

# **Sermons in Luke and John**

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## **Luke 2:1-20. The Shepherds**

Chapter 1 of Luke is mainly about the birth of John the Baptist, but in the middle of it we read something quite remarkable. The angel Gabriel appeared to a young virgin called Mary, who was espoused to be married to a man called Joseph, and said:

Luke 1:31-35

*And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

God became man. The miraculous conception of our Lord Jesus Christ is the most wonderful event ever to have occurred in this world. God manifest Himself in the flesh. And to do that, He didn't use anybody special. He used two ordinary young people:

John 1:14

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

And not only were they young and ordinary, but they lived in Nazareth, of which was said:

John 1:46

*Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?*

Nazareth was an obscure place way up north, far away from the religious centre in Jerusalem. If God was going to come to earth, we'd think he would choose the Temple in Jerusalem, but no, Nazareth, an unassuming Northern town was the place God chose to live and grow up. God doesn't use the great things of this world to display His glory:

1 Corinthians 1:27-29

*But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

And then we have a marvellous display of God's providence at work. At the same time as our Lord had been placed in Mary's womb in Nazareth, way over in Rome, completely separately, Caesar Augustus decided to hold a census of the whole Roman Empire:

***[1] And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.***

Now this seems to have been a one-off event, because in Acts there's a reference to an uprising that took place around this time:

Acts 5:37

*After this man rose up Judas of Galilee **in the days of the taxing**, and drew away much people after him....*

*“in the days of the taxing”* implies a one-off, unique occasion.

To fulfil the prophecy of Micah, Christ had to be born in Bethlehem:

Micah 5:2

*But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

It was this one-off decree from Caesar Augustus in Rome that sent Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. Otherwise they'd never have gone. There was no other reason to go. Joseph didn't seem to have any family in Bethlehem, otherwise he'd have stayed with them when he was there. Any relatives he had must've either died out or, like him, left the area. So this one-off event happening at exactly the same time Mary was due to give birth was God's providence in action. God always works His providence, so He gets all the glory.

And notice it says **“that all the world should be taxed.”** The phrase **“all the world”** can't be taken literally. The Australian aborigines weren't taxed. **“All the world”** here refers to the whole Roman Empire over which Caesar Augustus had authority. So when we come across the phrase *“the world”* or even *“all the world”* in Scripture, we've got to be careful, it doesn't necessarily mean every human being in the world head for head.

**[2] (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)**

The Bible pinpoints the time of Christ's birth accurately. It was at the same time Caesar Augustus was ruling in Rome, Cyrenius ruling in Syria and Herod the Great in Judea.

I looked these people up on Wikipedia. It tells us there that Cyrenius was governor of Syria between 6AD and 12AD, and that Augustus died in 14AD, so it's agreed their reigns coincided, but it tells us that Herod died in 4BC, so, according to this, his reign doesn't coincide with the other two. We're then given an explanation for this:

*“The Gospel of Luke uses it [the census] as the narrative means to establish the birth of Jesus, but places it within the reign of Herod the Great, who died 10 years earlier. No satisfactory explanation of the contradiction seems possible on the basis of present knowledge, and most scholars think that the author of the gospel made a mistake.”*

How are these dates arrived at? Scholars decide. Historians decide. Whenever we get a discrepancy between what the Bible says and what scholars say, which one does the BBC use? Which one is taught in our schools as fact? But which one is right? The Bible is always right, because it is the Word of God. Every word was breathed by Him as men were inspired of the Holy Ghost, so it can't be wrong:

2 Peter 1:21

*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

Scholars who differ from the Bible, whether historians, scientists, archaeologists, or anybody else, will always be wrong. Not so long ago archaeologists were very keen to tell us that Pontius Pilate never existed, because no evidence of his existence has ever been found in the archaeological record. Until they found an inscription in Caesarea with his name on it. Then they suddenly went quiet. Never follow men. Always follow this book.

**[3] And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.**

We may find the phrase “**His own city**” difficult to understand, but in China, everybody has a “family book” held by the family head in the place where they’re registered. That’s where they can get welfare, and free education for their children. But if they move away, they lose these benefits. That’s why so many children stay with grandparents while their parents go to the big cities to work. They can’t take their children with them without losing their benefits. That’s the idea of having your “**own city**,” a place where you’re registered.

This must have been a huge migration of people throughout the Roman Empire. It must have caused unprecedented difficulties for the population, all at the whim of the emperor.

**[4] And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)**

Joseph was “**of the house and lineage of David.**” We know that because we’ve got two genealogies of Christ in the Bible, one in Matthew 1 and the other in Luke 3. One traces Christ’s descent through David’s son Solomon, the other through his son Nathan. A lot of people think the genealogy in Luke is Mary’s, but I don’t agree. It states clearly that it’s Joseph’s. Mary was a “*cousin*,” a close relative, of Elisabeth, John the Baptist’s mother, who was from the High Priestly line. So how can we explain a divergence in the two genealogies between David and Joseph? There can be several explanations, the simplest is that at least one name in the list is female. If there are no sons, the line goes through the eldest daughter. Anyway, Joseph, in both genealogies, is descended from David.

In the Matthew genealogy, Joseph is descended through the kings of Judah. So if the monarchy had continued after the Babylonian exile, which it didn’t, then Joseph would have been the king of Judah and Jesus Christ, legally his first born, would have been his heir. So I suggest Christ started His public ministry age thirty, upon the death of Joseph. On the cross there was written above Him “*The King of the Jews.*” That was a true statement. Had the monarchy continued, He really would have been the king of Judah.

But Joseph wasn’t a king, he was a carpenter in Nazareth. Fourteen generations after the last official king of Judah, the kingship had been all but forgotten. There’s probably somebody in the world today who’s a direct descendent of Genghis Khan, but nobody knows who he is, probably sweeping the streets of Ulan Bator or something.

**[5] To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.**

Mary had to go to Bethlehem too. There were no exemptions. She was heavily pregnant, but she still had to go, not because she was descended from David herself, but because she was now espoused to Joseph who was, and so had to register as his wife.

**[6] And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.**

How long were they planning to be in Bethlehem for? Long enough to register. But this was the Lord's time for Mary to go into labour. And now they had a baby, they seem to have settled there for a while, because they're later found by the wise men in a house:

Matthew 2:11

*And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*

But they didn't stay in Bethlehem for long because they were told by an angel to flee to Egypt to escape Herod's attempt to kill all the children in the area.

Later, during Christ's ministry, there was a dispute as to whether He was Christ or not:

John 7:41-43

*Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him.*

Christ was always known as "Jesus of Nazareth." His actual birth in Bethlehem, while Joseph and Mary were on a short visit there, didn't seem to be widely known.

**[7] And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.**

There was no room in the inn. Nobody was willing to give up their place for a heavily pregnant woman. That's what people are like. By nature we're all self-centred, and can only think of ourselves and our own comforts. That's why we need a Saviour.

There's no mention of a stable. So "Once in Royal David's City, Stood a lowly cattle shed" is rubbish. A stable is assumed because a manger is mentioned, an animal feed trough, but a stable is not in the Bible. Maybe they were in a cave or some other kind of shelter. Maybe they were in the open field, we don't know. But Mary did the best she could in the circumstances. She found some cloths to swaddle Him, and a manger to put Him in, not realising that these would be the signs the shepherds were to look for later, v.12.

Compare Mary's care for her child with Ezekiel's description of the state of Jerusalem:

Ezekiel 16:4,5

*And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye*

*pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born.*

This represents the state of us all by nature. Ezekiel was told by the Lord:

Ezekiel 16:2

*Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations,*

We can talk about the sins of our nation, and compare it with Jerusalem here, and that would be a good comparison. But what about our own hearts as individuals? We're full of abominations, sins against God, which we should all be utterly ashamed of. We've not been swaddled or looked after, because we don't look after ourselves. We despise God, we don't want Him in our lives, we want to go our own way. That's what we're all like by nature. That's why the Son of God became man, so sinners like us can be changed, saved to a new life, given a new nature, and finished with our sinful ways for ever.

***[8] And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.***

Nearby is a group of shepherds, "***abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.***" So it's not winter, otherwise they'd be sheltering from the cold, not in the fields.

So, God becoming man, the Word becoming flesh, God Himself coming into this world, wasn't done in a great cathedral, or revealed to some great archbishop or pope. God chose to use a couple of ordinary young people from an obscure town, and some local shepherds. And when Christ chose His disciples, He chose mainly fishermen.

The religious leaders of the day completely missed it all. God passed them all by. In fact the religious leaders of Christ's day ended up as His worst enemies, and they got Him put to death. Is there a lesson here for the great religious leaders of our day?

***[9] And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.***

These poor simple shepherds doing an ordinary night's work were suddenly awakened. Firstly, we're told "***the angel of the Lord came upon them.***" "*The angel of the Lord*" appears several times in the Old Testament, and he's usually thought of as a theophany, an appearance of Christ in some kind of pre-incarnate state. But I'm not so sure about that. He appears here, but it can't be Christ because He's elsewhere lying in a manger.

And "***the glory of the Lord shone round about them.***" In the Old Testament, "*the glory of the Lord*" appeared on Mount Sinai, in the Tabernacle, and in the Temple. Whenever "*the glory of the Lord*" appeared, men, like the shepherds, became "***sore afraid.***" And it's not surprising, because God is holy, and we're altogether sinful. Isaiah saw it:

Isaiah 6:5

*Then said I Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*

But it is possible to have a glimpse of God's glory while we are on this earth. But we have to forsake our sin, and turn to Christ for salvation. Then we can be changed from within. We still only see God as through a glass darkly, but we can begin to see something.

2 Corinthians 3:18

*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

***[10] And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.***

When God appears to us, we fear, we tremble, because of our sin. But if God wants to show favour – and the prerogative is always with Him – He would say, “**Fear not,**” like here. There's only no need to fear if He's got good news for us, and He has: “**I bring you good tidings of great joy.**” Not only to the shepherds but “**to all people.**” Including us.

***[11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.***

That very day, in the city of David, that is Bethlehem, was born a Saviour “**Christ the Lord.**” For centuries, it had been prophesied a Saviour would come from God. These prophecies are found throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. And a Saviour is exactly what we need, because none of us can save ourselves. Isaiah said:

Isaiah 53:6

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

We can't hope to please God by anything we do, we're too self-centred. God, in His love and mercy, didn't leave us like that, but promised a Saviour who would come into the world, who would live a perfect life, and be put to death on a cross by wicked men. And all those who put their trust in Him shall not come into judgment for their sins, but have their sins placed on Him, so they can be set free.

1 Peter 3:18

*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit...*

John 8:36

*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

That's why this is good tidings of great joy to all people. Because in Christ we can have our sins forgiven. In Him we can be set free from the punishment we deserve. No other religious figure can do this. But Christ can, because He is God come down to earth for us.

***[12] And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.***

And here's the unusual sign they were told to look out for, a babe swaddled, so He was properly cared for, but He was lying in a manger. The angel didn't actually tell them to go, they could have stayed where they were and not bothered. But how could they not go, when such marvellous news had been revealed to them?

***[13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, [14] Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.***

In salvation, all the glory goes to God. We can't deserve it, we can't obtain it. It comes purely by the mercy of God. And we really ought to understand this. We must come to an end of ourselves, and realise salvation, deliverance from wrath to come, is all of the Lord.

And then there's this phrase, "***on earth peace, good will toward men.***" But Christ said:

Luke 12:51

*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division:*

The **division** Christ spoke of is the division that occurs naturally between men and men, because of Him. Some will believe in Him and be saved to eternal life, others won't.

The **peace** spoken of here is peace between God and men. Not all men, because some will never believe. But God sent Christ as a Saviour in an act of good will towards men. We can be reconciled to God today, if only we repent of our sins and come to Him.

John 3:17

*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

***[15] And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.***

So this great, glorious, heavenly visitation from the angels ends, and the shepherds are back on their own again. And they decided immediately to go to Bethlehem to see for themselves all these things the Lord had told them about.

The obvious question is, who looked after the sheep while they were gone? We always have to think of these silly questions, don't we? We don't know, is the answer. I'm sure the Lord kept them from straying too far, given these exceptional circumstances.

***[16] And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.***

They found Mary and Joseph and the babe in the manger just as the angel had told them. Which is why I don't think it was in a stable. Mary was giving birth. If they could have had privacy, they'd have done so and shut the stable door. The shepherds would never have been able to find them then. We're told they "***came with haste,***" they were excited, so



they weren't looking properly. Mary and Joseph were probably out in the open, maybe a cave, somewhere near the path the shepherds would take from their fields to Bethlehem, a place they would easily find, without really looking. There's another providence.

Mary must have been incredibly tired. She'd just arrived in Bethlehem after several days travel, only to find the inn full. She then went into labour and gave birth, at night, in the open, on the floor. She'd made the effort to swaddle the baby properly, I guess with a piece of cloth from her own clothing, cleaned the manger up as best she could, and placed the baby carefully in it. Then just as she's trying to get some sleep, these sweaty shepherds turn up. Under normal circumstances, she'd be pretty grumpy by now.

But the things of the Lord are wonderful. Who wants to sleep when such momentous events are taking place? And when we become a Christian, we're finished with our old life. The things of God, which meant nothing to us before, suddenly become exciting.

***[17] And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.***

The first thing they did after meeting the new young family, was they "***made known abroad***" what had happened. They went and told everybody they could about it. That's what happens when we come to know the Lord. We want to tell others about it.

The Saviour has come. We can be reconciled to God through Him. The shepherds had just witnessed the beginning of the story. We know the rest of it, because it's all here in this book. We love this book. And we love Jesus Christ, for what He has done for us.

***[18] And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.***

And "***all they that heard it wondered.***" This was one of the most successful evangelistic campaigns ever. Maybe the next day Mary had lots more visitors to deal with. Maybe someone offered them a house, because they're in one when the wise men came later on.

***[19] But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.***

So much had happened. And Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart. What was she pondering? Why did God choose me? Do we ever think that? Why did God choose me, and not my unbelieving neighbour? We can ponder on that question for ever, because I'm no better than him, in fact, thinking about it, I'm far worse.

And then she must have been pondering the works of God. The remarkable ways seemingly unrelated things came together in her life. We can ponder Scripture and see God's dealings with His people throughout history. We can also ponder the way God has worked in our life, because we all have different testimonies. All of them to His glory.

Nothing ever happens by chance. God works everything out in His providence. Mary was heavily pregnant, when she got a letter from the taxman telling her to report to the Bethlehem office by the date she was due. This seemed like a terrible problem for poor

Mary. But in faith she undertook that journey. No matter how big the problems we face, they're never there by chance. The Lord is in control of everything.

Romans 8:28

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

But what about disasters, illnesses, painful experiences. How can God be in them? Well, what do we think? God isn't the author of sin. But because of man's sin, we live in a fallen world. And it's through this fallenness, God works all things to His own glory:

Mark 13:7

*And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.*

Psalms 119:71

*It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

John 16:33

*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

If we never had any troubles in this world, and just drifted through life easily, without any problems, nobody would seek after God. We'd all be too busy living our own selfish little lives. God has allowed man to fall, and the world to be a fallen world, to stop us living for ourselves and putting our hope and trust here. This vale of tears is not worth trusting in.

Job 5:7

*Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.*

But while we're in this fallen world, we can have the assurance that God is working all things, both pleasant and unpleasant things, for good to His people, preparing them for the next world, which is far better. That's a wonderful thing to ponder in our hearts.

2 Peter 3:13

*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

Despite what it seems like in this world, God is in control of everything.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:*

*A time to be born, and a time to die;*

*a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;*

*A time to kill, and a time to heal;*

*a time to break down, and a time to build up;*

*A time to weep, and a time to laugh;*

*a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

*A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;*

*a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*

*A time to get, and a time to lose;*

*a time to keep, and a time to cast away;*

*A time to rend, and a time to sew;*

*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time of war, and a time of peace.*

***[20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.***

How is it that the shepherds could be so joyful in their hearts in such a fallen world? Because they had confidence God was in control of it, so they had no need to worry about anything. But not only that, they knew that this child they had just seen was the Saviour of the world, the Christ, the Son of the living God. The one who was to say later:

John 10:10

*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

All of us today can have this abundant life too, if only we finish with living for ourselves, and come to this child, this Saviour, whom to know is life eternal. May God grant that each and every one of us may do so.

## **Luke 2:25-38. Simeon and Anna**

At the time of the birth of Christ, we see that the land of Israel was in a mess. The Roman Empire had taken over. Wicked king Herod had been put in charge, and the Jews were oppressed. The religious leaders of the day had twisted the Scriptures, the Pharisees adding man-made laws to them, and the Sadducees taking away from the Scripture by not believing in such things as angels or the resurrection. Despite all this, God still had His people. Ordinary people. Not people of any status in society. Just ordinary people like us.

In the first two chapters of Luke, we come across Elizabeth and Zachariah, the parents of John the Baptist. It was said of them:

Luke 1:6

*...they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*

We come across Mary and Joseph. Of Joseph it was said that he was “a just man” (Matthew 1:19). And when Mary found out she was pregnant, she humbly replied:

Luke 1:38

*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*

We come across humble shepherds going about their daily work, when an angel of the Lord appeared to them:

Luke 2:10,11

*And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

And we come across Simeon and Anna. We'll look at these two for a short time now. God always has His people in the right place at the right time, to fulfil His will. If we are the Lord's people, we should also be exactly where He wants us to be.

### **Simeon**

***[25] And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.***

Here, we find out five things about Simeon:

1. He was “**in Jerusalem.**” That's where the true religion was outwardly based. Of course, God is everywhere. So we're able to worship Him anywhere, wherever we are. Christ said:

John 4:23

*... true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth...*

God is not dependent upon a place to be worshipped, but He does have churches in this world, where his witness primarily is. Simeon was in the right place, the Temple, the outward, visible church of his day, despite all its shortcomings. It was being run by Pharisees, Sadducees, men full of their own importance, who hated Christ and eventually got Him killed. But despite all this, it was there that Simeon got the blessing. No matter how bad we think the church is today, we should still make sure we are:

Hebrews 10:25

*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

2. He was “**just.**” The Bible tells us:

Matthew 5:6

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

Christianity is primarily concerned with morality:

1 John 5:19

*And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*

True religion is not about having a gooey feeling in our heart whenever we think of Jesus, and that's it – otherwise carrying on our lives as before. True religion is about a complete change of heart. Being turned from darkness to light. The gospel is described as being:

Acts 26:18

*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me [Christ].*

Being finished with the wicked, vain, empty lives received by tradition from our fathers:

Romans 6:1,2,4

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?... like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

Which side are we really on? Do we love righteousness and hate wickedness? If not, we're not His. We're still in darkness and need to repent. Call upon Christ. It's not too late.

