, and a festive spirit, Herod made a promise he must honor, but one he would regret as long as he lived.

**6:24 - THE HEAD OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.** *“And she went out and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask for?’ And she said, ‘The head of John the Baptist.’ Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, saying, ‘I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”* It is interesting that this young woman went to her mother to ask her to what she should request of Herod. While I am normally reluctant to “read between the lines” in any study of Scripture, there is something here that cries out, “conspiracy.” Herodias knew Herod well enough to anticipate an offer to an entertainer who pleased his guests. She made sure that it was her own daughter who would dance for Herod and his friends. If she pleased him, and pleased his guests, Herod would be in a very generous mood. There is no reason to believe that Herodias was simply taking advantage of an opportunity to get rid of John the Baptist that suddenly presented itself. Though I am very apprehensive about conspiracy theories and conspiracy nuts, I find it interesting that the daughter went to her mother and asked her what she should request. What strengthens this suspicion is the fact that Herodias told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist, and when she went back to Herod she demanded the head of John the Baptist “on a platter.” Like mother, like daughter.

With all the hatred and vindictiveness of a Jezebel, Herodias enlisted her own daughter in one of the most unfair, unjust, vile murders ever committed. There was no trial, no defense, just a brutal murder.

**6:26 - HE WAS VERY SORRY.** *“And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her*

*mother.*” The king was “very sorry” but he would not go back on his word. He had John beheaded in the prison where he was being held. While this was shocking, we should remind ourselves that human nature has not changed and throughout history men and women have been killed in just this brutal fashion. We are well aware of the slaughter of six million Jews by the Nazis, who actually killed fifteen million of their own people. I mentioned this figure to retired three star General Dutch Shoffner, who spent a lot of time in command of our army in Germany and he said, “I have twenty-two million.” It is a shame that Christians have not done as good a job keeping the murder of Christians before the world as the Jews have done, and continue to do.

In the Middle East today there are many young men and a few young women who will commit any kind of brutal murder, either for their loyalty to their god or their hatred for Israel. When Baghdad fell to the coalition forces in the war in Iraq, pictures and video tapes were found which showed the most sadistic torture and murder of citizens by the sons of Saddam Hussein . Is it possible that we may have some people in American would commit unspeakable crimes against others to protect their position or to eliminate those who might stand between them and their goal?

**6:29 - HIS DISCIPLES.** *“When his disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.”* Now we know that John’s disciples had never deserted him. They must have been visiting him in prison, possibly supplying some of his needs. They took his body and laid him in a tomb.

## **THE APOSTLES REPORT TO JESUS, 6:30**

**6:30 - GATHERED WITH JESUS.** *“The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught.”* Jesus was deeply interested in their report. In a short time most of them would be going out to witness for Him Some, if not all, would pay the same price John the Baptist paid. We can very easily make either of two mistakes when dealing with numbers and reports: we can pay too much attention to them or we can pay too little attention to them. There is a biblical precedent for making reports, aside from this passage. In Acts there are periodic progress reports on the spread of the Gospel which illustrate for us the success of those early believers in carrying out the Great Commission. On the Day of Pentecost three thousand souls were added to the church. A little later we read that God was adding to the church those who were being saved. Then we read that the number of believers was multiplied.

## **FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSANDS, 6:31-44**

**6:31-23 - A SECLUDED PLACE.** *“And He said to them, ‘Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.’ (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.”* Jesus and His Apostles put in some long days, walking from place to place, teaching the people and ministering to their needs. Many people in the Lord’s work grow tired and need to take a vacation

or a day off to recharge their batteries. The human Jesus grew tired like anyone else. He knew that His disciples would not work at maximum sufficiency if they did not get enough rest. He planned this retreat to be alone with His disciples and to allow time for a little rest.

**6:33 - THE PEOPLE SAW THEM.** *“The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.”* Jesus and His disciples rowed across the lake and the crowd rushed around the north end, the crowd must have been growing as it proceeded. We are not told how the crowd arrived ahead of Jesus and His disciples. They may have rowed at a more leisurely pace while the throngs were rushing to get there first.

**HE FELT COMPASSION.** Jesus and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee to get away from the crowd, but found them waiting for Him when He arrived. Rather than being annoyed by the crowd Jesus had compassion for them. They were there without food or lodging and it was late. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. So, what would He do? For several years it was popular to wear the WWJD bracelets: WHAT WOULD JESUS DO? Would He blow His stack and send them away? Would He do something spectacular? After all, Satan had told Him how to impress the crowds - Just turn the stones into bread. What would Jesus do? He would do that which please His heavenly Father: He would teach the people.

Some may doubt this on the grounds that, even if the crowd was silent, they would have trouble hearing Jesus. George Whitfield spoke to similar crowds in open fields, so there are some who can be heard and understood under such conditions.

**6:35-36 - SEND THEM AWAY.** *“When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, ‘This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.’”* It was late in the day. Jesus had taught on the western side of the Sea of Galilee before asking His disciples to row him to the other side, a distance of several miles, the actual distance depends on where they crossed. The crowd had made the journey around the lake and then He had taught them until it was late.

His disciples pointed out the obvious: It was late and the people were a long way from home. In addition, there were no restaurants, no restrooms, and possibly no fresh water in the immediate area. What was the solution to the problem? The disciples advised Him to send the people out into the surrounding countryside and villages where they would be able to buy food for their evening meal.

**6:37 - YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING.** *“But He answered them, ‘You give them something to eat!’”* And they said to Him, *‘Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?’* Jesus told His disciples to give the crowd something to eat. He was testing them. They immediately calculated the cost. They were thinking on one level and Jesus on another. Modern believers may, from our vantage point two thousand years later, tend to judge those disciples too harshly. They simply wanted to know if Jesus wanted them to go buy food and feed

this multitude. We may conclude that these disciples should have known better. They had seen him raise the dead, walk on water, restore sight to the blind, and heal the lame.

**6:38 - FIVE, AND TWO FISHES.** *“And He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!” And when they found out, they said, ‘Five, and two fish.’”* Jesus asked how much food they had and they did a quick survey and told Him they had found five loaves of bread and two fish. Now, observe that what they collected to feed the people was totally inadequate. The crowd could not feed itself and the disciples could not meet their needs. What they needed was what only Jesus could supply. What the world needs today only Jesus can supply. While He uses us to reach out to a sinful world, what we have to offer is woefully inadequate. Jesus does all the saving - 100% of it. We can contribute nothing to our own salvation. We are saved by grace through faith, plus nothing.

**6:39-40 - HE COMMANDED THEM.** *“And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties.”* John tells us that there was much green grass in the place. The little extra information we are given makes this story more believable. For one thing, the account is presented in a matter of fact manner. For another, it shows that Jesus did things in an orderly manner. There was no panic, no frantic scramble to solve the problem. Jesus commanded the people to be seated in grids of fifty to one hundred, which probably means that there were aisles between the grids to allow the disciples to pass between the groups to serve the food. Still, at this point He had only five loaves and two fish.

**6:41 - FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH.** *“And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all.”* Jesus took what they had and blessed it and began breaking the bread and passing out the fish. What they had was enough. If you bring what you have to Jesus - and if what you have is what Jesus demands of you, it will always be enough.

**6:42-44 - SATISFIED.** *“They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.”* There are several points that seem to leap from the page. **First**, they ate. If they had not eaten there would have been no “the rest of the story”, as Paul Harvey says. **Second**, they were satisfied. What Jesus offered them satisfied them completely. If you had offered them a dessert they would have said, “thanks, but no thanks.” This was not something to tide them over, they were absolutely filled. **Third**, there were twelve baskets full of broken pieces of bread and nice fillets left over. What Jesus had was not just adequate, it was more than adequate. If there had been twice that many people there they would have all been filled. Jesus offers us His grace and His grace is not just sufficient, it is more than sufficient.

## REVIEW OF THE SCENE

This is the first withdrawal, Jesus led His disciples away to a desert place. They left by boat but the

crowd knew where they were going and followed them, When He saw them coming He had pity on them and taught them. Jesus taught the people until it was late and then the disciples approached Him with a practical point - the people needed something to eat and there was no place to buy anything. Now look at the exchange between Jesus and His disciples:

Disciples: "Send them away for food."

Jesus: "You feed them."

Disciples: "We can't afford it."

Jesus: "What do you have?"

Disciples: "Five loaves and two fish."

Jesus: "Feed the people."

If you give your all to Jesus it will be enough. No person who trusts Jesus, the Bread of Life, will go away hungry. There was plenty left over - there was more left over than they had at the beginning. There were five thousand men plus women and children, possibly 20,000 people there that day.

## **JESUS WALKS ON THE WATER, 6:45-52**

**6:45 - HE MADE HIS DISCIPLES.** *"Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away."*

There was a Bethsaida (Bethsaida Julius) northeast of the Sea of Galilee and another Bethsaida west of the Sea of Galilee. The name meaning, "house of fish." The Bethsaida northeast side of the Sea of Galilee was the hometown of Andrew, Peter, and Philip (John 1:44; 12:21). Jesus fed the five thousand men plus women and children near Bethsaida and He made His disciples get into the boat and go to the other side of the lake.

**IMMEDIATELY.** Mark reveals an immediacy about the work of Jesus on many occasions. Why would Jesus act immediately or suddenly? As Jesus distributed the bread and fish to the disciples they were passing it out among multitudes. Remember that the people are sitting in grids of fifty to one hundred people. The disciples are walking between the sections. There is little doubt that the people were amazed at what Jesus was doing. It would not be surprising if the people were expressing their amazement at what Jesus was doing. Who else could do these things but the Messiah? There is no way that the disciples would not have heard what the people were saying. They know He is the Messiah. It is possible that the disciples were encouraging the people. It is also possible that by the time all the people had been finished eating the bread and fish that they began speculating in earnest. This must be the Messiah! The disciples may have been assuring them that He really was the Messiah. Jesus perceived what was being said and **immediately** ordered His disciples into the boat and told them to go to the other side.

Why would Jesus do this at this moment? Did He not want people to know that He was the Messiah? He wanted people to know He was the Messiah but He must act according to the Father's time table. They wanted a political or military Messiah who would drive out the hated Romans. They were excited about a Messiah Who could feed them, heal them, raise people from the dead. However, when the masses began to understand what kind of Messiah He was many turned away and followed Him no more.

A crowd the size of this one could easily bring down the wrath of the Roman army on these people. Picture the scenes shown so often on television today of large crowds in the Middle East. One crowd is jumping up and down shouting hatred, another animated crowd is expressing grief, another is fervently celebrating some religious observance. Jesus would have perceived the potential for a confrontation with the Roman army, but that is not all of it. He had an appointment with the Cross, and this was neither the time or the way to keep that appointment.

Immediately after sending the disciples away He sent the crowd away. He dismissed them so that they could make their way home. John reveals that the next day the crowd had gathered around Jesus on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They wanted more bread. Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life." He had given them a powerful sign. They missed it.

**6:46 - TO PRAY.** *"After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray."* Did the human Jesus need to pray? Did He not know what His Father wanted Him to do? Of course He did. At the same time, the human Jesus not only got hungry, He would also become fatigued. He needed rest, but that is not why He went un on the mountain to pray. He wanted to spend time with His Father.

When do we pray? Is it not often when we want something from our heavenly Father. How many times do we withdraw to pray simply because we want to be alone with our Lord? When we pray, are we "sending" or "receiving"? Are we telling God what we want or listening for that still quiet voice that tells us what He wants from us - not the other way around.

**6:47-48 - IT WAS EVENING.** *"When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them."* We are not given the time, but Jesus had been up on the mountain to pray and then He had walked back down the mountain to the sea shore.

I recently heard someone preach that the lesson we should get from this account is that when we are need Jesus comes to us. That is true. We have His word on it. However there is something else that seems important here. The disciples had been ordered to get into the boat and go to the other side a few hours earlier. Jesus had immediately commanded them to leave and if they had obeyed immediately they should have been approaching the western shore of the lake. Why were they close enough to the eastern shore for Jesus to see them straining at the oars in middle of the sea? Is it not possible that they had gotten into the boat, but instead of rowing for the other side, they pushed off

and then stayed near the eastern side so they could watch and see what would happen. Would Jesus make some pronouncement without them? The crowd was ready to follow Jesus. To the disciples, the time seemed right. What if He encouraged the crowd to go out and proclaim that the Messiah had come and was ready to reestablish the kingdom of David? The disciples would not want to miss out on anything like that.

It is true that Jesus will come to us when we get caught in a storm in the middle of a sea of fear, doubt, stress, or sin. It is also true that if these disciples had been totally obedient they would not have been caught in the storm. There are a lot of Christians today who are caught up in a storm because they disobeyed the Lord. Either we refuse to do what He clearly wants us to do or we do what He does not want us to do.

The divorce rate in America has soared in the past fifty years. What is even more disturbing is that the divorce rate among professing Christians is roughly the same as among non-Christians. This is really disturbing. It would be interesting to see what the divorce rate is among those who are genuinely born again Christians, compared to those who merely profess to be Christians. The family in America is often caught in a storm in the middle of a raging sea. The only way solution some see is divorce. How did we get in this situation? In many cases, people got in this situation because they were disobedient to the Lord. After one marries he or she may come to understand that a Christian should not be unequally yoked with a non-Christian. The best time to face this truth is before the Christian becomes involved with a non-Christian.

**STRAINING AT THE OARS.** The disciples were staring at the oars because they had hung back off shore and gotten caught in a violent storm. We are told that storms may come up very quickly in the mountains east of the Sea of Galilee and sweep down through valleys and out onto the sea, creating dangerous conditions for fishermen.

**6:49 -WALKING ON THE SEA.** *“But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, ‘Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.’”* Jesus approached the boat, walking on the water and the disciples saw Him and thought they were seeing a ghost. That they were terrified is not surprising, and they were terrified, not just apprehensive.

**WALKING ON THE SEA.** Yes, Jesus actually walked on the surface of the water. Liberals who seek to “explain away” the miracles of the Bible may claim that the words might have been translated, “Walking **toward** the sea,” not “walking **on** the sea.” They also claim that when Peter asked Jesus for permission to come to Him he got out of the boat and waded in the water. He slipped into a sinkhole and Jesus gave him a hand. Consider this, if Jesus was walking “toward the sea” then Peter was asking to walk “toward” the sea. Why would he do that when he was already in a boat in the sea?

If you do not believe that Jesus could walk on the water you are in a crisis of faith. I often remind myself that Francis Shaeffer said that the word “god” spelled with a small “g” is the most meaningless word in the English language. Since I spell God with a capital “G” I have no problem

with the miracle of the Bible.

**IMMEDIATELY.** Immediately, when the disciples began to cry out, Jesus spoke to them: “Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.” Mark was the human author of his material but the Holy Spirit was the divine Author. He is responsible for the frequent use of the word “immediately” at various places, possibly to underscore a sense of immediacy about the ministry of Jesus.

**6:51 - HE GOT INTO THE BOAT.** *“Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.”* The disciples were caught in a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus came to them walking on the water. When they took Him into the boat the winds stopped immediately and they were able to row to the other side.

**THEY WERE UTTERLY ASTONISHED.** From a strictly human point of view they had every right to be astonished. However, they had been walking with Jesus for some time. They had seen him heal Peter’s mother-in-law, raise the lame, give sight to the blind, feed the multitudes and now walk on the water. Why would they not be astonished? Because they had been walking with Him for some time and He was teaching them daily. If He really is the Christ and if He has called them to be His apostles, and if He has called them for a special mission, why would he let them perish in the sea?

They had been caught in the storm on the Sea of Galilee because they “had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.” They had disobeyed Jesus and as a result they had been caught in a storm. But that is not all of the story. Failure to understand the feeding of the five thousand caused a hardening of their hearts. You do not have to jump up and down and shout, “I don’t want you!” to have your heart hardened. You do not have to go out and commit vile sins in order for your heart to become hardened. You can do it in two ways that seem so innocent one may easily miss the significance of it. **First**, our hearts are hardened when we do not obey the Lord. Jesus said, “Go” and they did not go - well, let us say they postponed what Jesus ordered them to do. **Second**, The disciples “had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves.” They had not gained the insight that they should have gained. He was trying to teach the people that He is the Bread of Life. What they perceived is that He is a bread maker. Bread made up a significant part of their diet, so it is understandable that some of the people from the crowd would have missed the point, but His disciples should have understood why He had fed the people. Jesus demonstrated the fact that He can provide food for them. What He was trying to teach them is that He is the Bread of Life (John 6).

It is a serious matter when we break God’s commandments. It is also a serious problem when we fail to gain insight into the things of God. We have every advantage over the people of the First Century. We have the Word of God, and we have the Spirit of God to make it come alive in our hearts. The divine Author inspired it, He has preserved it, and He illuminates our hearts and minds that we can understand it and apply it.

This passage has an easy application for us today. Let me be more personal - it has a special

application for me. I have found myself caught in a storm, fearing that I might sink when I have been disobedient to my Lord. There have been other times when I have found myself a storm in the sea of life, not because I deliberately disobeyed the Lord, but because I simply did not wait on the Lord. I tried it my way, or I tried to adapt His will to suit my purpose, though I assumed I that since I had prayed about it I was in His will. There are times when it seemed that I was in danger of sinking, but there was never a time when He did not know exactly where I was and what I needed. There have been times, in small things and in bigger things when I have looked up and my Savior was coming to my aid. He did not wave from a distance, nor did He come near and wish me well. He got into the boat with me - and the storm ceased and the waters were smooth and clear and I was able to make it to the shore. How can we forget to look to Him when the night is dark and the sea is rough? Why would we not look to Him in complete trust - after all, are we not more faithful than those twelve backsliding apostles?! We would never harbor the doubt and fear those disciples manifested! Compared to Peter, Andrew, James, John and the others, we must appear to the Lord as super saints!

## **HEALING IN GENNESARET, 6:53-56**

**6:53-55 - THE PEOPLE RECOGNIZED HIM.** *“When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was.”* When people recognized Jesus the word of His presence spread throughout the area and people began coming to Him, with many people carrying sick people to Him on pallets. It is amazing the extent to which we will go to get help when we are physically ill, yet refuse to go to the Great Physician when we are spiritually ill.

**6:56 - BEING CURED.** *“Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.”* Jesus is nearing the end of His Galilean ministry, and people are excited because of His healing ministry. They were bringing sick people to Him, begging Him to let them touch the fringe of His cloak. As many as touched it were healed.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **CLASH WITH PHARISEES, 7:1-13**

**7:1-4 - PHARISEES.** *“And the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and*

*copper pots.*)” Jesus had told his followers not to spread word of His miracles, but they had done so anyway. Word reached Jerusalem and a delegation of scribes and Pharisees traveled to Galilee to see for themselves what was causing all the excitement. The first thing they saw was that some of Jesus’ disciples were “eating their bread with impure hands,” that is, they were eating without the prescribed ceremonial washing. They were not eating with dirty hands, they were eating with “impure hands”. Objections are raised on ceremonial grounds. It was their tradition to rinse before and at intervals during meals. Finger-tips were held up and water ran down to the elbows. This, they believed, washed away evil spirits. Large stone jars filled with water were kept near by for this purpose (See John 2 - six water pots of stone). Mark gives but a few examples of their many requirements for ceremonial cleansing.

**7:5 - THE TRADITION OF THE ELDERS.** “*And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?’*” The Pharisees and scribes began to question Jesus as to why His disciples were eating with “impure hands.” They may not have been moved by the sick, diseased, lame, blind, or deaf, but they were shocked by this religious oversight.

**TRADITION.** There are good traditions and there are bad traditions. Traditions based on truth are good traditions unless they are used to manipulate others or to either justify or amplify one’s own behavior (as in the case of the Pharisees). Bad traditions are based on a false premise or possibly a false code of ethics. The Lord declared through Isaiah, “Because this people draw near with their words And **honor Me with their lip service**, But **they remove their hearts far from Me**, And **their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote**” (Isaiah 29:13, emphasis added). Jesus is never more blunt than when He declared, “Why do you yourselves **transgress** the commandment of God **for the sake of your tradition?**” (Matt. 15:3, emphasis added).