3. He was “**devout.**” True religion was not just the first priority in his life. It was his life. He saw that everything else in this world was not worth living for. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived apart from Christ, concluded:

Ecclesiastes 1:14

*I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

Living for the Lord alone is the only thing worth living for. Everything else is emptiness.

4. He was also **“waiting for the consolation of Israel.”** He was waiting. Often, we don’t think that just waiting is very useful. We would rather be busy, busy, busy, doing something all the time. We get impatient with waiting. But waiting, or patience, is a virtue. It is a fruit of the Spirit. We are called to wait, like the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 1:9,10

*For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

The Thessalonians were true believers. They had **“turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”** They were waiting for Christ’s second coming, as indeed we are. Simeon was waiting for Christ’s first coming. Waiting doesn’t mean doing nothing. We do whatever the Lord has for us to do in this world. But we also wait and long for Christ to return. Waiting develops patience. We all need to grow in the grace of patience. Without it, we so easily get annoyed at the tiniest problems that come upon us in this world.

Simeon was waiting for **“the consolation of Israel.”** For centuries, God had promised that a Messiah, a Saviour, would come to save His people from their sins. We have many references to this in the Old Testament. The coming of the Messiah was what the whole of Old Testament history was leading up to.

5. And we see that **“The Holy Ghost was upon him.”** He was a godly man. He lived close to the Lord. And he was led by the Holy Spirit in all that he did. Let’s make sure we are too, and be finished with being led by self, making our own decisions, all the time.

In all these five aspects, Simeon is indeed a wonderful example for us all to follow.

***[26] And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.***

The Holy Spirit had shown him that he wouldn’t die until he’d seen the promised Messiah for himself. He must have been an old man, otherwise this promise wouldn’t make sense. It would only make sense if his life had been prolonged beyond an average lifetime. We see that he was sensitive to the Holy Spirit, otherwise he would never have known this. We need to learn to be sensitive to what the Holy Spirit has to say to us, in the same way.

***[27] And he came by the Spirit into the Temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him after the custom of the Law,***

Moved by the Spirit on this particular day, he was told to go to the Temple. This wasn’t just a sudden thought from nowhere. A lot of people today think the Holy Spirit is leading them to do all sorts of stupid things, things that just pop into their heads at the time. No. Simeon had spent a long time of patiently waiting. During this time, he made sure he

stayed close to the Lord. This wasn't a sudden impulse to do something. But when the Holy Spirit did tell him to go to the Temple, he was ready to obey at a moment's notice.

The Lord told him to go to the Temple. At the same time, in the Lord's providence, Joseph and Mary arrived for her purification. This would've taken place forty days after the birth:

Leviticus 12:2-4

*If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled.*

And in the crowd at the Temple, in the Lord's providence, they met.

***[28] Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, [29] Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.***

Simeon took the boy in his arms and praised God. He was now ready for his death. The promise of God had been fulfilled. He'd seen the Messiah just as the Lord had promised him. And he realised that his life's work had now been completed, and was ready to die.

If we are true Christians, we all have a unique life and calling from the Lord. Our job is to fulfil everything the Lord has for us to do as individuals in this world. But we should also realise that one day our lives here will be over, and we shall go to be with Christ.

We shouldn't be living our lives here so that death overtakes us suddenly. To most people, death comes as rather a shock. They aren't ready. They would have wanted to do so much more in this world before going away to the next. But that shouldn't be the attitude of the Christian. We should be ready for our death. While we're here, we should be aware of the work that the Lord has for us to do, and be diligently doing it. But we should also be aware that God has got a day fixed for every one of us, when we will die and go into the next world. It is inevitable. Paul said:

Philippians 1:21-24

*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

Paul was ready for his death. But he also realised that at that particular time the Lord still had some work for him to do down here. Here, the Lord's promise to Simeon had come to pass. He was now ready to die. He was happy and content to die. He knew his life's work was over. Then he blessed the child.

***[30] For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, [31] which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, [32] A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.***

His own eyes had seen the salvation that the Lord had provided for His people. Centuries of prophecy had now come true. This was the highlight of his life, and he knew that it was such a privilege to be able to see the Lord's salvation for himself.

It's a wonderful privilege to be a Christian. To know Jesus Christ for ourselves. We are now the children of God. The world won't understand us. But that shouldn't bother us, knowing the tremendous privilege it is to know Christ, and that through Him we shall be eternally saved from our sins:

1 John 3:1

*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*

But Simeon also knew that this salvation was “**before the face of all people. A light to lighten the Gentiles.**” He was perfectly aware that the salvation God had provided was not just for Jews, but for Gentiles too. This was prophesied in the Scriptures:

Isaiah 49:22

*Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.*

So we see that Simeon, the man of God, was not only close to the Lord, but he knew his Bible well. The two go together.

The church leaders in Israel, on the other hand, hated the idea of their Messiah being for Gentiles. They thought that they Jews were the one true people of God, and nobody else. They thought that they could get to heaven because they were born into the right family. Many people think that. It's very sad. We shouldn't put our trust in our family or church background, or in church leaders, but put our trust in the Lord alone.

***[33] And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.***

Joseph and Mary, being godly people themselves, understood the blessing Simeon pronounced on the child, and they marvelled. They knew Simeon to be a true believer like themselves, and they joyed in the fellowship they could have with one another.

Psalms 133:1

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*

But we can only dwell in unity if we have been truly changed in our hearts.

Do we know that experience when we meet a true believer? It's a joy to our hearts. This is our new family. These are the people we should support and have our fellowship with now. These are the ones whom the Lord has changed in their hearts forever. They will now no longer be living for themselves, but for Christ.



**[34] And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother: Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against, [35] “(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.**

And then Simeon gave Mary a prophecy. Mary would have accepted it. But it wasn't happy news for her. She was told that her son would be **“set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.”** That He would be **“a sign which shall be spoken against.”** And that a sword would pierce her own soul too.

Mary would witness everything the world would do to Christ. He would be persecuted and put to death. Mary would be at the cross to see His death at first hand. She would have all these trials to go through in this world.

Not only this, but Christ would cause division in the land:

Luke 12:51

*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division:*

The world today is divided into two types of people. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are saved to eternal life, and those who aren't. True believers will be persecuted by those who do not believe. But Christ said:

John 16:33

*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

But Simeon was not the only believer who was in the Temple at that time.

## **Anna**

**[36] And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; [37] And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. [38] And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.**

Anna was also very old. She'd been married for 7 years and then her husband died and she became a widow. She was now 84 years old. Did she have children? We don't know.

How did she spend her time? She **“departed not from the temple but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.”** What a life! Complete devotion to the things of God. Do we have such complete devotion to the Lord? I don't know about you, but I feel ashamed that my devotion to the Lord is so small. Our lives should be like Anna's. After all, Christ is the only thing worth living for.

As a result of such devotion, the Lord blessed her. At the very same time as Joseph, Mary and Simeon were all together in the Temple praising God for the child, Anna also turned

up. The Lord also guided her through the Temple crowds to meet them. And she offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

And then what did she do afterwards? She “**spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.**” She told others about the Saviour. God had finally visited and redeemed His people. What a joyful message we have to tell others about. Paul said:

Romans 1:16

*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*

Despite the dire outward circumstances in the land at the time, there seems to have been plenty of other godly people in Jerusalem. Anna knew many who also “**looked for redemption in Jerusalem.**” But they weren’t the important people. They were the quiet, unknown people in the land. We don’t know who they are. But one day we’ll meet them all in glory, and be praising God with them for evermore.

So, there we have Simeon and Anna. Two old people. Of whom the world was not worthy. What an example they are to us. May God grant that we all could live our lives in patience, humility and complete devotion, just like Simeon and Anna did.

## **Luke 5:27-32. The Calling of Matthew**

*Readings:*

*Luke 19:1-10*

*Luke 15*

I want to look for a short time at a few verses in Luke chapter 5.

*Read Luke 5:27-32.*

Christ calls a man named Levi to be one of His disciples.

***[27] And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me.***

The calling of Levi to follow Christ is also described in both Matthew and Mark's gospels. In Mark's gospel he's also called Levi, but in Matthew's gospel he's called Matthew. In all three gospels it's obviously the same event, it's not a different person in Matthew's gospel. So we're talking here about the apostle Matthew. And in the gospel he wrote himself, he doesn't call himself Levi, but he prefers to call himself by a new name, Matthew. Why do you think that is?

The Bible is full of people who have their names changed by God. Abram became Abraham. Sarai became Sarah. Jacob became Israel. Simon became Peter. Saul became Paul the apostle. I suggest that this is God speaking to us throughout the Scriptures, telling us a very important principle:

John 3:3

*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

Becoming a Christian is not just choosing to follow another religion or philosophy. It's not a choice, something we decide to do (and then maybe decide not to do later). It's altogether different from that. It involves a complete, permanent change of the heart, which only God can give.

Throughout history God has been changing people. We all need to be changed by God in the heart and become completely new creatures. We all need to start our lives all over again from scratch, because we've all messed up the first time. And that's exactly what happened to Levi.

What was Levi doing when Christ came? He was "***sitting at the receipt of custom.***" In other words he was a publican, or tax collector. Publicans were hated amongst the Jews for two reasons: Firstly, they collected the taxes for the Roman occupying forces. The Jews hated that fact that their land had been taken over by the Romans, so any Jew who worked for the Romans was despised. Secondly, not only that, but most publicans collected far more tax than was due, so they could make plenty of money for themselves. So for these two reasons they were considered to be among the worst of society.

In every society, there are two types of people. There's the respectable members of that society, which is probably the majority. They fully join in with the way the society

operates. They pay their taxes and generally keep the laws. And it suits them to do so. But in every society there's also always an underclass. Those who either don't want to be a part of that respectable society, like hardened criminals, or who, maybe through no fault of their own, have dropped out of it. Drug addicts, the prostitutes, the alcoholics, the down-and-outs, and so on. People that respectable members of the society wished weren't there. Publicans were classed in this group.

I suppose you could think of them as "*corrupt government officials*." We don't tend to come across this much in our country, but there are plenty of places in the world where corruption is a normal part of life. To get anywhere in the society at all, you have to bribe officials. The Jews had to pay their taxes, and the only way to do it was through these official tax collectors, who also made sure they pocketed plenty of cash for themselves.

So Levi was a publican, the lowest of the low. Collecting taxes but also cheating the people, and making quite a bit of money for himself.

Publicans visited John the Baptist to be baptised, and he gave them a piece of advice:

Luke 3:12,13

*Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.*

That's interesting. John didn't say, "Give up your job, it's corrupt." So the job of collecting taxes isn't wrong in itself. It wasn't like, for example, working in a betting shop, or prostitution or anything like that. If we become a Christian from one of those occupations, we'd have to leave straight away. But there's nothing actually wrong with collecting taxes. On one occasions the Pharisees asked Christ:

Matthew 22:17

*Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?*

To which Christ replied:

Matthew 22:21

*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

So having a tax system in itself is a good thing. We should all pay our taxes. What John was saying to the publicans who came to him, was simply that they shouldn't collect more than they were required to.

Now, we know that Levi/Matthew must have been one of those tax collectors at John's baptism. How do we know that? When the apostles had to find a successor to replace Judas, we are told the qualifications for being an apostle:

Acts 1:21,22

*Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.*

As Matthew later became an apostle, he must have had these qualifications. So he must have been at John's baptism, as were all the other apostles. When we think of Christ

turning up at the Sea of Galilee and asking a few fishermen, “*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,*” we’ve got in our minds the idea that He’d never met them before, and they just dropped everything and left their jobs to follow a total stranger. But that’s not what happened. In John chapter 1 we see that Christ had already met at least Andrew and Peter before, at John’s baptism. And I suggest He met all those who later became apostles there too. They’d already known Christ from that time, and were all expecting one day for Him to come, tell them to finish their ordinary work and follow Him instead.

And that’s what happened with Matthew. Originally something in his heart made him want to make the journey from Galilee into the wilderness to find John the Baptist. John gave him this advice not to give up his tax-collecting job altogether, but simply to treat people fairly. After having been baptised by John, a “*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*” (Mark 1:4), he’d gone back to his tax desk in Capernaum with a renewed heart.

And that’s why in the gospel that he wrote himself, he would rather use the name Matthew, which means “*gift of God.*” He no longer wanted to be called Levi any more, because he knew that he’d really changed in his heart, and wanted to show the world that he was starting a new life.

Now he was no longer going to cheat the people, but only ask what was due from them and no more. But that meant his problems had probably only just begun. He would now be a lot cheaper to deal with than other tax-collectors, who wanted to make a fat profit on their dealings. So now, he wouldn’t only be despised by the respectable members of society, but the underclass would now despise him as well, because he wasn’t playing their game of cheating the people any more.

And when we become a Christian, Christ has told us that things will become harder for us too, because we now want to do what is right. Christ said:

John 15:18,19

*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

John 16:33

*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

When we become Christians, we may not want to go back to our old lives, our old companions, our old jobs, our old situation. All things have now become new within us. Our desire now is to do far better things, far more exciting things than just going back to our dreary old jobs again. But that’s what we’re normally called to do. Except, as I said earlier, if our old job was inherently evil, like gambling or prostitution. Normally, we’re not called to walk away from a situation the Lord has already put us in. Rather we’re called to go back there and be salt and light, be a witness to God’s grace in that situation.

Life will become more difficult. But our calling is to stay there and develop the grace of patience. When the Lord’s ready, He’ll move us on. But it’ll be in His own good timing, and not before. And that’s what happened to Matthew. One day, Christ came to Matthew’s tax-collector’s desk, and said, “**Follow me.**” With new difficulties to deal with in his ordinary job, and the desire in his heart to completely break from his old life, he left everything he knew to start a new life as a disciple of Christ.

***[28] And he left all, rose up, and followed him.***

Matthew **“left all”** to follow Christ. He’s not going to collect taxes any more, even though it was a perfectly lawful job. Once the Lord called him to leave, he obeyed. And we too should be obedient to Christ when He calls. There’s another tax collector in the Bible, who we read about earlier, called Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10). See what happened to him.

Zaccheus was a chief tax-collector, and he was very wealthy as a result. But after meeting Christ, he had a complete heart change. As a result, he gave half of his goods to the poor, and offered to give back fourfold to anyone whom he had cheated. That is the evidence of a new heart. He’d been permanently changed from the inside. His actions proved it. There are plenty of people around today who claim they’ve been “born-again” by the Spirit of God, but the evidence of a new life doesn’t really seem to be there, they’re just as worldly as they were before. Now I know we shouldn’t judge anyone, but we do have to wonder sometimes. Let’s just make sure that isn’t us. Let’s make sure that if we’ve truly been changed in our hearts by the Lord, we produce the fruit of that change in our lives.

And we also find out from Zaccheus, that nobody is too far from God that he can’t receive a new heart from Him. Even a despised tax-collector can become a true believer, a true *“son of Abraham.”*

***[29] And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.***

So Matthew holds a great feast in Christ’s honour. And the people who came to Matthew’s feast were *“publicans and sinners.”* The underclass. These were the only people Matthew had ever known in his line of business. And now he’d come to know Christ, the first thing he wanted to do was invite everybody he knew to his house to meet Christ for themselves.

When something so life-changing happens to us, we immediately have a desire to tell others about it. We want everybody to know that they too can have their sins forgiven and receive a new start in life. But criticism arose from the respectable people:

***[30] But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?***

The scribes and Pharisees get to hear about this feast. These are the respectable religious men of the day. They come to the house and ask Christ’s disciples a question. Notice they didn’t go to Christ Himself. That’s the way people in the world behave. If they want to extract information from people they don’t like, they go to who they think are the weakest first. They never go straight to the top. So we little ones at the bottom ought to always be ready:

1 Peter 3:15

*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear....*

The Pharisees asked the disciples, **“Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?”** Of course the Pharisees would never do that. They’re respectable. They’d have no time for the underclass. The underclass spoil their nice, comfortable, respectable world. So they looked down on Christ and His disciples for mixing with that sort of people. Religious leaders aren’t supposed to do that. That’s not very “religious” at all.

Jesus heard the Pharisees asking the question to His disciples. And He went straight to them and answered it Himself. He cut out all their political manoeuvring and worldly-wise ways of doing things. Christ is having none of that. He gave them an answer Himself, in the form of a parable:

***[31] And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. [32] I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.***

I want to spend the rest of the time now looking at this parable. We only go to a doctor if we feel sick. If we’re feeling well, we don’t go, because we don’t see any need of going. That’s a simple idea we can all understand. Christ then uses this simple idea as an illustration of the kind of people He’s calling: **“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”**

The righteous are compared to the healthy man who doesn’t feel his need of seeing a doctor. He can’t see his illness, his sin. He thinks he’s righteous in himself, so he doesn’t see his need of a Saviour. So he’ll never come to Christ, because he doesn’t see he has any sins to be saved from.

Sinners, on the other hand, are compared to people who know they are sick, and therefore do feel their need of seeing a doctor. Only those who see their sin can see their need of a Saviour. That’s all the parable is meant to teach.

But it is easily possible to misunderstand this parable. And that’s why we read Luke 15. Luke chapter 15 contains three parables: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the lost (or prodigal) son.

The reason we read that chapter is that all three parables were prompted by an almost identical situation to what we’ve got in Matthew’s house here.

Luke 15:1,2

*Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*

Just as in Matthew’s house, the scribes and Pharisees complain that Christ receives sinners and eats with them. And on this occasion, Christ doesn’t just give one short parable, but three longer ones.

All three parables have the same message. Something is lost, and is then found. That’s the main point of each parable. And Christ relates this to the sinner who repents.

***The lost sheep:***

Luke 15:7

*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

**The lost coin:**

Luke 15:10

*Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

**And a lost son:**

Luke 15:32

*It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

Now, that's the only point of each parable. There is no other deeper meaning. But what we tend to do with parables is over-interpret them. We start asking questions, such as, who do the "ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" actually represent? Or the nine pieces of silver that were never lost? Or the elder brother?

I heard a whole sermon once on the "elder brother." The prodigal son, who is the main point of the parable, was hardly mentioned at all.

And these "ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Who are they? Some people say that they represents all believers, all those that have been found and are now in the pen being good little sheep. I find that a bit difficult to accept because even though I have been a Christian for many years, I really can't describe myself as "needing no repentance" any more. I'm constantly still needing repentance. Other people say that these 99 represent the Pharisees who think they need no repentance, which if I have to come down on one side or other, I would probably agree with this, because the context is the Pharisees complaining about Christ mixing with sinners. Others think these are the angels who never fell who "need no repentance." I'm sorry but I don't agree with any of that really. The problem we have is that, in all these parables, it at least seem to imply that there are many righteous people around who don't need to repent. They stay in the fold. They never go astray. The elder brother, for example, never left the family home. The 99 sheep never left the fold. The nine pieces of silver were never lost.