Paul confessed, “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions” (Gal. 1:14). However, he wrote to the Thessalonians (2 Thes. 2:15), “So then, brethren, stand firm and **hold to the traditions which you were taught**, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us” (emphasis added). He also wrote to the Corinthian believers, “Now **I praise you because you** remember me in everything and **hold firmly to the traditions**, just as I delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:2, emphasis added).

Every individual (and family) needs to adopt traditions that will honor God, and if they honor God they will bless the individual and the family. We had a tradition in our home when I was growing up. My mother got up at 4:00 A.M. and then called me at 4:15. I had to head to the barn and begin feeding and milking. I came in for breakfast, then I had to go back to finish feeding hogs, move livestock to a pasture, and be sure they had plenty of water. When I finished my chores I had to get a quick bath and walk a mile and a quarter to the county line grocery store where the school bus turned around. I lived in Tunica County, Mississippi and went to school in Quitman County.

Now for the tradition. M. C. Waldrup, the associational missionary who planted our church had mentioned the importance of a family altar, so Mother decided that we should have our family altar before breakfast. Sounds good, right. But you tell a fifteen year old boy that the family should read

a chapter from the Bible and have prayer - while the eggs and biscuits were getting cold - and he might question the family tradition. Why not have the “family altar” after breakfast?! But you know something - that family altar meant a lot more to me than I realized at the time. Prayer, Bible reading, worship, ministry are all traditions worth cultivating.

**7:6-7 - YOU HYPOCRITES** - *“And He said to them, ‘Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’”* Jesus was not deceived as to their purpose in asking the question. He took the respected teachers of the Law and the Prophets to Isaiah’s classroom. His introduction must have shocked them, for He called them hypocrites. They called others hypocrites, people did not call them hypocrites. The meaning of “hypocrite” (*hupokrites*) is “actor.” It referred to someone who acted out the part of a character in the theater.

The early actors wore masks to assume the identities of the characters they were playing. Jesus rightly calls the Pharisees hypocrites because of their pretense and the masking of their true selves behind their external ritual. Like the people of Isaiah's day, they look and sound good on the outside, but the inside (that which truly matters to God) is ugly. Jesus' most blistering sermon was directed against the Pharisees and their hypocrisy (cf. Matt. 23) [BSB].

Now look at the Scripture Jesus quoted: “THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’” Little commentary was needed because these words accurately describes the religious establishment these Pharisees and scribes were there to defend and protect.

**7:8 - TRADITION.** *“Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”* Note the sharp contrast between the **commandments of God** and **traditions of men**. Traditions are not bad, nor does the Lord condemn them. What he condemns is placing more value on the traditions of men than on the commandments of God. Can you think of modern parallels? There are people who today who are more impressed with ritual and ceremony than in the Word of God or a relationship with Him.

I recently became burdened about something that I had been observing for some time. I have always been aware of the fact that there are people all around us who pay more attention to ritual and ceremony than to worship, obedience, and sound doctrine. There are people who are active in their churches who either pay little attention to the Word of God, or they pick and choose what part of the Bible they will read and apply. A young professional woman had read my commentary on Philippians and when she met me she told me she had read my book and really liked it. She added, “And I normally don’t like Paul.” She stepped closer and with a knowing look that assumed agreement, added, “He was strictly a product of his own time, wasn’t he?” As she stepped around in front of me, her expression anticipated only affirmation - as though this was the only position a ministers could take.

A friend told me that when he was a teenager and young adult he and his friends would party all night on Saturday night and stagger home to sleep it off on Sunday. One Sunday morning someone dared him to go to Mass. He staggered in to prove that he would do it. Another man told me that as a child he would make up sins to confess when he went to confession. There are a lot of Baptists and Protestants who show up two or three times a month for the morning service and then depart to live a life that does not honor the Lord.

We are all aware of people like that, but that is not what I found disturbing. It dawned on me that the modern Christian may view certain Christians as super saints, thanks in part to the popularity of some Christian leaders whose works are displayed prominently in the stores, advertised in magazines and on television, and promoted through denominational materials. Many people will focus on these popular leaders, buy anything they sell and then use it in group studies - which can be a blessing. Some of these people really are outstanding people, talented writers, and inspiring speakers. Let us say that ever one of these popular saints are just that - committed, obedient, powerful saints. That is good. I have no problem with that.

I have observed that we have a way of discovering one of those popular leaders who is really focused on the Lord, and then we focus our attention - not on the Lord, but on that super saint who has his or her eyes on the Lord. Let me give you a few examples. For a number of years everywhere you went you saw books by Henry Blackaby - EXPERIENCE GOD and numerous spin-offs, outstanding books written by an outstanding man. As a trustee of LifeWay Christian Resources, I serve on the Broadman and Holman Committee. We have published a number of books by Blackaby. People buy anything Blackaby writes, they study his work in classes and quote him. He has his eyes on the Lord to the point that many people admire him - and keep their eyes focused on him. Beth Moore has written a lot of books and Broadman and Holman has published them and promoted her work. Her books and tapes are used in small group studies and she leads large conferences. She has her eyes focused on the Lord - we keep our eyes on her!

Now it is Rick Warren. Whatever he writes sells. When he speaks people listen. They go to Rick Warren conferences and hear him talk about how the Lord has blessed Saddleback and then warn them that what works for them in California may not work in their own community. People return and try to implement his program and a church gets a new lease of life - or it is split down the middle. I have met Rick Warren and I heard him speak at a board of trustees meeting for LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville. Churches all over the country have tried FORTY DAYS OF PURPOSE. My concern is not for Rick Warren, but for those who are so focused on Rick Warren that they might forget to go to the Source!

There are Christians who cannot carry on conversations about the Lord and Kingdom without saying, "John Calvin said..." I really believe John Calvin was focused on the Lord. I am equally as convinced that there are many people around today who, rather than focusing their attention on the God, remain focused on John Calvin. John Calvin quoted Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, and James. Why not read John Calvin and then go to the Source? We can learn from committed Christians whom the Lord has led to write or speak for His glory. But we must never let that person

or his program get between us and the Lord.

This is exactly what the scribes and Pharisees had done. They could not see the Word of God for the commentaries on the Word. They could not see the divine truth of the Word for the oral and written traditions of man. This is what Jesus condemns.

We are into programs, themes, mission statements, and visions today. I do not know how many outreach programs I have seen and various people prefer one to another. At this time the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Bobby Welch, is on a fifty state tour of the United States, urging Southern Baptists to win one million people to the Lord in one year. Bobby Welch developed the FAITH program, which so many have used with outstanding results. As with many programs, pastors and other leaders go off to conferences and study the program and return and teach it to their church. I have a suggestion. When I was going to the Hinds County Jail in Jackson, Mississippi and to the Mississippi State Penitentiary I used one tract, WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURE? I also used it in visiting with people on the outside. I would like to see evangelism directors use the simple outline with the printed Scripture (no commentary at all) and encourage others to use it. We could save a lot of money on printed programs and conferences and focus on the Scripture. After all, it is the Scripture God has promised to bless. It is the Scripture that will not return unto Him void.

**7:9 - SET ASIDE.** *“He was also saying to them, ‘You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.’”* The words “set aside” imply a choice. They had a choice: they could read, study, and apply the commandment of God or they could follow the tradition of man. They chose the traditions of man.

**7:10-13 - MOSES SAID.** *“For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH’; but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God), you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.’”* These teachers of the Law had come from Jerusalem to defend the Law, but now they receive a lesson on the Law. These experts in the Law are accused of giving traditions of men precedence over the Law they professed to honor and teach. He used a practical illustration which shows how they might break the Law while keeping the traditions of men. He used their use of “Corban” to illustrate His point. This was a clever way of rejecting God’s law - They could simply declare their possessions to be Corban and keep it for themselves. Corban means “it belongs to God.” The rabbis actually allowed the mere saying of the word by an unfaithful son to prevent the use of needed money for support of parents. He could say, “Corban” and then use the money for himself.

## **THINGS THAT MAKE ONE CLEAN, 7:14-23**

Man is defiled, not by that which goes into a person from the outside, but by what comes from the

heart. Jesus lifts restrictions on foods imposed by Levitical law. This is a point you will want to remember if you are confronted by some cynic who seeks to trap you concerning the Levitical Law.

**7:14-15 - LISTEN TO ME.** *“And after He called the multitude to Him again, He began saying to them, ‘Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.’”* He has responded to the scribes and Pharisees who interrupted his sermon to the people. Now, He called the multitude to Him again and began again to teach them. He is very clear: “Nothing that goes into a man from outside can defile him, but the things that come out of a man are what defile a man” (HCSB). Food taken into the body does not defile him, but words coming out of the mouth can defile him. A. T. Robertson is right:

The rabbis had attacked the disciples about not washing their hands before eating. Jesus now turned the tables on them completely and laid bare their hollow pretentious hypocrisy to the people. **Hear me all of you and understand** (*akousate mou pantes kai suniete*). A most pointed appeal to the people to see into and see through the chicanery of these ecclesiastics.” (Word Pictures in the New Testament)

**7:16 - LET HIM HEAR.** *“If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.”* The HCSB renders it, “If anyone has ears to hear, he should listen!” The Bible is very clear about one thing: There are people who have ears who do not hear divine truth, just as there are people who have eyes who do not see spiritual truth. Jesus is challenging those whose ears are open to divine truth to hear what He is saying and apply it.

**7:17 - QUESTIONED HIM.** *“And when leaving the multitude, He had entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable.”* They are probably at Simon Peter’s house. The Gospels record other times when the disciples questioned Him about what He had taught in public. This is understandable. Many years ago, Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, who had been president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary when I was a student there, was preaching in revival services for me. I had invited a young man who meant a lot to my family to direct our music that week. He had mentioned it to a relative who edited a Christian magazine and this relative had painted the worst picture imaginable of Dr. Eddleman, so the young friend had come with reservations. He came expecting to find one of those “right-wing fundamentalists.” I was amused to see this young man sitting with us around the table after an evening meal, asking Dr. Eddleman one question after another. I understood because I had spent a lot of time over the years asking my friend and mentor questions. I had even taped his answers. Dr. Eddleman’s father had been pastor of my home church and we had a lot of mutual friends. When I was working on a study of Acts, I would call him when I ran into a problem. When he was preaching a revival for me at another church he was writing his commentary on Acts. It is a blessing to follow up on a sermon when there are questions. This is exactly what the disciples were doing. They asked Him questions about the parable.

**7:18-19 - DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND?** *“And He said to them, ‘Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?’”* (Thus He

*declared all foods clean.)*” There are times when it is a joy to have someone ask questions after one teaches a lesson or preaches a sermon. It is another matter when it becomes obvious that a message which is so simple has been totally missed by some of those who listen to it. Again, Robertson captures the spirit of the questions and the impact on Jesus:

It was a discouraging moment for the great Teacher if his own chosen pupils (disciples) were still under the spell of the Pharisaic theological outlook. It was a riddle to them. "They had been trained in Judaism, in which the distinction between clean and unclean is ingrained, and could not understand a statement abrogating this" (Gould). They had noticed that the Pharisees stumbled at the parable of Jesus (Mat 15:12). They were stumbling themselves and did not know how to answer the Pharisees. Jesus charges the disciples with intellectual dullness and spiritual stupidity. [Word Pictures in the New Testament].

Food, taken in from the outside, does not go into the heart, but into the stomach and from there it is eliminated. Thus, He declared all food clean (Other mss read *is eliminated, making all foods clean*).

**7:20-23 - HE WAS SAYING.** *“And He was saying, ‘That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.’”*

What could be a more logical conclusion than this. It is not food taken in from the outside, digested, and eliminated that defiles, but that which proceeds from the heart. Jesus listed some of the evil thoughts that defile an individual, a list that might be compared to the catalog of sins mentioned in the first chapter of Romans. All these sins come from what is in the heart of an evil person. These are the things that defile a person, not what is taken in from the outside. He is talking about food here, not alcohol and drugs, which of course can and do defile the person and endanger others.

## **THE SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN’S FAITH, 7:24-30**

Here we find the second of four withdrawals from Galilee. This was to a distinctly heathen land. The bitterness of the Pharisees, suspicion of Herod Antipas, and dullness of the disciples have been suggested as reasons for the withdrawal. The woman’s daughter was healed after an interesting exchange with Jesus. She shows both wit and faith. Salvation came first to the Jews, but it was never intended to stay with them alone.

**7:24 - WENT...TO TYRE.** *“And from there He arose and went away to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice.”* The departure from Capernaum was the second of four withdrawals from Galilee. The first had been to the region of Bethsaida Julias in the territory of Herod Philip. This departure is different in that it is into distinctly heathen land. He did not merely go to the borderline of Phoenicia, but into the parts

of Tyre and Sidon. Why would He do that? Possible because there was too much excitement among the people, too much opposition from the Pharisees, and too much suspicion on the part of Herod Antipas. Some believe there was too much dullness on the part of the disciples for Jesus to remain in Galilee, but that may be stretching it a little. Jesus could have simply withdrawn from the crowds to teach His Apostles.

He had planned to go into Phoenicia quietly if not secretly. However, the news soon got out and now Gentile crowds came to Him. Mark says that He could not escape notice. That raises the question of why again. For one thing it would be difficult to travel with twelve disciples and totally escape all notice. But there may have been another reason. Is it not possible that someone there had been to Galilee and had recognized Jesus?

**7:25 -AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT.** *“But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, immediately came and fell at His feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.”* Mark gives us the basics in a few words. A Syrophoenician woman heard about Jesus and took her little daughter who had an unclean spirit to Him and fell at His feet. I well remember the first person I saw who went to see a faith healer. A young faith healer had come to Memphis and the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* carried stories about the meetings. People were delivered from demons, the lame walked, the blind received their sight, and others were healed - according to the publicity and some news reports. What I remember is that this faith healer would announce that he was about to cast demons out of an individual - and this is the interesting part - when the demons came out they would be looking for a place to go, and if you did not have a “point of contact” they would enter you. What was that point of contact? The chair in front of each person. All you had to do was reach over and take hold of the back of the chair in front of you and the demons could not enter you. He did not explain what the people on the front row should do to keep the demons from entering them.

This Gentile woman sought out Jesus and pleaded with Him to heal her daughter. She knew her daughter was possessed by demons and pleaded with Him to cast them out. How could she have known that her daughter was possessed by demons? Perhaps she did not have anyone from one of the social sciences to tell her otherwise. Please do not condemn me for saying that before you understand that I earned an undergraduate degree in one of those social sciences. However, I am aware of the difference between poor mental health and demon possession. The German writer, Kurt Koch, mentions in another place in this study from the Gospel According to Mark, studied thousands of cases in which it was claimed that an individual was demon possessed. He gave some guidelines for distinguishing between the two. For example, if therapy has no effect at all and prayer frees the individual the problem was more than likely a spiritual one. If the person did not respond to efforts to have them cleansed of demons but counseling brought about a healing, then the problem was probably psychological.

**7:27 - THE CHILDREN.** *“And He was saying to her, “Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.”* This is very interesting, and loaded with information. Jesus said that the children (of Israel) must eat and be satisfied first, and it would

not be good to take the children's (Jews') bread and throw it to the dogs (a term Jews used for Gentiles).

**7:28 - THE CHILDREN'S CRUMBS.** *“But she answered and said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs.’”* This was an amazing woman. He had called her the “D” word (dog!). She might have run to the authorities and report Him. She might have cried out to the Gentiles all around her and caused a mob scene. However, there was something in the voice or in the expression of Jesus that showed compassion. She would not be put off by some slight. As a matter of fact this woman was mentally quick, blending faith and wit. She said, Yes, Lord, but even the (little) dogs under the table feed on the little crumbs dropped by the little children. The emphasis was on little dogs and little scraps of bread. She was not asking Him to turn from the Jews and focus on the Gentiles. He could cleanse her daughter without depriving the Jews. This really was a remarkable woman.

**7:29-30 - BECAUSE OF YOUR ANSWER.** *“And He said to her, ‘Because of this answer go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.’ And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having departed.”* We find the parallel in Matthew 15:28: “Then Jesus replied to her, ‘Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want.’ And from that moment her daughter was cured” (HCSB). Jesus responded to her faith.

What would have happened if she had not had faith? We probably know the answer to that. What about those people who are offended by the Bible because it is a “sexist book” or because it is a “racist book?” What about those people who try to identify the Bible with white European Christians and deny that the God of the Bible is concerned with Black people, yellow people, or with Arab people? Well, the Bible was written, for the most part by Semitic people, with Luke being a notable exception. Those who use superficial excuses for rejection Jesus Christ remain in sin, some even possessed by demons. Let us be frank about it, they are going to hell without Jesus Christ, no matter how flimsy the excuse.

One must have faith, and that faith must properly placed, focused on the right Person. Following the biggest killer tsunami in history some Muslim Imam has announced that it occurred because of the evils of Christianity, or because the Muslims in that area had been too open to Christians. Hundreds of thousands are being kept alive because of the relief sent to the region, and much of the help is coming from Christians. They want the water, food, medicine, and blankets, but they do not want the people over there to hear about Jesus Christ.

## **THE THIRD WITHDRAWAL, 7:31-37**

**7:31 - THE REGION OF DECAPOLIS.** *“And again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.”* Jesus left Phoenicia, but did not go back to Galilee. He went east and then down on the east side of the Sea of Galilee (to Decapolis). He avoided the territory of Herod Antipas. Herod Philip was a better man than his

brother.

**7:32- THEY BROUGHT TO HIM.** *“And they brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they entreated Him to lay His hand upon him.”* This incident is found only in Mark. The interesting thing is that even in Gentiles lands, the people soon discovered Jesus. Had the word of His miracles spread throughout the region? Considering the fact that a lot of travel and commerce passed through the Holy Land, it should not be surprising that word would spread, especially when we consider how people love to repeat stories of the spectacular.

**7:33-35 - HE TOOK HIM ASIDE.** *“And He took him aside from the multitude by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ that is, ‘Be opened!’ And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly.”* This may shock some people today, but Jesus is sovereign and He knew exactly what He was doing. Does this set the pattern for modern day faith healers? Interestingly enough, I have heard a lot of claims and seen some unusual things from some of these people but this is one I have not seen.

I might add here that I believe very strongly in divine healing. I just have a problem with divine healers. For example, I was driving back from Omaha, Nebraska through Kansas and Oklahoma when the family decided to go to Oklahoma City and across to Tulsa and Muskogee on the way home. When we were approaching Tulsa we decided to drive through Oral Roberts University. Later, we learned that it was that very evening was when Oral Roberts made the well publicized statement that people had died in his services and he had raised them from the dead. I have had some people to go to sleep in services but I have never had anyone do die in a service.

Mrs. Mickey Steward is among the most remarkable ladies I have ever known. She has been a care give all her life and for more than fifteen year she has taken care of Alzheimer’s patients (she prefers to call them friends). She has had something like forty-eight “friends” to die in her home, most of them with her holding their hand or holding their head in her arms. This lady has earned nine degrees in medicine and might have retired and let someone take care of her years ago, but she prefers to serve others. She has had two serious heart attacks, a major stroke, and she has had cancer for fifteen years. The cancer is spreading at present, and still she will not give up the fight. A few years ago a man came to see her and he wanted to talk with her privately. He asked, “Miss Mickey, when you die will you give me permission to raise you from the dead?” She said, “No way! When I die I will go to Heaven and I do not want to come back.” The man was very sincere. So was she!

When they took the man to Jesus he was deaf and spoke with difficulty. When Jesus healed him his ears were opened and he could hear clearly and he spoke plainly. This is unlike some of the miracles we see portrayed on TV or in the movies in which the individual begins to show signs of recovery or healing and the process continuous over a period of time.