And similarly in our passage. The parable at least seems to imply that there are plenty of righteous people around who don't need to see the doctor, the Saviour. But these parables aren't teaching that at all. The Bible is very clear:

Romans 3:10-12

*There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

Ecclesiastes 7:20

*For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*

Jeremiah 17:9



*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?*

Whenever we come across a parable, it's only trying to show one truth. We shouldn't try to read into it more than it's trying to teach. In the parable of the hundred sheep, the emphasis is the one that got lost. The 99 who didn't get lost don't actually represent anybody in reality, because every one of us is like that one lost sheep. We're rebellious by nature. Similarly, the 9 pieces of silver that never got lost, and the elder brother who never went astray don't actually represent anybody. We're all that lost coin, or prodigal son, every one of us.

Similarly here, there's nobody who's well, and doesn't need a doctor. We're all sick and desperately need one. We're all sinners and desperately need a Saviour. The only difference is that some people realise that, and others don't.

And that's what this parable is getting at. ***"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*** Many people may think they're perfectly well, but none of us are. We're all terminally ill, but we don't realise it. Most people carry on with their lives never realising they desperately need a doctor to cure them, a Saviour to save them from their sins. But we do.

If we think we're righteous, we're never going to see our need of a Saviour. But if we see our sins, we see the problem, and there is hope. We've still got to go to the doctor. But it's better to see the problem than not see the problem. At least if we see the problem, we're now within the sound of Christ's call. And that's all Christ is teaching us in this parable.

And there's another possible misunderstanding with this parable. We might come to the conclusion that Christ didn't come for respectable people at all, but only the underclass. But that's not true either. These two types of people are just a picture. The real distinction is between those who see their sins before God and those who don't. Many respectable people come to see their sins, repent and turn to Christ, and are saved from them. And many of the underclass never come to see their sins, and so never repent of them.

The apostle Paul was about the most respectable person you could ever come across. He said about himself:

Acts 26:5

*After the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.*

He was such a proud man. But after he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, his heart was changed. He had become a new creature, and his new life would now make him realise that pursuing self-righteousness the way he did – being so proud in himself – was all a complete waste of time:

Philippians 3:8

*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.*

And he came to see that far from being one of the most righteous, respectable members of society, he now saw that, actually, he was the worst of sinners:

1 Timothy 1:15

*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*

And that's what Christianity should do to us. It should break our pride. The whole point of all of these parables is to try to get us, whoever we are, respectable or underclass, to see our sinfulness before a holy God.

But then we still need to do something about it. Many people can see they're ill, but they don't want to go to a doctor. Maybe they think he'll hurt them, or get them to change their lifestyle, or send them a huge bill or something. There are lots of reasons why people, even though they know they're sick, will just not go to the doctor. But, the doctor is the only hope they've got of a cure.

Many people can see their sins, but all that does is put them within the sound of Christ's call. They still have to respond to it. They still have to go to the doctor, to call upon Christ to save them. And that will mean a change of lifestyle. We must give up our sins. That's the cost. Many people can't do that. Christ will give them the strength to do it, but people still find it too painful to think about, because they love their sins so much. But going to the Saviour is the only hope any of us have of a real cure for the problem of our sins.

John 3:36

*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.*

The call of Christ is a call **"to repentance."** That's not a very popular word nowadays. It's unheard of in most churches today. The modern gospel today is altogether different. It tells us that Christ can give you a sense of self-worth, self-esteem, self-confidence. But that's not Christianity at all, it's humanism.

I spoke at a meeting in China once, and I mentioned we're all sinners and how Christ can save us from our sins, you know, the usual gospel message. And afterwards one young woman got up and said, "We shouldn't condemn ourselves," by which I took to mean she didn't like what I said very much. But that's what's taught in the churches these days. Don't talk about sin, don't talk about repentance. Tell people to think positive thoughts about themselves. Tell them they're worth something. But the problem is that I **am** a sinner. I'm not worth anything. What has this modern gospel got to say to me? Don't be negative. Snap out of it. But whatever anyone says to me, the fact remains I'm a sinner and I'm not worth anything. What I need, and what we all need, is a Saviour to save me from my sins. To die in my place. To take the punishment that I deserve and to place it on His shoulders instead. And that's exactly what we've got in Jesus Christ. This is the gospel message. This is the only message that can effectually treat the human condition. Not just words telling us to cheer up.

I'm not quite sure what message modern churches have for anybody if repentance is missing. Yes, we need to have faith, we need to have hope, we need to have more love, love, love between us, all of those things are true. But if we don't repent of our sins, if we're not prepared to accept that we need to change from the way we are by nature, then we won't be able to produce these things of ourselves. We need the Lord to change us. We need a new heart.

Only Jesus Christ can do this, and save every one of us from our sins, but we must call upon Him in prayer. It's a question of simply asking. And He's ready to receive all who come to Him:

John 3:17

*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Jesus Christ is our only hope. We all need to forsake our sins and come to the physician of souls. And let Him cure us from the one illness that matters.

Finally, I just want to look at one more parable:

Matthew 21:28-32

*But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.*

Let's not be like the Pharisees, who saw no need of a Saviour at all. Let's at least acknowledge our sins, and our need of a Saviour. That's what these parables are trying to teach us. And then let's want to repent of our sins, be finished with being the way we are by nature. Want to change. And let's put our trust in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who came into the world for the express purpose of saving sinners. He can save us. He can give us the strength we need to break free of sin. He has said:

John 6:37

*He that comes to me I will never cast out.*

May every one of us here today come to know the true, real, and complete heart-change and new life that only Christ can give, and know the real joy of having our sins forgiven through Him.

## **Luke 7:1-10. Unworthiness**

*Read Revelation 5 and Luke 7:1-10*

I want to look at this passage in Luke 7. In Luke 6, there's what appears to be a shortened version of the Sermon on the Mount, the full version of which is in Matthew 5-7.

There's a bit of controversy about whether Luke 6 describes the same event as in Matthew, or whether it's a different occasion. Those who think it's a different occasion point out in Matthew Christ sat on a mountain, but here He is standing in a plain:

Matthew 5:1,2

*And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,*

Luke 6:17-20

*And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all. And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said....*

And we also see that the beginning of His speech is different. In Matthew there are nine beatitudes, "*Blessed are the....*" meek, poor in spirit, pure in heart etc. In Luke, there are only four, and each one has an equivalent opposite woe attached to it:

*"Blessed be ye poor.... Woe unto you that are rich"*

*"Blessed are ye that hunger now.... Woe unto you that are full"*

*"Blessed are ye that weep now.... Woe unto you that laugh now"*

*"Blessed are ye when men shall hate you.... Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you"*

But actually I don't think these are strong enough reasons to necessarily think they're two separate events. We've got four accounts of the crucifixion which differ slightly in that they emphasise different things. But that's what's to be expected from different accounts by different people. In a court of law, if all the witnesses said exactly the same thing down to the very last detail, we can't help thinking the whole trial is being fixed.

It could be that it was the healings in vv.17-19 that took place on the plain, after which Christ called his disciples up the mountain to teach. Luke doesn't mention that, but it would have occurred between vv.19-20. And He stood for the miracles but could have sat to teach. It's fairly easy to reconcile these details and conclude it was the same event.

But perhaps the best evidence in favour of both accounts being the same event, is that, in both passages, immediately after Christ finished speaking, He entered Capernaum and this healing of a Centurion's servant took place. And that's what we want to look at today.

***[1] Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.***

In Matthew's account Christ heals a leper on the way to Capernaum, but Luke omits that.

**"His sayings"** were originally aimed at the disciples – in both Matthew and Luke, that's whom it says He was speaking to. But the multitude followed, and they also heard His words, so His words were also **"in the audience of the people."** And they were attracted by what He said, because it was different, it was refreshing. In Matthew it says:

Matthew 7:28,29

*And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

It was primarily aimed at the disciples, but the multitude found it attractive. They could see, still as unbelievers, what a different, radical, refreshing lifestyle Christ was presenting. Even unbelievers can see it's beauty, but their selfish natures make it impossible for them to follow it. Before we can even begin to follow this way of life, we need a new heart within us. And that's why it's primarily for disciples. It teaches **them** how they should live. But that doesn't mean the beauty of it can't be a witness to unbelievers.

If we can see the beauty of this way of life, but we also realise we can't live up to it, that's a good thing. We need to know the Lord of heaven can give us a new heart to be able to live such a beautiful lifestyle, if only we ask Him. As Christ said in the sermon Himself:

Matthew 7:7,8

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

**[2] And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.**

Capernaum is on the north coast of the Sea of Galilee. After Christ left Nazareth, He based Himself in Capernaum. About the same time that Christ arrived there, a Roman Centurion's servant fell sick and was about to die.

The Centurion wasn't a Jew, he was a Roman soldier stationed there. And he had a servant, or slave, who was very dear to him. Do we find that strange? He actually cared about a slave's welfare. Most slaveowners wouldn't have bothered. If a slave died, it's an inconvenience, but they could just go down the market and get another one. It's no big deal when a slave dies. This Centurion had no reason to care about this man, but he did. He treated his slave as a real person. That's what we should be doing, but it's very unusual. He was concerned about the welfare of the least of those under his supervision.

**[3] And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.**

The Centurion didn't seem to realise Christ was living there, he'd just heard of His presence in the locality, so this must have been just after Christ's arrival. The Centurion

had heard about Him, and by his attitude he seemed to know who He was. And he'd heard that He'd come into the city. A perfect opportunity to help his slave.

If we only had Matthew's gospel to go on, we'd be under the impression the Centurion himself came to Jesus. But here, in Luke, he doesn't actually meet Christ at all. He sends two groups to meet Him instead. The point is, these two groups both spoke in the Centurion's name, they spoke for him. So Matthew simply states that it was the Centurion who spoke the words, but the words were actually spoken by these others whom he'd sent. This is an important detail, because it's fairly crucial to the subject we're looking at.

The first group the Centurion sent, were Jewish elders. Why did he send Jewish elders? Maybe he thought that Christ wouldn't listen to a Gentile. He was friendly with the Jews, and he had friends who were Jewish elders, so he sent them to deliver his message.

They besought Christ, and pleaded with Him to come and heal the Centurion's slave. That was the original message the Centurion told the elders to give. That's what's in Matthew. But the Jewish elders added something extra that the Centurion hadn't told them to say:

***[4] And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: [5] For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.***

The elders thought it would be useful to say something about what the Centurion had done for the Jews. This wasn't any old Centurion. Most of them wouldn't be friendly at all to the Jews, and the Jews wouldn't be friendly to the Romans, because the Romans were occupying their land. But this Centurion had been good to the Jews. He'd built them a synagogue. The elders thought it was necessary to say that. This Centurion was different. He loved the Jews over whom he ruled, and he showed that by building a synagogue.

The elders took it upon themselves to add something onto the Centurion's original message. They thought they needed to prove he was worth Christ's attention. But this addition didn't make any difference as to whether Christ would heal the servant or not. If the Centurion had found out they'd added to his message, he'd have been horrified.

If we're ever entrusted with a message from anyone else, we must make sure we just give the message. We don't add to it, nor take away from it. We're not speaking for ourselves. That's particularly important as Christians, because we've been entrusted with the gospel. And we need to make sure we pass the message on accurately without embellishment.

2 Corinthians 5:20

*Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

***[6] Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:***

So Jesus goes with them. Not far from the house, a second group then appears with another message from the Centurion. These were the Centurion's friends. The message

this time really shows the Centurion's humility. He calls Christ "**Lord.**" He tells Him not to trouble Himself by coming to his house, because he wasn't worthy of a visit from Him.

**[7] Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.**

He didn't even think himself worthy to leave his house to meet Christ. He knew Christ could heal by just saying a word from a distance, and expected Him to do that and not trouble Himself, or condescend, by going out of His way to come to the house.

So we've got this situation whereby the Jews had thought the Centurion was eminently worthy, because he'd been kind to them. But he saw himself as thoroughly unworthy.

This reminds us a bit about Christ's words at the end of Matthew 25:

Matthew 25:34-46

*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

The ones who inherit the kingdom can't for the life of them see that they've done any of the good works Christ mentioned. They just think of themselves as so unworthy of inheriting the kingdom, they don't think about anything else. They certainly don't think of how good they've been. On the other hand, those who do think they've been good, are proud of it, and deserve to inherit the kingdom, end up just as surprised when they find themselves in everlasting punishment instead.

The thought of our own unworthiness is the key to real humility. Think of the crowds pressing around Christ demanding a miracle for themselves. And then think of the woman with an issue of blood who just crept up behind Him just to touch the hem of His garment. Christ healed many people, but why should anyone presume that He would? We should never presume on Christ to do anything for us. Who are we? We can ask, but never presume. This man saw himself as utterly unworthy of receiving anything from Christ.

Do we feel ourselves totally unworthy to approach Christ? Or do we strut into church every week thinking somehow we deserve to receive a blessing? This whole episode is fundamental with regards our attitude towards spiritual things. The wonderful thing is that we can approach God. We're told we can come before Him boldly:

Hebrews 4:16

*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

But we must also come before Him in the right attitude of humility. There are probably hundreds of examples of how we should approach God in the Bible. Here's a few of them:

**Jacob:**

Genesis 32:10

*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant.*

**Job:**

Job 42:5,6

*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

**David:**

2 Samuel 7:18

*Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?*

**Isaiah:**

Isaiah 6:5

*Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*

**John the Baptist:**

Matthew 3:11

*He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear.*

**The prodigal son:**

Luke 15:19

*And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.*

If we're following the Lord, we really need to learn from examples like this from Scripture.

***[8] For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it .***

The Centurion is a man under authority to his superiors in Rome, and at the same time he has people under him whom he has authority over. In other words, he's a middle-manager. And to some degree we're all middle-managers. We all have, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, superiors and inferiors. God has put every one of us in whatever position we have in life. And it's our job to know our place. To recognise



our place and to be content with it. We've all got people over us, whether it's the government, our employer, or the head of our family. And most of us have others whom we're responsible for. The fifth commandment says:

Exodus 20:12

*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*

This isn't only about families, it's about every relationship we've got with those above us. We're to honour our superiors, whoever they are.

To know whom we should honour, and whom we have responsibility for, is very important. This Centurion knew just that. So many people think of themselves as king of their own universe, not responsible to anybody over them, nor responsible for anyone under them. But nobody is. We've all got responsibilities. We're all middle-managers like this Centurion, and we need to be aware of our responsibilities to others above or beneath us.

This is all very well with regards our relation with our fellow men. But what about our relationship with God? How much more should we understand what our attitude should be towards Him. Look at this Centurion's attitude towards Christ. Did he strut into His company demanding a miracle? Did he think himself as being worthy of having his servant healed? No. All of us before Christ are not worthy of the least of His mercies.

***[9] When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.***

Christ "***marvelled at him***" for what he'd said. And He never even met him. He turned to the two groups of people and said, "***I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.***" Very few people in the Bible are said to have "***great faith.***" The only ones I can find are:

Christ said to ***the Syrophenician woman*** (Matthew 15:28) "***O woman, great is thy faith.***"

***Stephen*** was said to be (Acts 6:8) "***full of faith and power.***"

***Barnabas*** was said to be (Acts 11:24) "***full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.***"

***Abraham*** was said to be (Romans 4:20) "***strong in faith.***"

Why was the Centurion's faith great? Because of his whole attitude, particularly his humility. He had a very responsible position in society, but he didn't think of himself as anything special. He obeyed his superiors in Rome, and looked after even the least of his inferiors, his slaves. At the same time he was never ever proud about the position he had. So many people are full of themselves and their status in the world, but they're nothing:

Galatians 6:3

*For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*

And if we want to have great faith, we need to accept that everything we have is not our own achievement, but has been given to us by God. We need to realise we don't have anything to boast about in this world. And we need to trust in God for everything.

Christ said He had not found so great faith, "**no, not in Israel.**" Matthew adds a bit here:

Matthew 8:11,12

*And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The problem with the Jews was, they thought their pedigree would get them to heaven.

John 8:39

*They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.*

They thought because they were born a Jew, they were children of the kingdom, but Christ told them that's not necessarily true. The Jews had many privileges. They had the Scriptures. They had the prophets. They had the Messiah Himself born one of them. But that counts for absolutely nothing if they never lived the way their Scriptures told them to.

And it's so sad that so many people have effectively the same attitude, whoever they are, not just Jews. Millions blindly follow the religion of their family, the religion they were born into. Assuming their family was right all along. Maybe they were right. But they just assume that, and never think for themselves. They certainly never cry to God asking Him to show them the truth. We're told anyone who seeks after God genuinely, will be heard.

Jeremiah 29:13

*And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

John 8:31,32

*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

We must stop trusting in our background, our family religion, or anything else we think we have, and rather seek the Lord with all our heart. Only then will we truly find Him.

**[10] And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.**

The two groups of people who were sent by the Centurion, returned to the house and found the servant healed.

What can we learn from this Centurion, whom Christ never met because he was so humble that he wouldn't even presume to meet Him? Our utter unworthiness, and Christ's absolute worthiness. This man had "**great faith.**" So he's an example to us. And we really need to have his attitude. To see our utter unworthiness before God. Do we see that? I think we fancy ourselves too much. The world out there tells us to be somebody, to be

confident about ourselves, to impress people with what we have. And they'll even misquote Scripture to us. They'll say, "Don't hide your light under a bushel."

But, let's be honest. What have we got to impress people with? Nothing. And what little we might have has been given to us by the Lord anyway. The fact is, we are utterly unworthy. We're not worthy of the least of God's mercies. Yet He showers them on us.

Who is the only one in the whole universe that is worthy? If we don't know, we'll be miserable in heaven, because we'll all be crying it out to all eternity:

Revelation 4:11

*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

Revelation 5:12

*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*

Let's make sure we abase self to the dust, and exalt Him, who alone is worthy.

## **Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21. The Transfiguration of Christ**

Every day, we're surrounded by people who live with no regard for God whatsoever. And because we have to live with them and work with them, it's so easy for us to get caught up into their way of thinking ourselves. Before we know it, we've just spent another whole day without once thinking of the Lord. When we ought to be pleasing Him and doing His will, we find ourselves ending up talking nonsense just like everybody else. As Paul said:

Romans 7:24

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

But despite all that, if we're Christians, we know the Lord is there. He's revealed Himself to us. He's changed our hearts. His Holy Spirit has come to dwell within us. We know all His promises are true. We know He loves us and cares about us. But many times, to build up our faith, we'd just like to have a bit more proof of His presence. "If only I could see God. If only He'd reveal Himself to me. Then I'd have great faith. Then I'd be able to stay closer to the Lord." Job had that problem. He'd lost everything, apart from a grumpy wife:

Job 23:3

*Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!*

Then we read this passage in Luke 9, and we wish we could have the same experience of God that Peter, James and John had. Shortly before His death, Christ gave them a glimpse of His glory, in what is colloquially known as His transfiguration.

### **Luke 9:28-36**

***[28] And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.***

Christ took Peter, James and John aside to pray. That's a good start. We should be a praying people. But we invariably find ourselves too busy. We should never be too busy to pray. To communicate with the Lord. Prayer is so important for our spiritual well-being.

***[29] And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering.***

While He was praying, Christ gave these three disciples a view of Himself that no-one else would ever see, not even the rest of the disciples. His appearance was completely changed and His clothing became white and glistering:

Mark 9:3

*And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.*

This intensely bright light is a feature of God's presence. Paul saw it:

Acts 22:6,9

*And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.... And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid*

It was noon, yet an even greater light than the noonday sun shone from heaven. It was so bright, it made everybody in Paul's company afraid.

1 John 1:5

*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*

Revelation 21:23

*And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*

While we're in this world, I don't think we really know what light is. We're really just groping around, looking through a glass darkly.

***[30] And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: [31] Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.***

Moses and Elijah appeared in their glorified bodies, and started talking with Christ. And they were speaking about the most wonderful thing possible – the death that Christ was just about to accomplish at Jerusalem. That's the most important subject in the world. His death on the cross, whereby He'd pay the price for the sins of all those who would come to Him, so that they wouldn't have to pay for their own sins themselves. Is the death of Christ central to our lives? How often do we speak of it with each other? I feel ashamed.

***[32] But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.***

Christ was standing there in His glory, talking with Moses and Elijah in their resurrection bodies, about the most glorious event this world will ever know. And Peter, James and John were asleep! And there's one other occasion when Christ took these three apart. In Gethsemane. And they were asleep there too!

Matthew 26:41

*....the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

When they finally woke up, Moses and Elijah were just leaving:

***[33] And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.***

Peter hastily asked them all to stay, so they could build three tabernacles for them. And it says here, "**not knowing what he said.**" Peter was the sort of person who, when anything unusual happened, he's got to get in there and say something, even if it's

something stupid. He's got to be involved. Let's learn from this. If we don't know what to say, shut up. Stop trying to think we're so important that we have to say or do something.

Peter recognised that this was a special experience, so he wanted to build a memorial to it. But he'd missed the most important point of the whole experience – the conversation between Christ, Moses and Elijah. He knew just enough to realise they were speaking about Christ's death, otherwise we wouldn't know about it here, but he hadn't taken in anything more than that. He didn't understand why Christ had to die. In fact later on, Peter even cut off somebody's ear to try to stop Him going to the cross.

And we're like that. We're very good at having our memorials, our church traditions and we busy ourselves about church activities, but we're not so good at just sitting down and listening to what Christ actually taught.

Many churches in this country are hundreds of years old. Great. Let's celebrate that. That's good. Let's celebrate God's goodness in giving us a witness to His truth for such a long time. But if all it is to us is a memorial, a social occasion, a milestone in the church's history, then we've lost the point. We must always keep in mind why this chapel is here. It's a witness to Jesus Christ. And we should be asking ourselves such questions as: What did Jesus Christ actually teach? Why did He have to die? How can we apply this to our lives? He's the one we should be following, and His is the teaching that we should be propagating from here. That's the most important thing about this chapel – about any chapel. Otherwise we may as well not be here at all.

***[34] While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.***

And then a cloud came over, and they feared. In the Bible, we find that whenever anybody gets so close to the living God, a spirit of fear comes upon them. In fact, it's the unbelievers of whom it's said:

Romans 3:18

*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

Isaiah encourages us to:

Isaiah 8:13

*Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.*

And then, if the cloud wasn't fearful enough, God actually spoke to them:

***[35] And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.***

When God was about to give the people of Israel the Ten Commandments, they were so fearful, especially of the Lord's voice:

Exodus 20:18,19

*And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*

***[36] And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.***

Peter, James and John saw Christ in His glory. They heard Him speak of His death that was soon to take place. They'd seen Moses and Elijah in their glorified bodies. They'd heard the words of God the Father Himself. And they'd experienced the fear of God as they approached so close to Him. Yet, at the time, it didn't actually change them at all. They still didn't understand that Christ had to die, and that He would rise from the dead. And Peter was still to deny Him three times. This weakness and ignorance was probably the reason why Christ told them not to tell anybody until after His resurrection.

After the resurrection, everything changed. Christ had made His atoning sacrifice on the cross. The apostles had seen and talked with Him in His resurrection body. Now they understood all about why Christ came to die. He came to save His people from their sins. The disciples had now become altogether different people. And here in Peter's second letter, he writes about the importance of what he saw that day when he was half-asleep:

## ***2 Peter 1:16-21***

***[16] For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.***

Peter was an actual eyewitness of Christ's majesty. He now knew for sure that Jesus Christ has all power, and that He's coming again, next time in glory.

And Peter feels the needs to tell his readers that he's not just making all this up. Why? He's now absolutely sure in his own mind about his experience of the glorified Christ on that day. But how could he convince others of it? Why should others believe him? It was only a personal experience. Many people today say, "God told me to do this, God told me to do that." Well, let's suppose He did. The problem is, how can you convince me that God has spoken to you? And how can I convince you that God has spoken to me? We love hearing testimonies. Every believer's got a testimony of God's dealings with them. And hearing testimonies is a very encouraging thing. But we must also acknowledge that a person's experience of God is a very difficult thing to actually prove to anybody else.

So, when we're giving our testimony to unbelievers, we should give it by all means, but be aware that they're probably going to want to see proof of something, otherwise they might be thinking it's just a "cunningly devised fable." Now, if our life has completely changed, and they've seen a huge difference, that's going to be by far the best witness we could possibly be to them.

***[17] For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. [18] And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.***

Peter testified that he heard the voice of God Himself, when he was on the mountain. He was actually half-asleep, and missed most of what happened, but now he realises how important and “holy” that mountain really was.

Maybe we’ve had some tremendous experiences of God in the past. And that’s great. Let’s recall them, like Peter is doing here. When we look back, we can see where the Lord has led us, and that will help to strengthen our faith.

But, in difficult times, we can begin to doubt even these real experiences of God that we were once so sure of in the past. “Was that really God leading me to do that?” “Did God really work then, or was it my imagination?”

In the Lord’s goodness, He’s given us something far better and far more reliable than our own experiences of Him to strengthen our faith. And He’s given us something far better than our own unprovable experiences to convince others of the truth.

At the end of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, Christ said:

Luke 16:31

*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

The heart of the natural man is so dark, we are told here that even if he saw for himself someone rising from the dead, it wouldn’t necessarily convince him of anything. Even if he receives all the physical proof he was demanding, it still may not be enough to convince an unbeliever. Something far more is needed. And here we’ve got the answer. The Lord has given us today a far greater witness in this world, even than any experience of God’s power, great though that might have been. He’s given us “*Moses and the prophets,*” the Bible. If we don’t hear what they have to say, we won’t be convinced by lesser proofs of God, like someone rising from the dead.

***[19] We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:***

The only way we can come to know God for ourselves is if He chooses to reveal Himself to us. There are three ways God has revealed Himself to us:

God has revealed Himself to all men in creation:

Romans 1:20

*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse*



But Creation only reveals that an all-powerful creator God exists, i.e. His “*eternal power and godhead.*” That’s enough to render all men without excuse for their sin, because they know they’re responsible to this God.

For us to know anything else about God, His attributes, His love, His kindness, His justice, His mercy, His plan of salvation, we need Him to reveal more of Himself to us. The second way He has revealed Himself is in Jesus Christ. God became a man. Jesus Christ is called the Word of God:

John 1:14

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

And Christ is called the Light of the World:

John 8:12

*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

But Christ only came into the world for a short time, in one particular place. Most of us will never actually physically see Him. So the Lord has revealed Himself in a third way, by provided a completely reliable witness to Him accessible to everybody in every age.

And that’s what we’ve got in the Scriptures. “*Moses and the prophets.*” This is what we need. We do well to take heed to this book. It is like a light that shines in a dark place. It’s all we’ve got. All other writings in the world are purely the ideas of men. But this is altogether different. It’s the Word of God Himself.

Christ is central throughout this book. It’s a reliable history book. It’s an accurate record of what we need to know about the life and death and resurrection of Christ. It’s a reliable guide as to what God requires of us. It’s a reliable manual of Christian living. In fact, it’s everything we need:

2 Timothy 3:16,17

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

The Scriptures weren’t written by a single man. That’s important, because if that was the case, it would just be somebody’s opinion. Mohammed wrote the whole of the Koran. Joseph Smith wrote the whole of the Book of Mormon. The words of one man can’t be a witness to anybody. The Bible says:

2 Corinthians 13:1

*In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.*

The Bible is a collection of 66 books, written over about 1600 years, by many different authors, who all bear testimony to the same one true living God.

But, you may say, aren’t there contradictions in the Bible? There are several accounts of the same event, with seemingly different information.

I don't recommend reading novels or watching films particularly, Fiction is a complete waste of time if you ask me, but lets suppose we read a novel. It's fine first time around, we don't have a problem with the text. But read it a second time through, and a third time, and we'll soon discover mistakes in it. "That can't be true, because this happens later on." Or try watching a film. We can watch it once and it's fine, but watch it a few times, and we soon begin to see the continuity errors in it. And that's what it's like with every work of man. They all contain mistakes. But with the Bible, the opposite is the case. When we first read it, we might think there are lots of contradictions in it, but the more we read it, the more these apparent contradictions are resolved.

The Bible is different from every work of man. The more we read it, the fewer apparent contradictions we find, and the more it becomes one unified whole. And that's because, although many human authors wrote the Scriptures down, they're not the words of men:

***[20] Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. [21] For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.***

The Holy Spirit moved the writers to write the words God wanted them to write. And it's the Holy Spirit we need, to understand the words properly too. There are many people who know the Bible well, but they're completely wrong because they don't have the Holy Spirit. And there are a lot of people who say they've got the Holy Spirit, but ignore the Bible altogether. We need both.

Remember, this isn't an ordinary piece of literature. The Holy Spirit inspired the words. Christians know that already. They know there's something different about this book. It moves us whenever we read it:

Luke 24:32

*And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*

Jeremiah 20:9

*Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*

The Word of God is alive. It is living and powerful:

Hebrews 4:12,13

*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

The Bible is living and powerful. It's got power to convert the soul, to change people's hearts, to convince them of truth. And it has power to help the believer grow in the faith:

Psalm 19:7,8

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.*

The Bible is living and powerful. It's exciting to the believer. It burns within his bones. But there are many others who are totally unmoved by it.

Terry Waite was the Archbishop of Canterbury's special envoy during the war in Lebanon in the 1970s. He was captured by Muslims and imprisoned in a cellar for five years on his own. The war eventually ended and he was successfully released. Years later he spoke at a Christian convention. He said that after four years of imprisonment, his captors gave him a Bible. What a wonderful provision from God! But he said "I read through it several times (he had nothing else to do of course), and I found no comfort in it whatsoever." I know we're not supposed to judge people, but I can honestly say that, at that time, He can't possibly have known the Lord – because the Bible meant nothing to him. Maybe he's become a Christian since, I don't know.

Contrast that with a man I met once. When he was young, he was walking with some friends, and they came across an empty church. The door was open and there was nobody around, so they went inside. And, just fooling around, they pretended to play church. His mates all sat in the pews, and he got into the pulpit and pretended to be the preacher. He opened the Bible randomly, and started reading from it, and as he was reading the words, suddenly in his heart he realised that it was all true. None of his other friends showed any reaction at all to the words that were read, but his heart had been changed forever.

Suddenly, what we've always thought was just a boring stuffy book, comes alive. We realise that it's all true. Then it becomes so precious to us. Because it's living and powerful. It's got a life of its own. It's God's Word, not man's.

Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and others want the church to be a higher authority than the Scriptures, so they would tell us that the Bible is a product of the church – the church decided in about the fourth century which books would go in the Bible – but that's not true. This verse tells us that. ***"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*** Scripture became Scripture as soon as it came off the pen of the writer, whether church councils recognised it as Scripture or not. The fact that it took nearly 400 years for a church council to decide what Scripture was, just proves how long it takes church councils to agree on anything.

In any case, they got it wrong. They got the 27 books of the New Testament right, but they got the Old Testament wrong. They decided that a Greek translation known as the Septuagint was the inspired Word of God. Not only was that a translation from the original Hebrew, but it contained 14 extra books, which we know today as the Apocrypha. And that's why Roman Catholic Bibles contain these extra books.

It's the original Hebrew Old Testament that's the inspired Word of God:

Romans 3:1,2

*What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*

How do I know that the Apocrypha is not the Word of God?

- It's got mistakes in it,
- The oracles of God were committed to the Jews not Greeks, and
- It doesn't burn in my bones when I read it.

Let's go back to verse 19:

***....ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts***

We should take heed to this book. It's far more sure than even our own experience. It's a light that shines in a dark place. It's the only light we've got. But we've only got it for a short time. ***"until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."***

One day, we'll get to glory, and we'll no longer need the Bible any more:

1 Corinthians 13:12

*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

While we're here in this world, we need direction. We need guidance. We need the Lord to show us the way. Here, we still only see the things of God through a glass darkly. Many people disagree on many different Scriptures and their interpretation. And that's always going to be the case. But that doesn't stop the Scriptures being a light shining in a dark place. It's all we've got to go on. But the Lord will make sure that we've got enough light to see our way through this world, and bring us safely to our home in the next world.

Do we want to know what heaven is like? There are glimpses of it in this book. Do we want to know what Christ was like? Do we want to know why He came into the world? He came into the world to save sinners. That's us. If we put our trust completely in Him and His saving work on the cross, He can take us out of this miserable old life of ours, into to a new life, an eternal life with Christ ruling in our hearts. Why would anyone not want that? Let's read this book and find out all we can about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He can change our lives forever through this book. And this book can also give us everything we need to know for life and godliness. It keeps us from sin:

Psalm 119:11

*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

Psalm 119:105

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

Let's love this book. Let's take heed to it. Let's be converted by it. Let's live by it. Let's make it our most precious possession. And let us allow it to change us day by day, so that we can become ever more like Christ, who said:

John 17:17

*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*

This book is a far more sure word of prophecy than any experience we can ever have. And it's a far better witness to unbelievers than we can ever be ourselves. The best thing we can do is point people to this book. To the extent that the truth from this book is preached, propagated and lived out in our lives, that's the extent to which the Lord can use us to bring people to Himself.

## **Luke 14:25-35. Counting the Cost**

*Read Luke 14*

We read the whole chapter, but I just want to concentrate on the last eleven verses:

***[25] And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,***

Wherever Christ travelled, He had a problem with multitudes. You might say, why is that a problem? Wouldn't it be good if our church was packed every week. Well, it depends why they're here. If they're here to worship God, or for Bible teaching, or genuinely to find out more about the Christian faith, then, yes, they're very welcome. But, if they're here for other reasons: maybe it's the trendy thing to do, or they're just here for the free food, and they're not at all interested in the worship or teaching, and if by being here they prevent others who want to come for more genuine reasons, getting in, that becomes a problem.

That's the problem Christ had. Sadly, there were so many people following Him who were only there for what they could get for themselves – miracles, free food and so on. They might have called themselves His followers, or disciples, but only a few really were.

Mark 3:20

*And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.*

Christ needed to make a distinction between those who followed Him for wrong reasons, and those who truly were His disciples. And He used various techniques to do that.

Firstly, He only spoke to the multitudes in parables. Not to help them understand, but:

Mark 4:12

*That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.*

Why'd He want to do that? The parables were teasers. Those who wanted to know more, could ask Him, and He'd willingly explain everything:

Mark 4:34

*But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.*

Jesus is approachable. And we need to know that too. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." But those who weren't really interested wouldn't bother.

Another technique He used was hard sayings. After the feeding of the five thousand, the crowds wanted to make Him king. He never came to be an earthly king, so He quickly got away from them. When they found Him again, He began to teach using hard sayings:

John 6:53

*Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*

This technique seemed to work very well, because we're told:

John 6:60,66

*Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?.... From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

And here in this passage is another technique to try to thin the crowds. Here He gives three "**Ye cannot be my disciple**" statements. And here they are:

***[26] If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.***

***[27] And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.***

And down in v.33:

***[33] So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.***

Christ wanted to get across that not everybody who calls themselves a disciple of Christ, necessarily is one. That's such an important principle to understand.

There are 2.4 billion people in the world who identify themselves as Christian. That makes it the largest religion in the world. But that's not what Christ said:

Matthew 7:14

*Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

So, it must be the case that, within the total number of all who say they're a Christian, the number of true disciples is a lot less. A true disciple of Jesus Christ is one who's been changed on the inside. He came into the world to change hearts and to give eternal life:

John 12:46

*I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.*

John 17:3

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

I have to say straight away, how dare we judge anybody. We can't see anybody's heart except our own. As long as someone gives a credible profession of faith in Christ with their mouth, we must accept it, whether they really do have true faith inside them or not. So we should never judge anybody. But, the fact remains, although we can't see who are Christ's true disciples, they're a lot less than the total number who profess to be.

By giving the multitudes these “**cannot be my disciple**” statements, He’s asking them to examine themselves – not others – to see if they’re true disciples in their hearts. That’s a useful exercise for us too. So, let’s look at these statements in turn, and here’s the first:

**[26] If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.**

Is Christ really teaching here that we should hate our own families? Surely, God is love, and we’re not to hate anybody. And that’s true. It depends what you mean by “hate.” If you mean being nasty or vindictive to anyone, of course that’s wrong. Christ said:

Matthew 5:44,45

*But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.*

Romans 12:19-21

*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

That’s the Christian way. But what’s this about hating family members?

– Firstly, Christ put it differently on another occasion:

Matthew 10:37

*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

There, Christ tells us that if we love our families more than Him, we’re not worthy of Him – we cannot be His disciple. Here, He tells us unless we hate our families, we cannot be His disciple. Hate, here, is the same as loving less. There’s an example of this with Jacob:

Genesis 29:30,31

*And he went in also unto Rachel, and **he loved also Rachel more than Leah**, and served with him yet seven other years. And when the Lord saw that **Leah was hated**, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.*

To love someone less than another means that, if you had to choose, one must be rejected. That’s what Christ meant here by the word “hate.” He’s not saying be nasty to them, or treat them badly. But one day we might have to choose Him above our families.