**7:36 - ORDERS NOT TO TELL.** *“And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it.”* Once again, Jesus performs a spectacular miracle in the presence of a number of witnesses and then tells them not to tell it. Rather

than listen to Him, the more he ordered them not to tell it the more the proclaimed it. It has been suggested that Jesus was using psychology on these people, knowing that if He told them not to tell anyone they could not resist the temptation. Those who offer this view have witnessed how fallen human nature persistently rebels against God - does what it is told not to do and does not do what it is told to do (Paul struggled with this in his own life).

I am convinced that it not the best interpretation. Jesus told the people not to tell others what had happened for a very good reason. They knew what they were seeing but they did not understand the full significance of it, nor did they understand the importance of the timing of it. Jesus had an appointment with the Cross and He knew how all events, personalities, and agendas would come together at the right time to have Him in Jerusalem at Passover - and to have the religious leaders so enraged that they would demand His death at that time.

He did not want His ministry complicated. Proclaiming the miracles all over the country could cause the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees to move against Him before the appointed time. To be sure, they could not have caused His death any earlier - no one could take His life, He would give His life willingly when the time came. However, His enemies might well interfere with some of the things He needed to do and possible hinder His teaching and preaching ministry.

**7:37 - THE WERE UTTERLY ASTONISHED.** *“And they were utterly astonished, saying, ‘He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.’”* Once again, the people were “utterly astonished.” It is amazing that those who saw Jesus make “even the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak” were “utterly astonished”, when we can see evidence of His work all around us and give very little more than a nod to all the miraculous things He is doing.

If you have not seen Jesus do something in your life that left you “utterly astonished” for some period of time, you may be having a crisis of faith of which you are unaware. We often hear someone ask, “If you are not as close to the Lord as you once were, who moved?” If Jesus is not doing anything in your life that leaves you “utterly astonished,” whose fault is it? He is saving souls, He is blessing believers, He is responding to our prayers. He has sent His Spirit to convict lost people of sin, to convince them to turn to Jesus for forgiveness and for eternal life. He has blessed us with sunshine an rain, he blesses us with air to breathe, gravity to hold us on this earth, and He has given us the privilege of calling the Creator our Father. What Jesus is doing around the world is utterly amazing, and if we were not so caught up in our own affairs we would be “utterly amazed.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND, 8:1-10

This is not to be confused with the feeding of the five thousand. They are two separate miracles.

Jesus will refer to both of them a little later.

**8:1-3 - A GREAT MULTITUDE.** *“In those days again, when there was a great multitude and they had nothing to eat, He called His disciples and said to them, ‘I feel compassion for the multitude because they have remained with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away hungry to their home, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a distance.’”* On two separate occasions Jesus fed a multitude of people, a number far greater than most Christians may have assumed. Jesus fed five thousand men plus women and children (Matt. 14:13-21 ; Mark 6:30-44 ; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). “In those days again” alerts us to the fact that the feeding of the four thousand is not to be confused with the feeding of the five thousand - which only becomes an issue when someone is looking for contradictions in the Bible. When I study the Bible, that is not where I find the contradictions. The Bible points out the contradictions in my life.

**COMPASSION.** President George W. Bush has been criticized for his claim to be a compassionate conservative. Some of that criticism comes from fiscal conservatives in his own party, but some of it comes from liberals who seem to think that they had made our culture over into a secular society. It has been suggested that President Bush has the clearest Christian testimony of any president since Abraham Lincoln became a believer. It is a sad commentary on our times when one is mocked for being compassionate - but President Bush is criticized for being too compassionate in one breath and then for not being compassionate enough in the next breath.

Jesus had compassion on people. If you are a Christian you should be compassionate - Paul wrote, “Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus” (Phil.2:5). Paul also wrote, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...” (Rom. 8:20). What the Bible is saying is that God has a purpose for each person who is saved, and His purpose is to conform that person to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. If Jesus has compassion for others, we should have compassion for them.

**THREE DAYS.** They had followed Him three days? Why would this large crowd, 4000 men plus women and children - possibly 16,000 people - follow a Carpenter from Nazareth for three days without going home for food? I can understand their missing one meal, possibly two, but what would have motivated them to follow him for three days? I can think of but one thing. Whether they believed He was the Messiah or not, they hoped He was and they did not want to miss any proclamation He might make. They wanted to be in on whatever He might do. One can hardly imagine anyone in our day following anyone as they followed Him those three days.

**8:4 - HIS DISCIPLES.** *“And His disciples answered Him, ‘Where will anyone be able to find enough to satisfy these men with bread here in a desolate place?’”* This was a logical question. The answer was obvious. There was no bread in this desolate place. Period. No one sold bread, no one made bread, and no one could buy it. On the other hand, how could they have walked with him so long without knowing that He had the answer - that He was the answer.

**8:5 - HOW MAN LOVES.** *“And He was asking them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’”* And they said, ‘Seven.’ There were thousands of people there, they were a long way from home, and they

were exhausted and famished. And all that was available to them were seven loaves of bread. When will we ever learn that when we give what we have to Jesus it will be enough?

**8:6 - HE DIRECTED.** *“And He directed the multitude to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the multitude.”* Jesus knew exactly what He would do. He was in charge. There is no doubt that Jesus did everything in an orderly manner, as He did with the five thousand men plus women and children. At that time the people were seated in grids so that the apostles could pass between them to serve the fish and bread. There are times when the Lord’s people will be excited, such as the case when people are saved. However, when people are being “fed” there must be an orderly presentation of the Word of God.

Bob Moore, a deacon at Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas, once told me about a lay-renewal service in their church before I became his pastor. He was not happy with the service. Some people were excited by the testimonies, but Bob noticed a very quiet, very mature man as he walked toward his car after the service. He was shaking his head as he approached Bob. The man, not the kind to be critical or to try to attract attention to himself, said, “If there was a lost person in there, there is no way in the world he would know how to be saved.”

My younger brother Mike is a very busy attorney with a reputation for always being thoroughly prepared when he goes to trial. He is just as determined to be prepared when he teaches a Sunday School class. When he goes to church he expects to be taught when he hears someone else teach a Sunday School, and by all means, he expects to be fed when he hears a sermon. No amount of entertainment, no amount of psycho-babble, no amount of ecstatic excitement will ever take the place of an exposition of the Scripture.

Since the earliest days of my ministry I have known what “popular preaching” meant. I listened to students in college and seminary as they swapped sermons and sermon ideas. I listened to the, “And I told them...” time after time. I listened to the evangelists who loved to tell of how they surprised the crowd, of shocked the people with their stories or with some cliché’. I was tempted to try to preach like that - let’s face it, I tried it (to a degree), but a very good friend, former roommate Robert Sanderson, had the maturity to say, “Johnny, I appreciate your message and your conviction, but your normal delivery is much more effective.” He was right. The Lord did not call me to entertain the sheep. He did not call me to traumatize the sheep. He did not call me to psychoanalyze the sheep. He called me to feed His sheep. Crowds can be manipulated by those who seem to know how to swing back and forth between entertaining the sheep and traumatizing them. My son John listened to a lady who told him how much she loved her pastor because “He doesn’t just preach the Bible, he just tells us how to live.” Yet, God says, “Feed my sheep!”

**8:7 - A FEW SMALL FISH.** *“They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well.”* A few small fish would have been far inadequate for any of them to consider it, but whatever Jesus decides to use will be far more than adequate.

**8:8 - SATISFIED.** *“And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of*

*what was left over of the broken pieces.*” The entire multitude, four thousand men plus women and children who had not eaten in some time, ate until they were totally satisfied. After they had eaten they picked up seven large baskets full of broken pieces. These were pieces of fish and bread ready to serve, not scraps. If there had been ten thousand men plus women and children there, there would have been enough food. How do I know that? Logic. He would never have started feeding the multitude if He could not have met every one’s needs. If he could not meet their physical needs He certainly could not meet their spiritual needs. But there is more. How many baskets were filled with the food (not scraps) that was not consumed? Seven. The perfect number; the complete number.

I was attending the board of trustees meeting for LifeWay Christian Resources at the Ridgecrest Conference Center, Ridgecrest, NC, September 13-14 when a number of trustees began talking about the death of Stephen Olford. Dr. Olford and I sat on the same row the night we received our doctorates from Luther Rice Seminary in 1978 and I had heard Dr. Olford in person, listened to his tapes, and read some of his work. I agreed with LifeWay President Jimmy Draper, who declared Stephen Olford to be the most outstanding expositor of our lifetime.

Stephen Olford once told of the man in South Africa who ordered a new Rolls Royce. After he received it someone asked him how many horse power his new automobile had. He sent a telegram to Rolls Royce in London, asking, “Horse many horsepower in my new automobile.” Before long he was opening his response, and there was one word - ADEQUATE. What ever Jesus offers will always be adequate. Those who eat of the bread He gives them will be more than satisfied.

I have just read a tribute to Stephen Olford in *SBC Life* (JOURNAL OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION, October, 2004) by my friend Roger Wilmore, pastor of First Baptist Church, Boaz, Alabama. Roger and I have served together on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources for several years. He worked with Stephen Olford’s ministry for seven years in Memphis and when they called him and told him that Dr. Olford was dying he went to Memphis and spent several days with the family, mostly just sitting with Mrs. Olford.

Stephen Olford spent the first seventeen years of his life in the jungles of Africa, where his parents were missionaries before going to London to study to become an engineer. His specialty was carburetors and he developed one and tested it by racing motorcycles. He had an accident and spent several hours lying on the road before someone found him. The doctor gave him two weeks to live because of the pneumonia that complicated his overall condition.

His father, who knew nothing about the accident send him a letter which he received while he was in the hospital (letters took three months to reach London from the jungle). His father wrote:

“Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Stephen Olford got out of bed and kneeled by his bed and prayed, “Lord, you have won and I own you as King of Kings and Lord of Lords....and Lord, if you will heal my body I will serve you anywhere, any time, at any cost.” Thousands of preachers were blessed by the man who prayed that

prayer because if anyone ever meant it Stephen Olford did.