– Secondly, Christians think differently from unbelievers. We used to be like them, living for self, pleasing ourselves, no interest in pleasing the Lord. But we’ve been changed on the inside. We now want to honour God and follow Him, more than anything else.



Consequently we now hate, or at least disapprove of, the unbeliever's lifestyle. So, if half our family are unbelievers, we must hate their lifestyle, because it's wickedness.

– Thirdly, not only should we hate the lifestyle of unbelieving family members, but **“yea, and his own life also.”** We should hate ourselves too. We should be so glad we've been saved from our old life. And we should want our unbelieving family members to be saved from their way of life too. And we should also keep on hating ourselves for continuing to fall into sin, even now when we should know better. Sin still clings to the best of believers.

That's what Christ is getting at. If we don't hate the lifestyle of the unbelievers in our families, including the unbelief still lurking within ourselves, we cannot be His disciple:

1 John 2:15,16

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

And then there's the second **“cannot be my disciple”** statement:

**[27] And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.**

We're called to bear a cross. Christ had a real physical cross to bear. His sufferings were unique. His whole life was one of suffering for righteousness sake, and He ended up dying on a cross. On that cross, He willingly took on Himself the sins of all His people, so they wouldn't have to take the punishment themselves. Today we can be freed from the guilt of all our sins by trusting in Him and what He did on that cross for us. We can't enter into His sufferings, and we don't have to. He did it all. How thankful we should be.

But, the Christian life is not a bed of roses. We still have our own daily burdens to deal with. God has placed all of us in unique situations. And life is burdensome:

John 16:33

*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Maybe we've got an elderly relative to look after, or a wayward alcoholic son, or a debilitating illness. Everybody's got their own unique “crosses” to bear, and that's what we're called to do – bear them, and as Luke says elsewhere, **“take up your cross *daily*.”**

We might think our problems are overwhelming, and if we try to do everything ourselves, it will be. But as Christians, we've got the living God within us to help us. We don't have a dead religion like Buddhism, Islam or Roman Catholicism, where what they call “prayer” is just reciting words. We pray to a living God, who hears and answers all our prayers. He's always there when things are otherwise impossible:

Matthew 19:26

*With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*

Some people think being a Christian means we have no more problems. Jesus came to take them all away. Don't think about sin any more. Just think positive thoughts about yourself. That's not Christianity, or reality. Difficulties don't go away once we become a Christian. In fact, they get worse. We'll always have some sort of cross to bear. But if we walk closely with Christ, our crosses become bearable. The apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh. He asked three times for the Lord to remove it, but He didn't. Instead He said:

2 Corinthians 12:9

*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*

And then there's the third "**cannot be my disciple**" statement:

**[33] So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.**

We're called here to forsake all we have. A rich, young ruler once came up to Christ:

Matthew 19:21,22

*Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*

Christ specifically told this rich man to give all his possessions away. Is that what's meant here by "*forsake all that we have*"? Maybe, but not necessarily. This rich, young ruler had a particular weakness – stuff. He loved it too much. So that's what had to be dealt with.

We're told he "*went away sorrowful,*" and we don't hear anything more about him. Many think he never came to Christ at all, but I don't think so. If he really had chosen his possessions above Christ, he would have just walked off, or maybe become angry. The fact he was sorrowful, means that what Christ said had touched him. It bothered him. And if what Christ says bothers us, there's hope. Because it means we're taking Him seriously.

We're told "**whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath.**" In other words, ask ourselves, which do we love more? Our stuff, or Christ? After we become a Christian, a lot of what we've already got, we're not going to need any more. It fed our old lifestyle, so it's no longer required. So we can happily get rid of it. Everything else we're simply called to hand over to God's use. Whether it's plenty or little. Our property is not our own any more. We've now become merely the Lord's stewards of it. And we're told to give it away to anybody that asks:

Matthew 5:38-42

*Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

But doesn't that mean we'll just be a doormat? There are plenty of people out there who know jolly well this teaching of Jesus Christ, and when they find out we're a Christian,

they'll take advantage of us. They'll ask us for things knowing we've got to give it to them. We ought to give to anybody in genuine need, but also realise how sly people can be:

Matthew 10:16

*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

We've just got to trust in the Lord that all our stuff won't disappear. It's His stuff anyway. But the point is, all our stuff, we should be willing to forsake, rather than clinging on to it.

There are the three "**cannot be my disciple**" statements. If our families mean more to us than Christ, if we're not prepared to bear a cross and if we can't forsake all our stuff, guess what, we cannot be His disciple. Now, in the middle of this there are two parables:

***[28] For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? [29] Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, [30] Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.***

***[31] Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? [32] Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassador, and desireth conditions of peace.***

The first parable is about a man who wants to build a tower, so he starts to build, but halfway through realises he hasn't got enough cash to finish, because he didn't work out the cost at the start. As a result, he's mocked, everybody laughs at him. So the parable seems to teach that before we decide to become a Christian, we must count the cost.

But what is the cost of becoming a Christian? Christ has just told us. We may lose our families, we lose control of our stuff, and we have to bear a cross. Who in their right mind would ever choose that? If becoming a Christian was simply about making a decision, then if we knew the real cost beforehand, nobody would ever choose to come to Christ.

I can see two types of people here:

Some don't count the cost. They think they can start to live the Christian life in their own strength, without realising they can't. What happens? They get mocked, laughed at. If we try to live the Christian life with our own effort, it looks stupid, and it's a terrible witness.

There are others who do count the cost, and they realise they couldn't possibly live up to that standard. But that puts them off Christianity altogether, and sadly, they walk away.

In the second parable, a king wants to go to war, but he realises that he only has 10,000 men compared to his enemy who's got 20,000. So, instead of going to war, he quickly sends an ambassador to the other king and seeks conditions of peace. He's a bit more sensible. He counts the cost of going to war first, realises he's going to lose, so quickly seeks for peace instead. And that's us. We ought to count the cost of becoming a Christian first. Then realise we can't do it, but rather than walking away, we quickly send

an ambassador to God, to desire conditions of peace. In other words, pray to Him, tell Him we can't do it, and cry to Him for mercy. All we can ever say to God is:

Luke 18:13

*God be merciful to me a sinner.*

If we genuinely mean what we say, then God will come to us, and change us on the inside, permanently, for ever. He will make us an altogether new creature, with a new heart that now has got the ability to live the Christian life, which we didn't have before.

If we really lived the Christian life from a Christian heart, nobody would laugh at us. They'd see we're genuine, we've got integrity. That's the witness. Genuine Christianity from a genuine heart, not trying to be a Christian from a heart that's never been changed.

Then at the end we've got two verses which don't seem to make much sense, or at least don't seem to be connected to what's just been said:

***[34] Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?  
[35] It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.***

There's a similar verse about salt in Matthew's gospel, and it's connected to light:

Matthew 5:13,14

*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

True Christians, who've been changed from the inside by God, are spoken of as being salt and light in the world. But is there a difference between the two? First of all we're light:

Philippians 2:15

*That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;*

We're told to behave as children of light, producing the fruit of the spirit:

Ephesians 5:8-10

*For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.*

I suggest that the light is the spiritual light we receive from God when He changes us. We become new creatures in Christ, and we change permanently. The light can never go out:

Matthew 5:14

*A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

We can never lose our salvation. Not one of God's people will be lost:

John 10:28

*And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

But we can stop being fruitful. We can hide our light under a bushel. The light's still there, shining, but nobody can see it any more. When the light is hidden, nobody can tell we're a Christian any more. We behave just like everybody else. That's where the metaphor of salt comes in. Our saltiness has been lost, our witness to the world is lost. We lose our savour.

I'm sure we've all backslidden at some stage in our Christian lives. We know the light's still there in our hearts, but it's hidden, the saltiness has gone. And in that state I can guarantee that person is miserable. The difference between a backslidden Christian, and someone who walks away from a profession of Christianity but never was a true believer, is that going back into the world would never bother the latter. But a true Christian will never be happy until he comes back to the Lord. In a backslidden state, we cease to be fruitful, our witness for Christ disappears, and we're miserable. And look what happens:

***“It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out.”***

We become useless, not even fit for the dunghill. It's possible to be a fruitless Christian:

2 Peter 1:5-8

*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith [notice faith is already there] virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Notice **“men cast it out.”** God hasn't cast them out, the light's still there in the heart, they're still one of the Lord's people, but the witness before men has gone.

A backslider is very similar to the person who tries to be a Christian in his own strength. A backslider is a true believer trying to be an unbeliever. As opposed to an unbeliever trying to be a believer. Either way, the world laughs. The witness is not there. A Christian trying to be like the world and an unbeliever trying to be a Christian looks so stupid. It's embarrassing. Nobody is going to take our faith seriously if we find ourselves like that.

That's the text. But there's one question we might still have in our minds. If living the Christian life is impossible to do ourselves, and we can't live it without the Lord changing us, why do people bother becoming Christians at all? What's the point? Why don't we all just give it all up and go down the beach instead? A few Scriptures might help with this:

Ecclesiastes 1:14

*I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived (apart from Christ), said that. If all we see are the things **“under the sun,”** everything in this world is pointless. Nothing in this world

satisfies. Many people today suffer from depression. I just want to tell you, you're right. And it gets worse:

1 John 5:19

*The whole world lieth in wickedness.*

Look at how much evil there is in the world, not just on the news, but in our town, maybe even in our home. Why is the world like this? It's not God's fault. When He created the world, "*He saw that it was good.*" So where does evil come from?

Mark 7:21-23

*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.*

The problem is in us, our own hearts. I can't solve the problems in Syria or Yemen or Ukraine or anywhere else. But I'm not responsible for them. I'm not even responsible for what my neighbour does. I'm only responsible for all the wickedness that comes out of my own heart.

Nobody makes a decision to live the Christian life, because they fancy living some alternative lifestyle. Although we do it willingly, the Christian life is not an option, one of many to choose from. We **must** become a Christian. We **must** be born again. We **must** be changed. The consequence of not become a Christian, is that we'll be justly judged by a righteous God for everything we're responsible for – what comes out of here, the heart. And nobody will be able to stand. If we're drowning, and somebody throws us a lifebelt, it's not a lifestyle choice whether we grab hold of it or not. We've got to, or we drown.

After Christ had tested the people with hard sayings, and most of them stopped following Him, Simon Peter, despite all his faults, stayed, and actually gave the correct response:

John 6:67,68

*Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

There's nowhere else to go. There's no other way to be saved from the judgment to come, but by Jesus Christ, "*the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.*" May we all call on Him in repentance and faith, so that we too can not only be changed for ever, but realise it's a delightful life serving Him. We're free from the guilt of all this sin.

Psalm 32:1,2

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*

## **Luke 16:19-31. The Rich Man and Lazarus**

This is a parable. A story to teach us something. And it's about a rich man and a beggar.

***[19] There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:***

First of all, we're introduced to a rich man, and we're told he "***was clothed in purple and fine linen,***" which indicates he was a well-respected member of society. And he "***fared sumptuously every day.***" He had all he could ever want, all the time. And I can't help thinking that applies to all of us here. Compared to most of the world, we're so well-off.

But this parable isn't simply about a rich man and a poor man. If all we see in this parable is that it's better to be poor than rich, we've got it wrong. That's not what it's teaching. It's about attitude of heart. It's possible to be rich, and, unlike this man, kind and generous to others. And it's just as possible to be poor, and just as selfish towards others as this rich man. However, most of the time, rich people tend to be content with their riches and don't bother too much about others less well off than themselves. This rich man was like that. And he had a problem every day that he kept well outside of his gated compound.

***[20] And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,***

Some people think this isn't a parable but a real event, because if it is a parable, it would be the only one in which somebody is named, Lazarus. This isn't the same Lazarus who was raised from the dead in John 11. But I don't think his being named means necessarily that it's not a parable. I think he's named to show us that beggars full of sores are still real people. I think it's significant the well-respected rich man isn't named.

Anyway, whether this is a parable or not, the point is, Christ told this story to teach us something. And we need to understand what it teaches.

Lazarus was laid at the rich man's gate. He supposed the rich man might have had compassion on him. We don't know how long he'd been there, but he never got anything.

***[21] And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.***

And he's not merely a beggar. He's so full of sores that the dogs came and licked them. They must have been really bad, and oozing pus. He's not only poor, but in poor health too. It wasn't something he could hide. Dogs followed him. He was in a really bad way.

And he desired "***to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.***"

This man isn't a scrounger. He's genuinely desperate. He's not after the life of the rich man. He's not demanding some kind of change in society so he can live like the rich man. He's not even asking for justice so the rich man would be forced to give him something by law. He's simply appealing to the rich man's compassion. He's just after a few crumbs.

That'll do. Even a few coppers would make the world of difference to this beggar. To the rich man that would be nothing. But the rich man has no compassion whatsoever for poor Lazarus. And there's not much Lazarus could lawfully do about it.

But something happens to both of them which changes everything. Something inevitable happens to us all soon enough. We all die. Then where will we be?

***[22] And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;***

This story gives us just a small insight into what happens after death. There's not much in the Bible about what life after death is like actually. Most people think nothing happens, we just get snuffed out. When you're dead, you're dead. When our body's gone, our soul is as well. But how do we know that? Where do we get that information from? There's no basis at all for believing it. The best we can say is that we don't know what happens after death. But the fact that we still exist and that something does happen to us after death is one of the few things we do know about, because God has revealed it.

Hebrews 9:27

*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*

There's a judgment after death. And just thinking about it, that's surely a good thing. Justice in this world is so obviously not done perfectly by anyone, although I'm sure the judicial system tries its best. But men can't see the heart of a person. Men can't really judge motives, they can't see what a person's really like inside. But God can. There is no hiding from the one true God, Lord of heaven and earth. He alone can judge righteously:

Psalms 7:9

*Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.*

Revelation 16:7

*Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.*

We're told that the rich man "**died, and was buried.**" And that's it. We find out in a minute that he does actually go somewhere, or at least his soul does. But there's no fanfare for this well-regarded man in this world. He might have had a great funeral, because he was so highly regarded. But in God's eyes, he's just another one who "**died, and was buried.**"

On the other hand, we're told the beggar died and something very special happened to his soul immediately afterwards. He "**was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.**" Whatever that means, it sounds good. What a wretched life he'd had. We don't know how long for. But what is our life in this world really? It's all "*vanity and vexation of spirit.*"

Genesis 47:9

*And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been....*



Psalm 90:10

*The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

Job 5:7

*Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.*

Are we happy here, really? Do we love this world? Do we want this life to go on for ever? The rich man did. He was quite happy here, surrounded by his riches. Unpleasant things, like poor, sore-infested beggars he could lock outside of his gate and ignore. But do we really want this world to go on for ever, with all its evil, misery and decay? Surely not.

Or do we have trials and tribulations here, like Lazarus? Let's be honest about this life. It's miserable isn't it? The fittest survive at the expense of the weak. Justice is never done properly. Is not our life, every day, one of "labour and sorrow," as Moses put it?

Don't get me wrong. We shouldn't be unthankful for the lives God has given us. As long as we've breath, there's work to do. But we shouldn't love this present, evil world.

1 John 2:15

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

Philippians 1:21-23

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better...*

So, Lazarus, after such a wretched existence in this world, ends up in Abraham's bosom, a place of eternal rest from his labours. In his life, he never tried to fight for any rights he might have had, and he never stole to help himself, which makes me think he was trusting in the Lord for his daily needs. And the Lord finally takes him away out of this world to a far, far better place. But the rich man goes somewhere completely different:

***[23] And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.***

The rich man goes to hell, to torments. Now, a lot of people, even genuine Christians, have a problem with the idea of hell. First of all we need to get rid of fancy, superstitious, mediaeval ideas of hell we might have in our minds. Hell is not a place of heat and flames with the devil in charge keeping us down in there with his pitchfork. Where that idea came from I don't know. Well, I have got an idea. It was probably from the pope frightening people to death to keep them in his church. I hope you don't think that's what I'm doing. God forbid. The devil isn't in charge of hell, he's it's most notorious prisoner.

Matthew 25:41

*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.*

I don't think people have a problem with hell so much. Most people are happy to believe in some kind of just judgment after death. It's the eternity of it that people have a problem with. The fact it lasts forever. So men invent such places as purgatory, places which have a time limit. Even Adolf Hitler will get out eventually. But that's not what the Bible teaches.

Isaiah 33:14

*The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with **everlasting burnings**?*

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

*The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with **everlasting destruction** from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power...*

Even many genuine Christians find the idea of hell difficult. They read such things as:

John 3:16

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not **perish**, but have everlasting life.*

They see the word "perish" and say, Aha! those who believe in Christ get everlasting life, but those who don't, simply get snuffed out. But that can't be what it means. If that was the case, God would be unjust. Nobody would get the punishment they deserve. Sinners would love that. They don't want a boring life for ever with a goody-goody like Jesus. They want to indulge their lusts as much as they can, believing the worst thing that can happen is that they'll be snuffed out and never be brought to account. Teaching people that if they don't repent they'll just be snuffed out, gives them exactly what they want.

1 Corinthians 15:32

*Let us eat and drink; for to morrow we [but] die.*

If we have a problem with the eternity of the punishment, I'm sorry, but the Bible teaches it. And I think that's to wake us up. To give us a push, to make us realise we've got to do something about this now, in this life, because there's no second chance after we die.

So this rich man ends up in hell, in torments. And he looks up. And he can see what's happening in the other place. And that place is "**afar off.**" There's no hope of getting there now. In any case, as we find out later in v.26, there's "**a great gulf fixed**" between the two places so nobody can get between them. It's impossible to make amends for anything we've said or done after we're dead. The only time we have to sort ourselves out is now.

And who does the rich man see? "**Father Abraham,**" as he calls him in v.24. The rich man was a Jew. He thought having Abraham as his natural father was sufficient to get him a nice, comfortable place in the next world. But that's not necessarily so:

John 8:39

*They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.*

Many people are like this, not just Jews. They think their pedigree can get them to heaven. But it's not because we're born into a certain religion that God accepts us, it's whether we live our lives as God requires. And that applies to everybody, whatever religion we're born into.

Where's Lazarus in all this? Was he a devout Jew? Did he go to the Temple with the rich man? Did he strictly observe the Sabbath and all the Jewish festivals? Even though he truly believed in God, he probably wouldn't have been anywhere else but begging for his food every day. He'd have to. He'd have no time to attend the Temple. Yet he's the one who ends up in Abraham's bosom, not the rich man, who thought himself so devout.

**[24] And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.**

The rich man cries out to who he thought was his "**Father Abraham.**" He calls on him to grant him mercy. Men are all too keen to call on creatures for mercy, whether it's Mary or the saints or somebody. But mercy only comes from God. And the very solemn thing we find out here, is that God's mercy runs out in the next world.

God is such a merciful God here. He gives us food and clothing and all things. Yet how many of us are really thankful? Vast multitudes totally ignore Him, the provider of us all.

Exodus 34:6,7

*The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.*

Psalms 103:8

*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

Romans 1:21

*When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, **neither were thankful**; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Notice, the rich man doesn't say, "There's been some kind of mistake, I'm in the wrong place. Can you, Father Abraham, get God to sort this all out for me?" He knows he's in the right place all right. And we all will, when we get there. There'll be no atheists in hell.

Philippians 2:10,11

*That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, **and things under the earth**; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

In the next world, nobody will complain that God is unjust. They know that wherever they end up, they're there justly, and the only one they'll have to complain about is themselves.

So the rich man knew he was in the right place. But he's so used to ordering people around, he asks Abraham, "**have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue.**" We realise here for the first time, he

knew very well all about the beggar at his gate, even knowing his name was Lazarus. He's not just some anonymous beggar who just happened to be there. There's more to the story. The rich man knew exactly who he was, and had deliberately, wilfully ignored him, shut him outside and not had compassion on him.

But he still thinks he can order people around. In the next world, the wicked will no longer be able to use their silver-tongues, their charm, their dominating personalities or whatever else they may have had here, to get people to do whatever they want any more. Their power of persuasion is completely finished.

And we see he's "**tormented in this flame.**" We don't necessarily need to think of hell as being literal flames, the Bible uses various metaphors, "*weeping and gnashing of teeth,*" "*the blackness of darkness for ever,*" "*where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*" Take your choice. Whichever one, it's not very pleasant. But it's perfectly just.

Genesis 18:25

*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*

***[25] But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.***

Abraham rebukes the rich man (without naming him) and tells him the truth, which the rich man would have known all along, really, if he'd only admitted it to himself. He'd only ever received good things in his life, whereas Lazarus had only received evil things. Now, we can't blame God for our lot in life. It's what we do with it that counts. Notice it says "**thy good things.**" They were his. God had blessed the rich man with material wealth, but what had he done with it? Amassed it all for himself. He couldn't even spare a few coppers for Lazarus. That's the point. It's not wrong to be rich as such, but we must be thankful for everything we've been given by God and use it wisely, which this rich man never did.

***[26] And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.***

There is no second chance after death. At the moment of our death everything is fixed, and there's no turning back. No more opportunity to repent. Just an endless lifetime of regret for the things we've done here. To escape that, we must get right with God here. And there's only two places to go in the next world. Either "**Abraham's bosom,**" a place of eternal comfort, or "**hell,**" a place of everlasting torment. And what we do in this world determines where we go permanently in the next. But who can do enough good works to get to Abraham's bosom by themselves? Nobody.

Psalms 130:3

*If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*

But there is good news:

Psalms 130:4

*But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

None of us can achieve heaven. We're sinners. The rich man never thought that about himself. He was quite happy in his own little bubble, thinking he was going to be all right. But Lazarus saw himself for who he really was, a sinner. How do I know that? He was in the situation he was in, but he didn't fight for his rights, because he knew he hadn't got any. He didn't steal, because he knew it was wrong. He humbly accepted his lot, and trusted in the Lord to look after him on a daily basis. We don't need to get to his level of deprivation before we can know the Lord, but do we humbly accept the Lord's providence in our lives? Or are we fighting all the time to get what we think we deserve?

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Not those who think they're righteous.

Matthew 9:13

*I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

The rich man thought he was all right, he thought he had Abraham as his father. So he never saw his need of someone to save him from his sins. He'd just laugh at the idea. But Lazarus did see his need. Do we see ourselves as sinners before a holy God, in which case there is hope for us. If you just laugh at me saying that, all I can say is repent, or perish like the rich man. Christ died on the cross to save sinners, and we need to call on a Him ourselves, as individuals, and then we can be saved to everlasting life:

1 Peter 3:18

*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.*

John 3:36

*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

I'm not trying to frighten anybody. I'm not after anybody's money, or following, or support. I'm just telling the truth. If you choose to ignore me, go ahead. You're free to walk away. Be it on your own head. Be like the rich man. Hide from reality behind your gated compound, enjoying the finer things of life. I'm just telling you where that lifestyle leads.

The rich man at last comes to a realisation of his situation, but it's too late. Now there's no way out. And finally, he has some kind of compassion. On the family he's left behind.

***[27] Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: [28] For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.***

He realises there's nothing more he can do about his own predicament, but he's got five brethren still alive on earth, who he knows are in the same situation he was in, totally oblivious to reality. Living lives to the full for themselves, and hiding away from the truth.

And he still thinks he can order Lazarus about. He doesn't say, "Let **me** go to my brethren...." but "**send *him* to my father's house.**"

The plea now is urgent. He realises his brethren need to be persuaded of the truth of what the next life entails. He's desperate that they don't end up where he is. And he knows they're going to end up there if nothing is done about it. This is the urgency of the gospel.

On the one hand, God saves sinners. Thank God it's not up to us and our persuasive abilities to convince people of the truth, otherwise nobody would be saved. But on the other hand, we'd be utterly negligent if we didn't say anything about the situation people are in at all. We need to be responsible watchmen. Ezekiel was told:

Ezekiel 3:18,19

*When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.*

But Abraham turns down his request for anyone to go back to earth:

***[29] Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.***

***"Moses and the prophets."*** The Bible. There is a witness to all men, and it's here in this book. And it's the only witness. These are the words of God to men to tell them of their predicament and how they can be saved from it. Abraham told the rich man that the Bible is a sufficient witness. In it, God has revealed our situation to us, and the solution, nothing more is necessary.

The rich man's brethren were also, presumably, devout Jews who would have known the Scriptures fairly well. Just think about the millions of people throughout the world today who don't have this book. Just think about the many in this country alone who have this book readily available, but never read it, never have any interest in it. This book is the witness of God to us. It's a far greater witness than anything else. Which is why, when we go to church to hear a preacher, he ought to always expound this book, and never go off at a tangent, but stick to the text.

The rich man knew his brethren had the Scriptures, but his concern was that he also knew they wouldn't read it, they wouldn't actually take heed to what it said. Because he didn't. Like so many all around us today. We must read this book, and apply it to our lives:

Luke 11:28

*Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*

The rich man has one final plea. Although he knew his brethren would have had the Scriptures, he also knew they wouldn't read it, or if they did, they wouldn't heed a word of it. So he thinks he's got a better idea. He thinks he's found an even greater witness than the Scriptures. If someone came back from the dead, that would surely convince them:

***[30] And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.***

But Abraham tells him it wouldn't work:

***[31] And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.***

We can have somebody here, now, come back from the dead, and tell us about the torments that await us if we don't repent, and it still wouldn't persuade us. It might impress us for a while. But the impression would fade, and we'd be back to our old ways soon enough. One man did come back from the dead. Our Lord Jesus Christ. He had many witnesses, on one occasion there was about 500 people all at once. A court of law could be successfully convinced of the resurrection of Christ as an historical event. But how many people believe because of that today? Not many. Oh, it's just a story from long ago, it didn't really happen. It's nice for people who need a crutch to lean on, but not me.

But the Scripture is more than just words in a book, it's living and powerful:

Hebrews 4:12

*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

Read this book. It can change your life.

So, what can we learn from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus?

Luke 13:5

*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

## Luke 18:9-14. The Pharisee and the Publican

Also read Job 40:1-14.

I want to look today at this parable of Christ's, about the Pharisee and the publican. It only occurs here, in Luke's gospel. But it's a very important parable, because it shows us the kind of mindset we ought to have before God. What attitude the Lord finds acceptable in His sight. I fear this attitude's missing in most churches today. So we can learn a lot from this parable.

Normally, when Christ spoke in parables, He told the story to the multitudes, but only gave the explanation to the disciples afterwards. Why did He do that? Well, many people were following Him just for what they could get out of Him. They maybe wanted to see Him perform a miracle, or to get something for nothing from Him, like a free meal. They weren't really bothered about His teaching, His teaching meant nothing to them, so after He'd finished speaking, Christ just lets them walk away.

But if the parable created a desire in someone's heart to want to know more, what could they do? They could approach Christ to ask Him about it, and they'd become His disciple. Christ was approachable. And He's approachable today. If we don't understand a Bible passage, or what He's doing in our life, we can ask Him. Talk to Him. Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, is approachable and answers prayer.

But this parable is slightly different from the others, in that the explanation comes together with the parable. And we find that Christ wasn't speaking to a general multitude here, but He had a target audience:

***[9] And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:***

There are plenty of people in the world who ***"trust in themselves."*** We only have to switch on television to see all sorts of people with opinions. Reporters ask people for their "opinions." Everybody seems to have an opinion, not just politicians. And they've all come to their opinion for themselves. They ***"trust in themselves"*** that their opinion is the right one.

And we also see that these people were ***"trusting in themselves that they were righteous."*** Now, a lot of us would say, "I'm righteous. I do the best I can, and try my best to live a good life." And it's good to be righteous. It's good to want to do the best you can to live a good life. That's not the issue. We're all agreed on that. But the thing is that these people were ***"trusting in themselves that they were righteous."*** And that's where they went wrong. As we'll hopefully see.

And they ***"despised others."*** We know we shouldn't despise others. Most of us would at least try to get on with people different from ourselves, people with different opinions. But really, just by our having an opinion at all, by definition we think everybody else is wrong. We at least look down on others. We'd never admit to despising them, but when we judge people for their opinions, that's exactly what we're doing.



So, if we're trusting in ourselves, if we think we're doing our best to do what's right, and certainly, if we're despising or looking down on others, then this parable is for us.

***[10] Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.***

The first thing to notice is that both these men were religious. They both went up to the temple to pray. We're not talking here about a Christian and an atheist, or two people of different religions. We're talking about churchgoers. They're in the same church. They profess to know the same God.

The Pharisee was outwardly, a highly moral man. In fact, he was the most morally upright person anyone could have come across in Christ's day. When Christ spoke of the righteousness that we should all have, He said:

Matthew 5:20

*Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

When Christ wanted to give the best possible example of outward morality, He chose that of the scribes and Pharisees.

And not only were they extremely moral, but they were Bible-believers too. In Christ's day, the church had two main factions: Pharisees and Sadducees:

Acts 23:8

*For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.*

The Sadducees were liberals. They didn't believe a word of the Bible. And there are plenty of people in the church today who disbelieve the plain teachings of Scripture. But the Pharisees believed every word of the Bible. They were like good evangelicals.

And then we have the publican, or "tax-collector," as it is in other translations. The Pharisees were respectable upright members of the community, but the publican was the opposite. He was a despised member of the community. He went to the Temple just like the Pharisee, so he was a Jew. But his day job was to collect the taxes for the Roman authorities. The Romans were seen by the Jews as the occupying force, just like the Palestinians see the Israelis of today.

The publican was despised because he was seen to be sucking up to the occupying power. And not only that, but most publicans also asked for more taxes than were necessary to make a bit of money for themselves on the side.

So the publican was a despised member of the community, and the Pharisee was a respected member of the community. That's the difference.

And we now see a complete difference in the way they both prayed. The way we pray is always very revealing about our spiritual state.

**[11] The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself....**

The Pharisee (and the publican) stood for prayer. Actually, that's the Biblical posture we should adopt for public prayer. There are three postures mentioned in the Bible for prayer: standing, kneeling and falling prostrate. Sitting isn't mentioned in the Bible. Slouching certainly isn't. I think sitting must be a lazy, Western phenomenon, because in every other church I've been to or heard about, it's been normal to stand for public prayer. It's only respectful to the Lord. If we wanted to petition the King, we wouldn't sit.

Anyway, the Pharisee prayed "**with himself.**" This is variously translated as "standing by himself," or "said to himself." Either way, this is a private prayer between the Pharisee and God. This is a prayer that shows from the heart what he was really thinking. This prayer definitely wasn't for public ears.

The Pharisees loved to pray in public. Christ warns us not to be like them:

Matthew 6:5

*And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

The Pharisees just wanted to be seen of men, so they'd get the respect of men. The approval of God wasn't even in their minds.

But this prayer of the Pharisee here, wasn't meant to be the eloquent type of prayer he'd normally give in public to impress people. No. He'd never want the public to know that this was what he was really thinking in his heart.

**....God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.**

Well, he does thank God. That's a good thing. We should be thankful for everything the Lord gives us. But he's thanking God for being himself. He's so proud of the fact that he's different from others.

As far as he's concerned, the publican can be labelled with the evil men of this world, the extortioners, the unjust and the adulterers. The Pharisee thinks himself above all of these because he's so moral, so righteous, and proud of it. And he then goes on to boast, to God, about what he does:

**[12] I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.**

He "**fasts twice in the week.**" I was surprised when I found this out, but fasting isn't in the Mosaic law at all, although it's always mentioned in the Bible as a good, profitable thing to do, especially in conjunction with prayer. But, the Pharisee obviously thinks he's obeying God by fasting twice a week, whereas there's no real Biblical warrant for it. Maybe some tradition had crept in, which involved fasting on certain days, or maybe he decided to fast himself, we don't know for sure. The Bible doesn't tell us.

He also **“gave tithes of all that he possessed.”** Tithing **is** in the Mosaic law, so there is a Biblical warrant for giving at least a tenth of one’s income to the church. In fact, Christ commends the Pharisee for tithing. But he was omitting more important things:

Matthew 23:23

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

I’m sure the Pharisee was very content with his prayer. He must have gone away with his head held high, thinking he’d done his duty for another day, feeling so proud of himself. But was God happy with it? Well, I don’t think so.

Let’s now compare and contrast the Pharisee with Job. Job lived about 2,000 years earlier. It was said of him:

Job 1:1

*There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.*

Both the Pharisee and Job were impeccable in their outward conduct. They were the best, most morally upright men that we could find anywhere in their respective day. But that’s just about where the similarity ends.

The Pharisee behaved the way he did to impress men. All his supposed good works were only for show. Christ actually gave a warning about the Pharisees:

Matthew 23:3-5

*....do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men*

On the other hand, Job’s good works came from a genuine heart. And as a result, the Lord had blessed him with a large family and plenty of stuff.

Briefly, the story of the book of Job is that Satan comes along and suggests to God that Job was only being morally upright because God was blessing him for it. So, the Lord, for no real reason, took everything away from him. That was a test of Job’s faith. Yet Job didn’t complain, and still worshipped God:

Job 1:21

*....And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*

And we’re told that:

Job 1:22

*In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.*

After that, Satan had another go, and now even Job's health was taken away from him. The only thing he had left was a grumpy wife, who told him:

Job 2:9

*Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.*

But, even then, Job still clung to his faith in God:

Job 2:10

*But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.*

But when three of his friends came to him to try to comfort him, he made a mistake. He opened his mouth. And most of the rest of the book of Job is the conversation Job had with these three so-called comforters.

Throughout the conversation, Job couldn't understand why the Lord had brought all this disaster upon him. He knew from his heart he'd always tried to do his best, to do what was right. Yet the Lord was treating him like this. He cried to the Lord, but God didn't seem to answer him any more. It seemed that He was no longer there. What would we have done in that situation? I'm sure by that point, many people would have abandoned what little faith they had in God altogether. But Job never did that.

Even though he was in this situation, and God seemed not to be there any more, he still stuck to the fact that one day, after his death, he'd be redeemed:

Job 19:25-27

*I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.*

The Pharisees on the other hand, never had any assurance like that in their hearts at all. They knew jolly well they were only doing what they did for show, to impress men. They knew they weren't being genuine in their hearts. But Job knew absolutely that he'd been genuine. And he knew that the Lord knew that. That's why he was so perplexed when all this trouble came on him.

Well, Job's so-called comforters finished speaking, they'd been absolutely no use whatsoever. And then we're told something very interesting:

Job 32:1

*So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.*

Even though Job had genuinely been upright in everything he'd done, his mistake came when he started to see himself as righteous in his own eyes. Job had begun to think along the lines of the Pharisee who had **“trusted in himself that he was righteous.”**

Job 32:2

*Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God.*

This young man Elihu comes along, and, unlike Job's three useless comforters, he immediately puts his finger on the problem. In Job's own mind, he had declared himself to be just rather than God. So Elihu, rather than continuing to look at the problem from Job's perspective, starts to look from God's perspective. And that's what changes Job's thinking completely. After Elihu's speech, God Himself then finally speaks:

Job 38:1-5

*Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?*

And what's the result of God finally answering Job? We saw it in the passage we read earlier: Job saw his own wretchedness, and he was speechless:

Job 40:3-5

*Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.*

And there's another place in the Bible where we come across someone else was speechless. Christ told a parable about a king who made a wedding for his son:

Matthew 22:11,12

*And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.*

When we come before the one true God Lord of heaven and earth on Judgment Day, we too will be speechless. We won't be trying to justify ourselves then. We couldn't even begin to do that.

Just imagine what heaven would be like, if entrance was granted on the basis of what we've done? It'd be awful. It'd be full of people boasting about themselves. "I got to heaven by doing this, or that." They'd be like the Pharisee: **"I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."**

– "I prayed five times a day, fasted during Ramadan and went on the Hajj."

– "I walked round and round the temple with my prayer wheel, chanting the same prayer a million times."

– "I went to confession, took the Mass and obeyed the pope."

– "I chose Jesus as my personal Saviour."

Is that the right one? No! That's just as much boasting in a work as all the others are! What you're effectively saying is, "I'm better than my unbelieving neighbour because I chose Jesus as my Saviour and he didn't." None of those is the way to heaven.

A heaven full of people boasting about their achievements would be terrible. No. The only way to heaven is by penitence. Bringing ourselves down.

Let's go back to the parable, and look at the prayer of the publican.

**[13] And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.**

This is an altogether different attitude from that of the Pharisee. The publican didn't strut into the Temple and thank God for how wonderful he was, for all the good works he'd done, and how faithful he'd been. Rather, he just crept inside the door, he was "**standing afar off.**" When we go to a church, where do we sit? Do we apply the Biblical principle?

Luke 14:8-10

*When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.*

And not only did the publican stand at the back, but he "**would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven.**" When we come before the judgment seat of Christ, we'll not only be speechless, but we'll be humbled to the dust as well.