I thank the Lord for answering that prayer. Many people proclaim Stephen Olford the greatest expositor of our time. I agree, but what I shared with those friends at Ridgecrest was the impression I had when I met Stephen Olford in person. As I shook hands with him and looked into his eyes I had the distinct impression that I was seeing more clearly than I had ever seen before the incredible combination of power and meekness. What Jesus did for Stephen Olford was far more than adequate - and whatever your needs are, He is more than adequate. As the hymn says, "What He's done for others, He'll do for you."

**SEVEN LARGE BASKETS.** When he fed the five thousand men (plus women and children) there were twelve baskets full left over. The word basket itself (in the Greek) denotes larger baskets than the word used of the 12 baskets in which the leftovers were collected from the feeding of the 5,000 (6:43). These baskets were the kind used to let Paul down over the wall of Damascus (Acts 9:25).

**8:9 - FOUR THOUSAND.** *"And about four thousand were there; and He sent them away."* For those who do not like numbers, it is interesting that the Bible does record numbers - even if it does not dwell on some of the numbers as much as some preachers do today. Jesus fed multitudes on two occasions. Here He feeds four thousand. On the other occasion He fed five thousand men plus women and children. Do you realize that He may have fed twenty thousand on that occasion? No wonder the people were astonished.

**8:10 - IMMEDIATELY.** *"And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples, and came to the district of Dalmanutha."* Once again, Jesus acts "immediately." The political arena today is filled with a hatred that earlier America never witnessed. The "sixties" type liberals shocked us with their hatred for America, especially the military. Those young people of the sixties are now the talking heads of the media, university professors, and politicians. To many of these people, the hatred becomes especially intense when Jesus is mentioned. Just when they thought they had pushed Christians aside and assigned Jesus His place inside the four walls of the church and to the home of Christians, George W. Bush was elected president of the United States. One thing the media, and their political experts have not been able to fathom is the fact the President Bush will make a decision and then take action without second guessing himself. He moves forward with a confidence they cannot comprehend - any more than they can comprehend His faith. He prays for guidance, receives, it, and then acts without questioning the Lord.

That Jesus acted immediately, not only in this case, but throughout His ministry should not come as a surprise to any student of the Word. However, inclusion of this note underscores something very significant about the ministry of our Lord. He knew what He was doing, where He was going, and why He was going there.

## **THE PHARISEES REQUEST A MIRACLE, 8:11-13**

Jesus is back in Galilee and the opposition continues.

**8:11 - PHARISEES.** *“And the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him.”* The Holman Bible Dictionary offers the following information on the Pharisees:

“The Pharisees were strongly monotheistic. They accepted all the Old Testament as authoritative. They affirmed the reality of angels and demons. They had a firm belief in life beyond the grave and a resurrection of the body. They were missionary, seeking the conversion of Gentiles (Matt. 23:15). They saw God as concerned with the life of a person without denying that the individual was responsible for how he or she lived. They had little interest in politics. The Pharisees opposed Jesus because He refused to accept the teachings of the oral law” [HBD].

Jesus was a threat to religious leaders whose understood that their position in Israel was threatened by the preaching of Jesus. They also sensed that their favorable position with Roman officials was in jeopardy. Of all the religious sects in Palestine in the First Century, no group was more pious than the Pharisees. The Jews were God’s Chosen People, but the Pharisees felt themselves to be the chosen of the Chosen. Many were narrow minded bigots, fanatical defenders of the law, and self-ordained judges of all things Jewish. They epitomized self-righteousness - in fact, they are remembered metaphorically for their self-righteousness, their judgmental attitude, and their pious, narrow-minded application of the Law.

**8:12-13 - SEEK A SIGN.** *“And sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, “Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation. And leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.”* Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. As a human being, Jesus “was tempted in all points like as we, yet without sin.” These Pharisees must have presented Jesus with some of those temptations. Their piously sought to trap Him and expose Him as a false prophet. These experts in the Law demanded a sign, not because the believed in Him, but because they were looking for any opportunity to condemn His as a fraud.

Jesus’ response must have been frustrating to these religious leaders, whose very name is used synonymously hypocrite. Jesus understood them perfectly, and refused to perform for them. These Pharisees demanded that He perform some sign that would prove that He was the Messiah. He refused to be drawn into their trap.

Sadly, many people today are looking everywhere for some sign that the Second Coming of Jesus is at hand. I heard it often when I started out in the ministry: “Don’t you believe that the signs point to His return.” Or, “Don’t you believe prophecy is being fulfilled?” There is nothing wrong with looking for His return. In fact, we are told to watch and pray. The problem is that many people are only interested in the sensational. Some who flock to “healing services” and prophecy conferences show little interest in sound doctrine. Jesus refused to play their game. He simply left them and went away.

## JESUS TEACHES ON LEAVEN, 8:14-21

**8:14-16 - BEWARE OF THE LEAVEN.** *“And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, ‘Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’ They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.”* When the Pharisees had tried to trap Him with their demands for a sign, Jesus and His disciples got into a boat and started for the other side. Why did Jesus not confront the Pharisees and have it out with them right there? Was He afraid of a confrontation with them? I do not believe that is the answer - but I believe there is one. When the time for His crucifixion drew near, Jesus did confront them - so boldly, in fact that they either had to silence Him and punish Him or lose their influence over the people and possibly their position with Rome. As long as the Sadducees and Pharisees maintained order in Judea and Galilee Rome permitted the leaders a certain amount of control over the people. If Jesus was not afraid to call them a bunch of snakes, white washed sepulchers, and hypocrites, under more threatening circumstances, He was not afraid of them at this time. The time had not come for the confrontations that would lead them to go to Pilate and demand His crucifixion.

We live in the day of confrontational TV programs. Hannity and Colmbs is a popular program on the Fox New Network which feathers conservative, Sean Hannity, and liberal, Alan Colmbs. Bill O’Reilly, also on Fox, invites people to send comments - and keep it “pithy.” Some of the most popular TV hosts and guests are the ones who attack others on air. If the words of Solomon were applied to modern news “shows” it might put some of them out of business. Solomon wrote:

“A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, But the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness” (Pro. 15:1-2).

Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. The leaven of the Pharisees was hypocrisy and the leaven of Herod was secularism. Is it not wonderful how the disciples eliminated all hypocrisy and secularism in the first century?! Hypocrites within the church make the church undesirable to lost people and secularists out side the church attack prayer and Bible reading in public places, “under God” in the pledge, and “in God we trust” on our coins. We need to heed the warning of Jesus when we deal with either group.

His disciples missed the message. They were preoccupied with a pressing problem. When they got into the boat and discovered that there was only one loaf of bread in the boat they began to discuss Jesus’ warning. Was he talking about the fact that one loaf was not enough to feed all of them? They missed His point completely.

**8:17-20 - DO YOU NOT SEE.** *“And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces*

*you picked up?’ They said to Him, ‘Twelve.’ ‘When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?’ And they said to Him, ‘Seven.’”*

They had missed His point completely, and now Jesus asks questions to refocus their attention on the issue. At the same time, there is a mild but unmistakable rebuke in the questions He asked them. Why were they discussing something that had nothing to do with His warning? How often people hear an eternal truth and immediately translate it into something temporal. Someone says that Jesus is the Bread of Life and some wilderness saint says, “Yeah and I sure hope he sends us a rain, my garden is drying up. Are you watering your garden?” They had spiritual eyes but could not see spiritual truth. This is not something you can instill academically. I have seen people with more degrees than a thermometer who wandered through life like a blind person. As a matter of fact some of the most outlandish behavior I have ever seen or heard at some Christian conventions came from highly educated people (sadly, some were pastors).

Jesus was talking about spiritual truth and they were worried about bread. How could they worry about bread when they had the Bread of Life in the boat with them? Did they think they would starve with Jesus in the boat with them?

Jesus asked questions that illustrated the absurdity of their concern. How many baskets full of bread were left when he fed the five thousand (plus women and children, 20,000 people)? Twelve. And how many large baskets were left after He fed the four thousand (plus women and children, 16,000 people)? Seven. And how many people were in the boat with one loaf? Thirteen! That was more than enough. Jesus was not even concerned about bread. He had something more important on His mind.

**8:21 - UNDERSTAND.** *“And He was saying to them, ‘Do you not yet understand?’”* The point is, they should have understood. If they had not gotten sidetracked they would have understood. Jesus has warned them about hypocrisy and secularism. They had seen and heard Jesus but processed what they heard simply as “bread”. Those disciples surely were foolish, were they not? Here is an exercise for us. See if you can make a list of parallels to that today. For example, how many times do we emphasize the need for spiritual healing only to have someone overlook that in favor of physical healing? How many times do we speak of the church only to see someone change the emphasis from the body of Christ to the physical plant?

“Do you not understand?” That is a fair question for us today. On December 26, 2004, a 9.1 magnitude earthquake five and one-half miles beneath the Indian Ocean caused a tsunami that swept across the ocean floor at 500 miles per hour. The surface of the ocean above the tsunami was calm and ships would have been safe there. As the tsunami approached land it would lose speed but the ocean would draw back from the beaches, causing people to approach it to see what was happening. If they had all run the other way thousands of lives may have been saved, but they did not know what was happening. As of January 4, 2005, the death is approaching 150,000 people, and still more bodies are being discovered. Within three weeks Indonesia would add 70,000 to that number.

A few Muslims are telling the predominantly Muslim population of Indonesia and all the others

countries in the region that Christians caused the tsunami - or that they caused it by being friendly with Christians. On January 4, 2005, I turned on the television to check the latest news on the effort to get food, water, and shelter to those who desperately need it in the region. The Hannity and Colms program was on and they were interviewing Franklin Graham - I cannot think of a better person to have had on the program. Someone had quoted a pastor who had made the statement that God was judging the world, and this statement had spawned debate around the world. They were asking the questions others are asking: Did God cause this? Graham stated that we must remember that God loves us and offers us salvation through His Son. They give Him an opportunity and he takes advantage of it to share God's message of salvation through Jesus Christ better than almost anyone I have seen interviewed on a program like this. He will not be sidetracked, and still, they let him speak, and invited him back. This is amazing in light of the attacks on Christianity in the media today.