So, what should be our general attitude of mind? It should be one of humility, not pride. Plenty of people go to church, who quite like their status in the church, their position, their knowledge, their ability to debate theology, or whatever they fancy themselves doing. But we shouldn't be like that:

Ecclesiastes 5:1,2

*Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.*

And the publican smote upon his breast, as a sign of mourning, repentance, and humiliation for his sins. And all he could say was "**God be merciful to me a sinner.**" That's all we can ever say before a holy God. A sinner is all we are, compared to God. Job excelled in righteousness compared to others, and genuinely and honestly was one of the most righteous men that ever lived. Yet even he eventually had to acknowledge that the righteousness of God far exceeds any righteousness we can ever produce by ourselves.

Isaiah 64:6

*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

**[14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other:....**

If all we looked at was outward appearance, this conclusion should surprise us.

Outwardly, the Pharisee was seen to be by far the most upright, moral person on the face of the earth, and the publican was the most despised. But:

1 Samuel 16:7

*....the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*

It was the publican, not the Pharisee that God declared righteous, because God saw his heart. He wasn't proud, full of himself. He was humble and genuine. He didn't boast of his achievements, but recognised his need.

What is God's plan for us all? What is God's overarching intention for the whole world? His ultimate purpose? It's here:

***....for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.***

That's the overall plan of God. And we find it throughout the Bible. In the passage that we read earlier, God challenges Job to:

Job 40:12

*Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low.*

And of course, Job couldn't do that, and neither can we. We can't even bring ourselves down, we're all so proud by nature. We need God to do it for us.

Isaiah tells us of this overall plan of God:

Isaiah 2:17

*And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.*

Even wicked king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon got it, eventually:

Daniel 4:37

*Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*

The apostle Paul tells us:

Ephesians 2:8,9

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

And Paul concludes that the whole reason God works this way, is:

1 Corinthians 1:29

*That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

Do we want to be made right with God? We shouldn't even attempt to do it by our own efforts, because we can't. We must realise that. Cry to Him for mercy. Cry to Him. Cry, **"God be merciful to me a sinner."** Not just saying it as an empty chant like the Eastern Orthodox churches do, but meaning it from our hearts. And the God of heaven will hear, and change our heart. The only way to heaven is the way of the cross. The way of humility. The way of self-abasement. Boasting is excluded.

1 Peter 5:5,6

*God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time*

And that's why God's way of salvation is altogether different from every other religion in the world. Salvation can only come by putting our trust in a Saviour outside of ourselves. A Saviour who died in our place to turn away God's wrath. A Saviour who took upon Himself the sins of all those who would come to Him. That's what we need. And that's what we can have freely, in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, if only we ask Him. He is the only Saviour. May we all come to know Him truly, for ourselves.



## Luke 23:33-47. Good Friday

In the so-called “Christian calendar,” Good Friday is the day when we’re supposed to think particularly on the death of Christ. And on Easter Sunday, two days later, we’re supposed to think particularly on His resurrection.

The Christian calendar isn’t in the Bible at all. So festivals such as Christmas and Easter are purely traditions that have been introduced later. So we aren’t obliged to celebrate any of them. And in any case, we shouldn’t just spend one day a year thinking about these things. The death and resurrection of Christ are so central to our religion that the Bible gives us instructions to think about them far more often than that.

Soon after Christ’s resurrection, Christians started meeting on the first day of the week. The Bible tells us that the first day of the week began to be called the Lord’s Day. So, we should be celebrating the resurrection of Christ every Sunday, not just on one day a year. The Bible also tells us to remember the Lord’s death, not just once a year, but every time we take the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, or Communion:

1 Corinthians 11:26

*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.*

Therefore, we need to understand why the death of Christ is so important to us. And I hope we can get some insight into this as we look at this passage.

First of all, we need to notice the circumstances in which Christ died. He was put to death by crucifixion, as a common criminal, at the age of about 33 years old, by the Roman authorities. But why did they put Him to death? What crime had He committed?

Normally, that would be an easy question to answer, because whenever someone was crucified, their crime was usually written on a notice above their heads. But we see here in v.38, that in Jesus Christ’s case, it read: “***This is the king of the Jews.***” This statement produces more questions than answers.

Actually, He was the king of the Jews. If we look at His family tree in Matthew chapter 1, we see that He was a direct descendent of Jeconiah, the second to last king of Judah. After Jeconiah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians, his uncle Zedekiah was put on the throne for eleven years, until, eventually, Jerusalem fell, and the people were taken into exile.

Seventy years later, after Babylon itself was captured by the Persians, some Jews returned to rebuild Jerusalem, under Jeconiah’s grandson Zerubabel. But he never called himself king, he was only known as ***governor*** of Judah. The monarchy was never re-established. And the royal family went into obscurity until eleven generations later, his direct descendent Jesus would grow up in a simple carpenter’s family in an obscure town called Nazareth.

But nobody knew that Christ was of royal blood at the time. In any case, that wouldn’t have been a reason to put Him to death. The religious leaders wanted Him put to death because he claimed to be the King of the Jews, and they just didn’t agree. In fact, the

more we look into the events that took place, the more we see that He didn't actually commit any crime at all.

Here in the text, one of the thieves on the cross said (v.41), "***this man hath done nothing amiss.***" And in v.47, the Roman centurion said, "***Certainly, this was a righteous man.***" And earlier on in this chapter at Christ's trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Pilate himself said no less than three times, "***I find no fault in this man.***" And even the disciple Judas, who betrayed Him, said afterwards, "***I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.***"

I think there's far more to this than these people simply believing that Christ was innocent of calling Himself the king of the Jews. The whole way He behaved as He was put to trial and accused of all sorts of things they found no evidence for, was entirely different from the way we would have behaved.

If we were accused of a crime we were innocent of, we'd try our best to fight for our rights and attempt to establish our innocence. But Christ didn't fight. Instead, He said calmly:

John 18:36

*My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

So, who was this person? This behaviour is altogether different from anything we have ever known. This person was truly different from anyone else.

And when we look at His life, we again see how differently He behaved. Far, far differently than any of us can even understand. And He calls us to such a high standard as well. Listen to this from Matthew chapter 5. This is just part of a much longer teaching:

Matthew 5:39-48

*But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Jesus Christ lived His life in a far different way to any of us. We're all so selfish, self-centred, self-seeking, living for our own pleasures rather than living for God. Everything we do is for our own benefit, our own desire, our own ambition. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, gave Himself for others. He lived His life for His heavenly Father, not for Himself.

The Bible says of Him that He was sinless. He didn't do anything wrong in His entire life. There was no fault found in Him, not just in His trial before Pilate, but in His entire life. This man was indeed the Son of God:

Hebrews 7:26

*....holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.*

Hebrews 4:15

*[He] was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

1 John 3:5

*....in him is no sin.*

1 Peter 2:22,23

*Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*

Jesus Christ was a sinless man. The only sinless man that has ever lived. So, why did He end up being put to death? Well, there are two answers to that question:

The immediate circumstances were that the religious leaders were jealous of Him. They wanted control over the people. They wanted to be their spiritual guides. Up until this point they were. But when Christ came along, it was said:

Mark 12:37

*....the common people heard him gladly.*

Matthew 7:29

*....he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

As Christ started His own public ministry, people began following Him, and the religious leaders began to lose their control over them. And particularly after Christ had raised Lazarus from the dead, the religious leaders finally decided to take action:

John 11:47,48

*Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.*

John 11:53

*Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.*

Now, they didn't have the authority to put someone to death, so they had to persuade the Roman authorities to do it for them. And with no evidence against Christ with regards any crime, they still managed to succeed in doing that, using their own powers of persuasion. Even though Pilate really knew He was an innocent man, the religious leaders still managed to persuade him to crucify Him. Now, those were the immediate circumstances.

But again, something far deeper is going on here. When Peter tried to defend Christ after He had been captured, Christ said:

Matthew 26:52-54

*Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and*

*he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*

And again, He said elsewhere:

John 10:17,18

*Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*

The Bible tells us that Christ laid down His life voluntarily. He could have prevented His own death from happening, but He didn't. And this must prompt the question, Why? Why on earth would anyone want to do that? How can someone deliberately laying down his life be good, be useful in any way? And then we remember something else He said, which we often think about in times of war:

John 15:13

*Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

There was something far greater going on here than simply an innocent man dying on a cross. Christ was laying down His life for His friends.

John 15:14

*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

Let's now finally go to the text we're looking at today.

***[33] And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.***

So the scene is set, There are three people being crucified, Christ in the middle and a thief on either side.

***[34] Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do....***

An innocent man who had done no wrong was being crucified. And more than a man, the Son of God Himself. They were crucifying the Lord of Glory. So, arguably this was the worst crime in history, God being put to death on a cross by men. And here Christ is actually praying to God to forgive them. Why shouldn't God judge them for their wickedness? And then we realise that this is what it's all about. The forgiveness of sins.

Acts 5:30,31

*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*

Just looking at things from this world's point of view, the death of Christ was unjust. But injustices happen all the time in the world. Innocent men are quite often wrongly punished and guilty men quite often get away with their crimes. So, what we see in Christ is just

another miscarriage of justice. That's all we see. But we need to start seeing things as Christ saw them, not from this world's point of view, but from the point of view of eternity.

**....And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.**

This is actually a fulfilment of prophecy:

Psalm 22:18

*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.*

In fact so many of the events that surround the death of Christ are actually prophesied in the Old Testament. Look particularly at Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. If these passages don't clearly prophesy Christ, I don't know what will convince us otherwise that He's the Saviour the Scriptures said would come. And of course, these Roman soldiers had no idea they were fulfilling prophecy. We can't accuse them of trying to fake a prophecy's fulfilment in any way.

**[35] And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.**

**[36] And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, [37] And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.**

**[39] And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.**

Now, three lots of people started mocking Christ, the rulers, the soldiers and one of the two criminals. All they can do is mock and sneer at Him. They laugh at His claim to be the Messiah, the Saviour. To them, He's totally powerless to save anybody, because He's stuck there, hanging on a cross. So they mock Him by challenging Him to come down from the cross and save Himself. They think that if He can't even save Himself, how can He possibly be a Saviour for anyone else? And when He doesn't come down from the cross, they assume that He's not coming down because He can't come down.

And this is typical of what every one of us is like. All we see is this world. We don't see things from the point of view of eternity. If all we see is this world, we too are going to think that Christ is powerless. He was just a good man. He was just another religious teacher, one of many. That's all we think of Him. But if we start seeing things from an eternal perspective, seeing that death is not the end and there's a judgment to come, then, and only then, can we just begin to understand that Christ dying on a cross wasn't weakness, but victory.

Remember, Christ didn't come just to save us from some temporary problem, like oppression by the Romans, or some other political end. He came to save us from our sins. That's the real problem we need to be saved from. And it is an eternal problem, not a temporary one. In fact, that's what His name means:

Matthew 1:21

*....and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

As long as we're just looking at this world all the time, we're not going to see the importance of this. We're rather just going to be looking for temporal solutions to temporal problems. In fact, we're not even going to see our sins as much of a problem at all. So, how do we react when someone comes along to tell us that our real need is for our sins before God to be dealt with? We'd mock them. We'd laugh at them. And we'd put them to death if we could, because they're disturbing our enjoyment of this world. And that's exactly what these people did. And it's exactly as Christ prophesied:

John 7:7

*The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.*

Our sins deserve the eternal punishment of God. And that's what we're going to get, unless we recognise our need of a Saviour from sin. We need a Saviour because we can't save ourselves, it's impossible, we're not good enough.

That's why Christ talked so much about forgiveness of sins. That's why Christ died on the cross. He laid down His life for His friends. He took upon Himself the sins of all those who trust in Him for salvation, so that they won't need to be punished themselves:

1 Peter 2:24

*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*

Christ knew exactly what He was doing when He went to the cross. He didn't have to save anyone. He could have just not bothered. But He did it because He loved His people. He laid down His life for his friends. It was the only way any of us could be reconciled to God. This is what we need to understand. Yet our minds are usually so closed to these things.

But look what happened to one of the thieves. He did begin to understand this. In Matthew's gospel, we read that at first both thieves mocked Him:

Matthew 27:44

*The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

But we see here that one of them suddenly changed:

***[40] But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? [41] And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. [42] And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.***

It's as though a light had suddenly been switched on in his understanding. He had just begun to see something of what Christ was getting at.

He rebuked the other thief for mocking Christ. He recognised he himself was a sinful man, receiving the due punishment for his sins. He also saw that Jesus had done nothing wrong, and that all He had said about His being a king of a kingdom not of this world was true. And he asked to be remembered in it.

He was no longer putting his trust in anything this world had to say. All the world's philosophies are vain and empty. He recognised his sins, realised that Jesus was right after all, and asked Him for the free forgiveness of sin that He had been teaching about, that only He could give, and which was the very reason for His coming into the world in the first place. That's the point we need to get to. Stop trusting in ourselves. Stop believing in this world and its empty ideas. Trust in Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:19

*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

And he got a welcoming response from Christ:

***[43] And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.***

Paradise. Where's that? That's the place we should all want to go to after death. The place where all of Christ's people, those who truly put their trust in Him for salvation, will go. Even death can't stop us from getting there, but our sins can. Our sins will send us to eternal punishment instead. We must cry to God for Christ to take our sins away, so we may be free from the burden of them:

2 Corinthians 5:20,21

*....be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

1 Peter 3:18

*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.*

Once we've been reconciled to God, we'll have true peace, even through death.

***[44] And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. [45] And the sun was darkened....***

This wasn't an eclipse. Eclipses don't last that long, and anyway, it was Passover, which was always at a full moon. The moon would have been on the opposite side of the sky to the sun, so it couldn't possibly have moved in front of the sun for an eclipse. The darkness could only have been the hand of God.

***....and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.***

Only the High Priest was allowed behind the Temple curtain once a year, and then not without a sacrifice. As long as the curtain stood, it symbolised that the way into the true Holy Place of God's presence in heaven had not yet been revealed. But now, with Christ dying on the cross, He has made the true sacrifice for sin, and the way has now been made clear for everybody who puts their trust in Him to receive the salvation for their sins that the animal sacrifices could never take away. They were only ever symbols of the true

sacrifice of the coming Saviour. Now Christ's own shed blood has opened the way for reconciliation with God by faith in Jesus Christ:

Romans 5:1

*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*

***[46] And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.***

Then Jesus could die in peace, knowing that His work had been finished. He put His Spirit into God the Father's hands. And we need to do the same. God has now provided a way of being reconciled to Him, through the blood of Christ. Let's not just try to laugh it off, and say we don't need it. It's the one thing every one of us really does need right now, whether we realise it or not. But we need to forsake our sin, hate it, get rid of it. Put it all onto Christ. That's why He came, to take away our sin.

Well, may all of us come to repent of our sins, put our trust in the Son of God, have a new heart given to us, and start today to live the new life that He gives to all those who ask, a life of righteousness. So we can then truly say, with the apostle Paul:

Galatians 2:20

*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*



## **John 3:1-21. Ye Must Be Born Again. (Reformation Day)**

On October 31<sup>st</sup> 1517, a German monk, Martin Luther, nailed a list of 95 grievances against the church of his day on the door of his local church in Wittenberg, Germany. That incident is generally taken by historians as marking the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Western Europe.

The great call of the Reformation was the phrase “*Justification by Faith Alone.*” By which we mean that we are made right with God, accepted by Him, not by any good works we do, because we can never do enough, but we’re made right with God purely by His grace alone, which we receive by faith, by simply believing in the Saviour He has sent, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This “*Justification by Faith Alone*”, not only went against the church of Luther’s day, but it goes against every other religion in the whole world. All religions, except Protestant Christianity, believe you have to do something to gain the favour of the god or gods of the religion. Buddhists walk round and round their temples endlessly reciting chants, because they think it’ll give them a better life the next time around. Muslims have to go through a ritual prayer sequence five times a day, do charitable works, fast during Ramadan, go on the Hajj to Mecca if they can, and so on. And then maybe they’ll be good enough for Allah to let them into heaven. Roman Catholics have to go to Mass and do as many good works of charity as they possibly can.

And the sad thing about all these religions, is that nobody can ever know for sure if they’ve done enough. They’ve just got to hope for the best. What a terrible burden that must be, never knowing if their god is pleased or not.

But Protestants believe we can get to heaven, and avoid any punishment for our sins, “*by Faith Alone.*” In other words, simply by believing on Jesus Christ for our salvation. That’s true. That’s the good news we have for the world:

Acts 16:31

*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

It’s a great comfort to the Christian to realise that our eternal destiny doesn’t rely on what we do, because none of us are anywhere near good enough:

Isaiah 64:6

*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

And it’s also a great comfort to be able to know for sure that we’re saved, and that we’re never going to get the punishment we deserve.

John 10:28

*And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

The closer we get to God, the more sin we see in ourselves. It’s promises such as these that are the greatest comfort to us every time we fall into sin.

But, there's one major objection people have to this. If, once we're saved, we're always saved, and we can't lose our salvation once we've got it, isn't that just licence to sin? If all we have to do to get to heaven is say we believe in Jesus, then we can do what we like, and we'll still get there. We can go out on a sinning spree, God won't mind, He'll forgive us everything anyway. That can't be fair. Surely salvation must depend on what we do, and not faith alone.

It's that objection I want to address today by looking at this passage:

**[1] *There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:***

We know nothing else about Nicodemus except he was a ruler of the Jews. It was the rulers and religious leaders Christ had the most trouble with. They were jealous of Him. The people realised that Christ "*spoke as one with authority and not as the scribes*". He knew what He was talking about. As opposed to the church leaders with their clever speeches trying to impress people. The religious leaders eventually handed Christ over to the Romans for crucifixion. But here, Nicodemus, one of those leaders, comes on his own to see Christ.

**[2] *The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.***

He probably went at night to avoid detection by the ruling council. He didn't want them to know he'd gone to see Jesus. That'd have been embarrassing.

But another reason he came by night could be that he couldn't sleep. All the time in his mind he was wondering whether this Jesus Christ of Nazareth was the prophesied Messiah or not. Maybe he'd heard bad things said about Him in the council, and it was bugging him. He didn't want to go against God, he had to get to the truth. He had to find out. He couldn't sleep until he'd found out. So he went to Him in the middle of the night to sort it all out in his mind.

And he says: "***We know that thou art a teacher come from God.***" Notice "***We know.***" So there was more than one of them in the council who secretly recognised Christ was from God. Nicodemus seems to have been sent as a spokesman for them. We know of Joseph of Arimathea, he was one of them, we meet him later in Scripture.