Franklin Graham stated that the prince of the world is Satan and that rather than blame God for evil things, we should blame the devil. Immediately, Alan Colms asked, "Isn't God more powerful than the devil? Couldn't He have prevented this?" Rush Limbaugh, seeking to defend God, stated that God does not permit disasters, and He doesn't cause them - they just happen. Rush is to be commended for his desire to refute the charges that God could have prevented the tsunami, at the same time, his brother David is a better theologian. David is a committed Christian, who has obviously studied the Scripture. Rush has a general knowledge of the Bible, but he missed the point in his desire to defend God. The simple fact is that God is sovereign and He can do anything He chooses to do. There is the permissive will of God, and there is the directive will of God. He has permitted disasters and He has caused disasters. In the Bible, we see that God stated very definitely that He had used natural disasters, war, and famine as instruments of judgment.

It is both interesting and disturbing to see how people distort the truth through their ignorance of the Word of God. Franklin Graham pointed out the fact that the Bible teaches that there will be an increase in earthquakes and other disasters as the end approaches. He also stressed that sin is responsible for suffering in the world. Graham declared the truth from the Word of God at a time when many people are blaming God for not stopping the disaster. Repeatedly, he proclaimed God's message of salvation.

As they closed out that segment they put his Samaritan's Purse ministry's phone number and website on the screen and asked people to contribute to their efforts to help with relief efforts. Graham has pledged four million dollars to the relief effort - more than some nations. Southern Baptists may well give more than some nations, beginning with a commitment of \$300,000 by the International Missions Board. This is an opportunity for Christians to come together for a worthy cause. It is also an opportunity for Satan to inspire misunderstanding and distrust.

It is amazing to me that when we need God's mercy and grace most many people seem more interested in blaming God for bad things that happen to them. I have had to deal with a few serious problems. I was in my mid-thirties when I went to a foot specialist with what I learned later was a pinched nerve between two metatarsal joints in my left foot. By the time two "specialists" got through with me, I was almost incapacitated. I know what physical pain means, I have lived with it

for years. I know some of the frustrations that go with it - and believe me, if you have never experienced something like this for an extended period of time, YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND. So, stop saying you do!

I know what it means not to be able to do things with your family you would like to do. I know what it means to have to depend upon family members to do things you once did. I know what it means when friends, not wanting to be limited by your inactivity, move on without you. I know what it means to be challenged financially. Financially, my family was saving more money on my salary before I moved back to a smaller church than my wife and I have ever been able to save since that time. I know a lot of the frustrations of not understanding either the diagnosis or the prognosis. I sat on a barstool to preach for twenty-five years. I made hospital calls in a wheel chair for several years. By the time I got dressed each morning my feet would burn like I was walking on fire for the rest of the day. Pain I could handle, but the burning was another matter.

During all this time I called on God to lift me up and let me to stand. I asked Him to heal me. He did not. What He did was to provide for me under the circumstances. It is absolutely amazing what He has done. During all this time I was never angry with God. I never blamed God. He was the One to whom I looked for help.

A few years ago when I stood to preach one Sunday morning a number of elderly members said, “You don’t know how we have been praying for this.” I thank God for the lessons I have learned that I may not have learned any other way. I trust God, I do not blame Him.

## **POWER OVER BLINDNESS, 8:22-26**

**8:22-26 - A BLIND MAN.** *“And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, ‘Do you see anything?’ And he looked up and said, ‘I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around.’ Then*

again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. And He sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.” After the confrontation with a group of Pharisees, Jesus and His disciples left Capernaum and went to Bethsaida, where He had fed the 5,000. On this visit, “they” brought a blind man to Him. “They” probably referred to local citizens. This miracle has caused some interesting speculations. Normally, when Jesus healed someone they were totally and instantly healed. Why did Jesus handle this situation as He did. First, he took the man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then, “after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him.” Why would he spit on the man’s eyes?

“The unusual procedure of healing the blind man in stages is intentional, and is meant to portray the gradual understanding of the disciples. Physical sight is often used as a metaphor for understanding (cf. 8:18, 21). That Jesus could heal instantaneously is evident in His previous acts and in the consistent use of ‘immediately’ in these miracles. The disciples have slowly come to understand that Jesus is the Messiah, and even after Peter’s confession in v. 29, they still have only partial sight, in that they do not understand the kind of Messiah He truly is” [BSB].

At first the blind man could see, but not clearly. Then, Jesus laid his hands on the young man and healed Him completely. After that He instructed the young man to go to his own home, and not even go through the village. His purpose was not to put on a show for the local residents, but to teach His disciples something they needed to know and understand.

As in other places, Jesus demonstrates His authority over situations and circumstances. He has demonstrated His authority over the elements, over diseases, over the elements, and over death. Here, He demonstrates His sovereignty over both physical and spiritual circumstances.

## **PETER’S CONFESSION, 8:27-30**

**8:27 - CAESAREA.** *“Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, ‘Who do people say that I am?’”* Caesarea Philippi, located about 25 miles the Sea of Galilee, was built by Herod Philip in honor of Caesar Augustus. There was another Caesarea located on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, where Paul was imprisoned for two years.

**WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT I AM?** This is the critical question. The first question is not, Who do you say that I am, but who do other people say that I am.

**8:28 - JOHN THE BAPTIST.** *“They told Him, saying, ‘John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.’”* The disciples were simply repeating what the people were saying. There would have been a lot of speculation as to His identity. When five thousand men plus women and children followed him on one occasion, and when four thousand followed Him for three days on another occasion, you can believe there was a lot of talk about Him. Their knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures would have channeled their thoughts toward Elijah or toward the Messiah.

**8:29 - YOU ARE THE CHRIST.** *“And He continued by questioning them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, ‘You are the Christ.’”* Jesus now turns from the public to His disciples, those who know Him best, and asks, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter, not surprisingly, answers, “You are the Christ.” We are probably more familiar with the longer version in Matthew 16:16-17:

Simon Peter answered, ““You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!”” And Jesus responded, ““Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven” (HCSB).

Jesus had been teaching His disciples for some time and when He asked them, “Who do you say that I am,” Peter had the answer. If we did not have the fuller account in Matthew we might think that Peter had simply been paying attention to the lectures and responded accordingly. Jesus, however, stresses the fact that Peter did not discern this truth, he did not discover it, and he did not learn it from someone else. “Flesh and blood” had not revealed this to Simon. Jesus said, “My Father in heaven” has revealed this truth to you. No one ever comes to Jesus Christ on his own. No one has ever “come to Jesus”, or “found” Him on his own. The Father must reveal this truth to each person. Today, that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7f):

“Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don’t go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send Him to you. 8 When He comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment: 9 about sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see Me; 11 and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged” (John 16:7-11, HCSB).

**8:30 - TELL NO ONE.** *“And He warned them to tell no one about Him.”* Matthew (16:20) tells us that Jesus “gave the disciples orders to tell no one that He was the Messiah.” Why would He tell them to tell no one what they had just professed? Was that not what He had been teaching them? Did He not command His followers to go into all the world with this message? Absolutely. But the time had not yet come for this proclamation. That would come later.

## **JESUS PROPHECIES HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION, 8:31-33**

**8:31 - THE SON OF MAN.** *“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”* “The Son of Man” is a favorite title for Jesus in Mark’s Gospel. The Son of Man is used as a designation for Jesus as God incarnate some 84 times in the Gospels, all but one being Jesus’ designation for Himself. Any study of the title will lead one to the Old Testament use of the designation, where, with the exception of Ezekiel and Daniel, the term Son of man appears in the Old Testament as a synonym for “man,” (Isa. 56:2; Jer. 50:40; Pss. 8:4; 80:17; 146:3; Job 25:6). In the Aramaic language spoken in Palestine in Jesus’ day, the expression was also used for “man.”

The Holman Bible Dictionary points to the two Old Testament books in which the designation is often used:

1. In Ezekiel, God uses the term 90 times to address the prophet. The exact nuance of this usage is widely debated. Is the emphasis on the humanity and frailty of the prophet? It is used, perhaps, as a title to distinguish him from other men. Or, it may reveal the prophet's sense of identity with his people. In any event, the emphasis seems to be on the humanity of the prophet, a meaning which Christians also came to attach to the term when applied to Jesus.

2. The most distinctive Old Testament use of "Son of man" is in Daniel 7:13. In one of his night visions, the prophet saw "one like a son of man" (NASB) come on the clouds of heaven to appear before the throne of God. He was given dominion over all peoples and an everlasting kingdom. Scholars are divided over whether the Son of man of Daniel's vision should be seen as an angel, as the Messiah, or as all of Israel. (The latter conclusion is drawn from the fact that in Dan. 7:27 the "saints of the most High" were granted dominion over an everlasting kingdom.) Later, Jewish interpretation of Daniel 7:13, however, is at one in seeing the reference as messianic. This is true of the later apocalyptic writings such as Enoch and 2 Esdras as well as the rabbinic writings [HBD].

In the New Testament, Jesus applied the term in three distinct ways. Only a brief summary from the Holman Bible Dictionary (see the complete article in the HBD) will illustrate the way Jesus used the title for Himself:

1. Apocalyptic Sayings The largest number of Son of man sayings deal with the final times when the Son of man will descend to earth to gather the elect and to judge. The picture of the Son of man in these passages is strongly reminiscent of Daniel 7:13 (quoted in Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; 22:69). The Son of man will come in glory with His angels and take His seat on His throne (Matt. 25:31).

2. Passion Sayings The second largest group of Son of man sayings are connected with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Three times Jesus predicted that the Son of man would be rejected and killed by the priests and scribes but would rise on the third day (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; Luke 24:7). Just like John the Baptist, the Son of man would be treated with contempt (Mark 9:12-13; Matt. 17:12-13). He will be betrayed (Matt. 26:24,45; Luke 22:48). Death would be followed by victory, the resurrection from the dead (Matt. 17:9).

3. Sayings Connected with Jesus' Ministry The third group of Son of man sayings is the most heterogeneous, but all refer to some aspect of Jesus' earthly ministry. Many could be understood in the sense of the Hebrew idiom--"a man, this man, I." Yet, all have a deeper implication than any human I, for all point to some unique quality

about Jesus' ministry. Even in these sayings, "Son of man" should be seen as a title pointing to Jesus' special role. He is the One who has authority to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24) and to interpret the meaning of the sabbath (Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). In His preaching, He sowed the seed of God's kingdom (Matt. 13:37), for He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Blessed is the disciple who suffers for His sake (Luke 6:22) [HBD].

**MUST SUFFER.** *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”* Millions have only recently seen Mel Gibson’s *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST*, and even though there are spots where the Scripture is not followed as closely as certain denominational traditions, this movie dramatically, and shockingly portrays the suffering, torture, and abuse to which Jesus was subjected. Perhaps no other film has ever come close to capturing the intensity of the abuse to which He submitted. He suffered, bled, and died for our sins, and on the third day he did indeed rise again.

Considering all Jesus taught His disciples about what was to come one wonders why they did not anticipate the crucifixion and the resurrection. The simple fact is that, in spite of all He said to prepare them, they never understood. Why? Is it possible that they thought He was speaking allegorically? Or was it that they had never seen anything like this and they were unprepared for it? After they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost they would begin to understand, because He would call the promises of Jesus to their minds. Remember that today we have a much greater revelation than they and the majority still do not believe.

**8:32 - STATING THE MATTER PLAINLY.** *“And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.”* There was nothing ambiguous about what Jesus taught His disciples about His death and resurrection. That is one reason it is so amazing that they did not anticipate it, accept it, or believe it when it happened. Not one of them understood what He was telling them. How had they missed the message? Is it possible that they were so focused on an earthly kingdom in which they would be given positions for which He was training them that they could not see beyond the physical realm? Before we criticize those ancient disciples, consider how little most professing Christians know about the promises of God today.

It is interesting that Peter then took Jesus aside to rebuke Him. It would be interesting to know what he said to the Lord. Perhaps he told Him that He needed to go easy on that kind of talk because His disciples might become discouraged. Lest we think Peter was unique, think of all the psychobabble we hear today about how people become angry with God and, in essence, rebuke Him when He does not do what they want Him to do.

**8:33 - HE REBUKED PETER.** *“But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.’”* Peter, James, and John formed the inner circle of apostles and Peter probably influenced the others, including James and John. This may have been the reason Jesus rebuked him personally. It is also possible that when Peter heard what he did not want to hear he simply refused to consider it and sought to get Jesus to stop telling them that He was to be put to death. However, if Jesus had not

wanted the apostles to know about his appointment with the cross He would not have told them. After the crucifixion, when Jesus appeared to them and reminded them of what He had taught them they would know that everything that happened was according to the will of God - and not one thing happened to Him surprised Him. He had never lost control.

## **THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS, 8:34-9:1**

**8:34 - TAKE UP HIS CROSS.** *“And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’”* This is one of the best known verses in the Bible. It is a lot easier to quote the verse than it is to put it into practice. What does He mean to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus? It certainly means more than wearing a piece of jewelry in the shape of a cross. In the first place, Jesus summoned the multitude and His disciples to come close enough to be sure they heard what He had to say. One would infer from this that He was about to say something very significant. This is not addressed only to the inner circle, but to all who want to follow Him. There was a multitude there who either professed to want to follow Jesus, or they were still trying to make up their minds.

Jesus lays it on the line: if you want to follow me you must deny yourself, and follow Me. First, you must deny yourself. This not the self-worth, self-love; self-esteem gospel some have been proclaiming for three decades in America. This is not what the “me generation” is seeking. The post-Christian culture invites people to gratify self, not deny self. Jesus teaches that those who would follow Him must first deny self, and then take up his cross and follow Him.

The cross was an instrument of death, a means of execution. Does this mean that only those who die a martyr’s death are followers of Jesus? No, but it does mean that when you commit yourself to follow Him you commit your all to Him, and for some that will mean death. If you would follow Jesus you will hold nothing back. You will pour out your life for Him, and if there ever comes a time when one must literally pour out his or her blood for Him they are prepared to do it. This is happening in Islamic countries today. It happened at Columbine High School in Colorado when a teenager chose death rather than deny her Lord.

**8:35-37 - WHOEVER WISHES TO SAVE HIS LIFE.** *“For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”* Ryrie explains that verse 35 means that:

“Whoever would save his life (by renouncing the gospel and thus avoiding the risk of martyrdom) will lose it (eternally, because he has not believed the gospel); but whoever is willing to lose his life (as a martyr for Christ) will save it (i.e., will prove that he is a follower of Christ and an heir of eternal life)” [RSB].

While Ryrie is right, there may be a more practical application for us today. People are not put to death for following Christ in America. A lot of Christians have died for the cause of Jesus Christ in other places, but in America no one can legally be put to death for following Him. So, what does

this verse mean to us today?

What is it that human beings want more than almost anything else? They want to live. They want to live longer, they want to live better, and they want to really experience life. However, Jesus is saying that if that is the total focus of your life, you are going to lose your life. Of course, one who give strict attention to diet, exercise, and rest, and follows the general rules of health may well expect to live longer and enjoy life better than those who do not take care of their body - but we must fit that “longer” life into that frame of time which God sees as a vapor which appears for a brief time and then evaporates.

Long life is a blessing God promised to those Old Testament saints who lived in fear of the Lord. Living the Christian life should help one live longer and better today. If you abstain from alcohol, drugs, tobacco, immorality, and other things that will take years off your life you should live longer than you would have otherwise. However, stress, genetics, and other factors may cause one to have a fatal heart attack at an early age, while another person may live one hundred years or more. On October 13, 2004, I had a very good visit with Alton Biggs (Bro. Alton). One year ago, when he was six months from his one hundredth birthday, my wife Becky and I saw Bro. Alton park his truck at the corner of the fire station, walk over to Don Antley’s gate and climb over it. He saw us and walked to the corner of the pasture to explain that he was going to walk down the hill to check the Catawba trees to see if he could find any worms. He was going fishing. Just before his one hundredth birthday last Spring Bro. Alton told me that he had decided not to put out trot lines and nets this year. He believed duck hunters had helped him harvest his catfish last year. More recently, I visited with Bro. Alton and discovered that he had several planters setting in the sun and one of them had a live oak sprout in it. He was trying to sprout live oak trees to be transplanted later. He is one hundred, one years old and he is planting live oak trees!

Very few people live as long as Bro. Alton, and among those who do, very few are as independent as he. This is not what Jesus has in mind. Those who spend all their time searching for the fountain of youth, visiting health spas, following every new diet that comes out, and become obsessed with exercise may live longer on this earth, but none of these things will produce eternal life. If your whole life is given to the pursuit of physical life you will ultimately lose your life.

**IF ANYONE.** I am absolutely convinced that no one comes to the Father on his own. No one “finds” God. We do not choose God, He chooses us. Yet, this is an invitation to anyone who wishes to follow Jesus. The “whosoever wills” of the Bible are clear. God chooses us but He never saves anyone against his will. The late Dr. E. R. Pinson, longtime Bible professor at Mississippi College, taught his class, “Everyone is free to choose, but no one is free not to choose.” You are going to choose to follow the Lord or to reject Him.

**DENY HIMSELF.** What exactly does that mean? Does it mean that one must deny his identity? His existence? That of course is foolish. One must deny self gratification, a self-centered, self-indulgent life in order to know and follow Jesus.

**TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME.** If you would follow Jesus you must take

up your cross. Notes in the Believer's Study Bible are applicable:

“One of the apparent paradoxes of Scripture relates to the voluntary sacrifice of a man's life for the cause of Christ. The verse does not demand martyrdom in order to secure life. However, the passage does establish that men coming to Christ must give Him their lives in such totality that they retain no claim upon them. Having placed themselves forever in the hands of Christ, they immediately possess the abundant life” [BSB].

It is significant that “Deny” and “Take up” are in the aorist imperfect tense, showing once-for-all action. “Follow” is a present imperfect, demanding continuous action. What are the implications for us? We make a once for all commitment and then we follow Him continually.

Perhaps what is needed most today is for Christians to re-visit the Cross. George MacLeod wrote a poem that helps put a lot of things in perspective, helping to emphasize content rather than cosmetics, Christ rather than self, the gospel going beyond the church walls rather than simply being contained within them.

I simply argue that the cross be raised again  
at the center of the market place  
as well as on the steeple of the church,  
I am recovering the claim that  
Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral  
between two candles:  
But on a cross between two thieves;  
on a town garbage heap;  
At a crossroad of politics so cosmopolitan  
that they had to write His title  
in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek...  
And at the kind of place where cynics talk smut,  
and thieves curse and soldiers gamble.  
Because that is where He died,  
and that is what He died about.  
And that is where Christ's men ought to be,  
and what church people ought to be about.

-- George MacLeod

A. W. Tozer is often quoted by those who have been blessed by his writings. His comments on cross bearing is but one example of the contribution he has made to our understanding of the Christian life:

I am afraid we modern Christians are long on talk and short on conduct. We use the language of power but our deeds are the deeds of weakness. We settle for words in

religion because deeds are too costly. It is easier to pray, "Lord, help me to carry my cross daily" then to pick up the cross and carry it; but since the mere request for help to do something we do not actually intend to do has a certain degree of religious comfort, we are content with repetition of the words (A. W. Tozerm the Bible Illustrator).

**8:38 - ASHAMED OF ME.** *“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”* This is both an eternal truth and a severe warning to anyone who is ashamed of Jesus. In some places in the world to confess Jesus Christ is to risk torture and possibly death. In America, there are millions of Christians and even though there is a growing hostility toward Christianity in the media and in liberal universities Christians can worship without fear of persecution. Yet, millions deny Jesus Christ every day in America, not because they fear for their life, but because someone may laugh at them. If people you see on a regular basis suddenly discover that you are a Christian, you have been denying Christ.

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

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