***"For no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."***

They'd been convinced of Christ having come from God by the miracles. And that's exactly what the miracles were meant to point to. Sadly, most of the people who saw the miracles just wanted free healthcare. Christ told them:

John 6:26,27

*Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.*

And that's all Nicodemus managed to say. We don't actually know why he went to see Jesus, because he never got the chance to ask whatever he came for. Jesus intervened by saying something quite remarkable:

***[3] Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.***

Christ "**answered**" before Nicodemus had asked a question. And He comes out with this statement, which Nicodemus didn't understand. And we may not understand it either, but it is actually the most fundamental teaching of the Christian faith. Christ tells Nicodemus nobody can see the kingdom of God unless he is "**born again,**" or "**born from above.**"

Nicodemus had told Christ that they had recognised He was a teacher sent from God. And that's true, He was a teacher. He teaches us some wonderful lessons, let's hear Him. Let's love our enemies, let's do good to those who persecute us, let's turn the other cheek, go the extra mile. He's given us some wonderful teaching that nobody bothers with in the modern world today. So by all means let's spread His teachings abroad.

But, if all we see in Jesus Christ is a teacher, yes, it would be good to follow Him. But we'd soon find out that we couldn't keep it up for very long. No matter how hard we try to follow His teaching, we can't do it. Even to begin to follow Christ, we need a fundamental change in our very nature. And that's what Christ meant when He said "**Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" Nicodemus wondered what "**born again**" meant:

***[4] Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?***

The only sort of birth Nicodemus is familiar with is natural childbirth. It's obvious a grown man can't go through that again. So here is a religious leader on the ruling council, with absolutely no concept of heavenly things.

And that's what we've got in the church today. Christian churches have been in existence for many centuries in this country. Most of them were started by good Christian people. But, they've now become no more than glorified social clubs. As generations have come and gone, all teaching on heavenly things, has been completely lost. The only sermons in these churches nowadays are no more than moral or political messages. The church in Nicodemus' day after many centuries of tradition, had become no different.

***[5] Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.***

Christ explained that to be "**born again,**" doesn't mean going through physical childbirth again, but rather it means a spiritual birth. There's a completely different dimension to life that by nature we're all totally unaware of. We've all been born of water, born of the flesh.

That's natural childbirth, which we've all been through to get here. But if that's all we've experienced, there's a whole spiritual dimension that we just can't see, we really can't. To see the kingdom of God, to begin to live a Christ-like life, we also need to be born of the Spirit. That's the new birth, a spiritual birth. And we must all go through this spiritual birth, in order to have any hope of getting out of this sinful life we've been born into.

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

**[8] *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.***

Then Christ compares everyone "**born of the Spirit**" to the wind. Now that might seem odd at first. The wind "**bloweth where it listeth.**" We think of the wind as moving about at random, and the weather coming about by random movements in the air. But that's not the case at all. The weather, in its minutest detail, is controlled by God in His overarching providence.

Dunkirk 1940. Thousands of soldiers had to be quickly evacuated from continental Europe as the Nazis were advancing. Just for that one day, the English Channel was calm as a millpond to allow many to be saved alive.

In 1984 York Minster was struck by lightning causing a lot of damage. Why did God do that? Three days beforehand an openly unbelieving bishop had just been consecrated there. God will not be mocked. It was said of Christ:

Mark 4:41

*What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*

I heard a preacher once say that it was Satan that caused earthquakes and hurricanes and what we call "natural disasters," but that's not true. Satan's not that powerful. He's powerful, we don't mess with him, but he's a spiritual enemy, he's the accuser of the brethren. He can't change the weather.

We hear the sound of the wind but we can't tell where it comes from nor where it's going. And that's compared to everyone born of the Spirit. We can't see the wind, but we can see its effect. And it's the same with spiritual things. The world can't understand the born-again Christian. Everybody born of the Spirit no longer behaves the way the world behaves. They no longer live for themselves, but for Him who gave Himself for them:

Galatians 2:20

*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

The world can't understand the new birth, because it has no experience of it. They can't explain our new life, our new desires, our new behaviour, no longer living for ourselves but for Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:14

*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

***[9] Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? [10] Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?***

Nicodemus was outwardly very high up in the religious hierarchy. He was a master in Israel. But he knew absolutely nothing of spiritual things at all. And Christ rebukes him for that. And Christ goes on:

***[11] Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. [12] If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?***

Christ is the true witness from the Father, who came into this world to teach us about heavenly things. But men don't receive the witness of God. Nobody listens to Jesus Christ today. Just on an earthly level, nobody bothers with His teachings. Where is He in our education system? Nowhere. So how can anybody be expected to know spiritual, heavenly things? He came to this world and was rejected. Men prefer their own way.

John 1:10-13

*He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

So, how do we receive this new birth? How can we become "**born again**" so that we can see the kingdom of God? So that we can see spiritual things?

***[13] And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.***

We must come to Jesus Christ. He is the only way. He is the only one who is of the Father, come down from heaven. Who is "*God manifest in the flesh.*"

Acts 4:12

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

John 14:6

*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

We must believe in Jesus Christ, put our trust in Him to save us from our sins:

***[14] And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: [15] That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.***

This refers to a judgment God brought on the people of Israel in Numbers 21:

Numbers 21:6-9

*And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.*

God brought a judgment on Israel for their sin. But He also provided a way out. Anyone who had been bitten, who then simply looked at the brass serpent, lived. That's all they had to do, just look. Now I'm sure many people would have thought that to be ridiculous. How is it possible that just looking at a piece of brass can save anyone from snake poison? So I'm sure many of them wouldn't even have bothered to look, because they thought it stupid.

And that's exactly what we've got in the world today. We've all been bitten by the serpent. We've all been born in a fallen state, with a sinful nature. But God has provided a way out. All we have to do is look to Jesus Christ, believe in Him, trust in Him, and we can be saved from our sins, from our sinful, selfish natures. But so many people around us think that's ridiculous. So they don't.

***[16] For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.***

God loved the world "so," in this manner: Not that God is going to forgive everybody everything unconditionally anyway, no matter how bad they are. No, no, no. That's not the manner in which God loved the world. He loved the world in this manner: that whosoever simply believeth in Christ should not get the due punishment for their sins, but have everlasting life.

Now, we must forsake our sin, to repent of our past lives, our sinful natures. We've got to be finished with that life. But then all we need to do is believe in Him, put our trust in Him. That's it. That's all we can do. And, if we are genuine, if we truly hate our old life and want to change, and want to receive the new life Jesus Christ can give, then pray to Him, believe in Him, start to trust in Him to lead and to take care of us. That's it.

And if we're genuinely genuine, He will respond. He will put a new heart within us and change our very nature. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. We must recognise ourselves as sinners and come to Him:

***[17] For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.***

Jesus Christ came the first time as a Saviour. All those who put their trust in Him will surely be saved. But He's going to come again at the end of time as a judge. While we are here, now, there's still hope for every one of us. He's come to save. And all we have to do is trust in Him to save us to eternal life:

***[18] He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.***

But if we just sit back and do nothing, we'll reap what we sow. We'll be judged according to the natural human nature we received at birth. Do we really want to continue living for self, selfish desires, selfish ambitions? Aren't we fed up with that yet? By nature every one of us loves darkness. We don't want Christ. That's why, when Christ came into the world, he was put to death. Not that He did anything wrong, He was sinless. But men couldn't abide His light:

***[19] And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. [20] For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. [21] But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.***

So, do we hate the light of Jesus Christ, because we don't want to give up our sin? Or do we love the truth, in which case we'll be drawn to the light. That's the choice everybody has to deal with.

Nicodemus is mentioned in two other places in Scripture, and it's obvious that sometime after this meeting with Christ, such a change had happened to him. In John 7, we find him standing up against the rulers in the council:

John 7:48-52

*Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.*

And then later on in John 19, we hear of him with Joseph of Arimathaea taking away the body of Christ to give Him a decent burial:

John 19:38-40

*And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about*

*an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.*

Nicodemus had received the new birth. It was obvious that he'd experienced a true change in his heart. When we first meet him, he knows nothing of spiritual things whatsoever. To him, Christ was just a teacher from God, not his Lord and Saviour. But now, see how he loves Him, as he boldly stands up to the council, and as he takes the Lord's body for burial. Without the new birth, he wouldn't have done either of those things. He'd probably just have kept quiet to save his skin. His boldness is the fruit of the new birth.

So, back to "*Justification by Faith Alone.*" If we've never experienced the new birth, if we've never been born-again in our hearts and received a new nature from Christ, then it's quite understandable we'd think that salvation obtained simply by believing, without any connection to our good works, is too easy.

That would provoke two kinds of response: Firstly, the critics of it would say it gives licence to sin. That can't possibly be right. So they reject it altogether.

But there'll also be a lot of other people who'll think it's a great idea. Because they want to carry on freely in their sin, and still have that heavenly insurance policy at the same time. And it has to be said, Protestant churches today are full of that kind of people, and it's a terrible witness to the truth. Christ said:

Matthew 7:22,23

*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

On the other hand, the truly born-again Christian has had a fundamental change of nature. He now hates sin. He just wouldn't want to sin. He would rather want to run away from sin whenever he can. The very last thing on his mind is to think that now he's saved he can sin all he wants. No. God has written the law in his heart, to take away his desire to sin:

Psalm 119:11

*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

Christians still sin, but whenever we do, we don't do it deliberately, we don't want to do it, we fall into it. And every time it happens, we hate it. Let's never take the forgiveness of sins lightly. It took Christ to the cross to forgive sin. Forgiveness with God should never be thought of as easy and cheap.

Psalm 130:4

*But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

To the world, just like Nicodemus at first, Christ is no more than a teacher, one of many, just like Mohammed and Buddha and all the rest. No. He's far more than just a teacher. He is Lord and Saviour to all who believe.



Let's make sure that every one of us puts our trust in Christ, and receives the new birth that He freely gives to all who call upon Him. Then we'll be saved from our sins, we'll know we've been saved, we'll know we can never be lost, and we'll certainly never ever want to try to find an excuse for sin any more.

## **John 6:26-27. The Miracles of Christ**

*Read John 6:1-27*

When Jesus Christ was on earth, one thing that marked Him out from everybody else was that He performed miracles. A miracle is something over and above the course of nature. By definition, miracles don't ordinarily happen. Ordinarily, God uses means. That's the only way we can have order. Otherwise we couldn't do anything. Fire is normally hot, so we can cook our food on it. If we didn't know whether it was going to be hot or cold before we lit it, we couldn't plan anything. We have to have natural laws. But God is God. He's free to work above and beyond them, if He so wishes. And He does, in miracles.

We saw two of Christ's miracles in the passage that was read. The first one was the feeding of five thousand men, plus women and children, using only five barley loaves of bread and two small fish. The second was Christ walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee and calming a storm. Things like that don't happen every day. They're over and above natural means, so they're defined as miracles.

### **1. Christ's Miracles were Real Miracles**

First, we've got to ascertain that Christ's miracles were real. We shouldn't have to do this, but today our universities are full of atheist theologians. If you go to any university today to study theology, you will be taught the miracles weren't real, the resurrection didn't happen, Mary, when she bore Christ, was a "young woman" not a virgin, Moses' miracles before Pharaoh were the result of a volcanic eruption, the Biblical account of Creation is a myth, and the Bible itself isn't the word of God, it's just a jigsaw of man-made writings.

We can't argue with these people. Our ultimate authority is the Bible, which is God's revelation to man. But they don't believe that. They believe what they want to believe. So it's impossible to pin them down, or to discuss anything with them. Christ said:

Matthew 15:14

*Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

It's fairly simple to show that Christ's miracles were real. The people believed they were:

John 6:2

*And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.*

Not only that, but Christ's greatest enemies recognised them as real miracles. They couldn't deny it. After Christ healed the man born blind in John 9, some Pharisees murmured about Him, but they couldn't deny the miracles:

John 9:16

*Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.*

They admitted He did real miracles. They didn't call him a charlatan, a fake healer. They dismissed Him for other reasons. They thought Him a sinner and a Sabbath-breaker.

And later on, they held a council, where none of them denied that He performed miracles:

John 11:47,48

*Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.*

They were far more concerned that the Romans would take away their place and nation than anything else. Why didn't they just call Him a fake? Because they couldn't. Every miracle Christ worked was real. And they knew it. So that's the first point. These miracles were real, despite what theology professors tell us.

## **2. We Can't do Miracles like Christ Today**

We've got plenty of atheists to deal with. But we also have the opposite extreme. Faith healers. Benny Hinn, Morris Cerullo, Peter Popoff. We see them on our so-called "Christian" TV channels every day. And if we believe them, they'll take all our money.

Faith-healing isn't unique to Christianity. There are faith-healers in every religion. Animists have faith-healers, Buddhist do too, even Islam has them. Because there's money in it.

And they're popular, because vulnerable people who're sick, who've tried everything else without success, will try anything, so they easily fall prey to a smooth-talking faith-healer.

Have you heard of Derren Brown? He's an illusionist, a stage magician. He's made several very good TV programmes showing that the techniques of these faith healers are exactly the same ones he uses as an illusionist. He's done a very good job exposing their deceit. But he's an atheist, and sadly, he throws the baby out with the bath water. He proves these faith-healers are fake, but concludes Christianity is too. But that doesn't follow.

Christ could perform miracles, but we can't today. We need to show that from the Bible.

We read of two occasions during Christ's ministry when He gave the power to perform miracles to some of His disciples for certain campaigns. In Matthew 10, the twelve disciples went out, only preaching to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And in Luke 10, seventy went out as a vanguard, into every place He himself would go later.

He also gave His apostles this power for a while after His ascension. That's it. They're the only occasions when Christ gave power to others to do miracles. The Bible calls these miracles "*signs and wonders*," and we're told specifically they're the signs of an apostle:

2 Corinthians 12:12

*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*

Many think Acts chapter 2 proves we can do miracles today, but it says nothing of the kind. On that unique occasion, some people spoke miraculously with other languages. But I suggest that even this was only the apostles, because we're told:

Acts 2:7

*And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?*

What were the miracles Christ gave to His disciples on these occasions? The best list we have is in Matthew 10. This was to the twelve, and notice that included Judas Iscariot:

Matthew 10:1,8

*And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.... Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.*

Take this list "*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils,*" and compare it with the lists of "*spiritual gifts*" mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. They're not the same. These "*spiritual gifts*" are given to the church, and I suggest they are still with us today, otherwise why are they in the Bible at all? The most comprehensive list of these we have is in 1 Corinthians 12:

1 Corinthians 12:8-10

*For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues....*

Aha! There we are. The "*spiritual gifts*" of "*the working of miracles*" and "*healing.*" It's always assumed that the miracles mentioned here are the same as the miracles Christ did. But they're not. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Greek word for "*miracles*" is "*dunamis,*" which is usually translated "*power.*" In the gospels, the usual word for Christ's miracles is "*sayimon,*" which is usually translated "*sign.*" We can argue over what "*the working of miracles*" actually is, but it's not the same as the "*signs and wonders*" Christ performed.

And as for the spiritual "*gifts of healing*" (notice the plural), why do we assume they mean instant physical healing like Christ's miracles? It could be something completely different. Some people have a gift of being able to speak healing words to people in need. Knowing exactly the right thing to say at the right time in order to defuse a volatile, or awkward situation. The "*gifts of healing*" could simply mean the gifts of being a peacemaker.

Nowhere in the lists of "*spiritual gifts*" are "*heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils.*" These were the "*signs*" Christ and the apostles did, not the "*spiritual gifts*" we have today. The spiritual gifts also include "*wisdom,*" "*knowledge,*" "*faith,*" "*helps,*" "*governments,*" and "*tongues,*" or other languages. These are for the church today, and are not in the list of "*signs and wonders*" which only Christ and the apostles could do.

In any case, "*spiritual gifts*" are gifts of the Spirit, which are only given to believers as the Lord wills, so Judas couldn't have had any. But he was given "*signs and wonders*" to do.

We can't perform the miracles Christ and the apostles could do today. So, if aunt Bessie is sick, we don't go up to her and say, "Be healed in the name of Jesus!" But what we can

do is pray. There is a God in heaven who can heal. He is the one we go to. He may heal, or He may not. It may be her time to die. But we still go to Him and accept whatever He has for her. We don't try to pretend we can heal her ourselves.

### **3. What was the Purpose of the Miracles?**

Christ and the apostles performed miracles. But what was their purpose? Did Christ come to give us physical healing on demand? Why can't we have the miracles today?

Christ didn't do any miracles for the first thirty years of His life. He only started them after He began His public ministry. In John 2:11, we're told His turning water into wine was the "*beginning of miracles.*" Why did He only start then? He could've healed so many more.

The miracles were not an end in themselves. Physical healing is not an end in itself. Unless Christ comes again in our lifetime, we're all still going to die. Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, but he still died again later. We must all face death, because we're sinners:

Romans 6:23

*The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Hebrews 9:27

*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment....*

The miracles were good things, they healed people from crippling illnesses, fed people in the wilderness. Christ went about doing good. The only ones who complained about Him were the religious leaders, who wanted Him out of the way so they could be in charge.

Acts 10:38

*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.*

Why people today don't want to know or desire Him, I don't know. He only ever did good.

But He didn't come just to do a few miracles then go away again. The miracles pointed to something far greater, namely the fact that He was the Christ, the prophesied Messiah.

It had always been prophesied that a Messiah, a Saviour, would come to save the Lord's people. Many thought that just meant a physical salvation for Israel from their enemies, such as the Romans. But God meant it to be far more than that.

We're all born with a problem. We're sinful, selfish creatures by nature. From all eternity, God planned to save a number that no man can number from the consequences of that sin. To do that, He had to send His Son to die on a cross to take the punishment for their sin in their place. If we don't have Jesus Christ dying in our place as our substitute, there will be no hope for us in eternity. We'll have to be punished for our own sin for ever and ever. That's why knowing Jesus Christ, repenting of our sins and coming to Him, calling on Him to save us, is the most important thing in the world. Without Him there's no hope for us. But how are we to know who this Messiah is, when He's arrived on earth? Many people throughout history have claimed to be some sort of Saviour:

Matthew 24:4,5

*And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many....*

But Christ did miracles. This was the proof He was from God. It's true, we're told that in the end times false Christs will come with "great signs and wonders:"

Matthew 24:23,24

*Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

But will these really be real miracles, like Christ did? I don't think so. They'll be very, very clever deceptions. So clever that even some of the elect will be taken in for a time.

Nicodemus saw Christ's miracles and realised they meant that He came from God:

John 3:2

*The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

Many others in Christ's day saw the miracles and realised this was the Christ too:

John 7:31

*And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?*

Christ's miracles were only ever meant to be signs, pointing to something greater, His having come from God. His teachings were far more important than miracles. But most didn't realise that. They didn't want boring teaching. They just wanted more miracles now.

After the feeding of the five thousand and the calming of the storm, a crowd met Him in Capernaum. They were actively seeking Him. But Christ saw their real motive.

**John 6:26-27**

***[26] Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.***

***[27] Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.***

They were looking for Him, not because they "**saw the miracles,**" in other words, saw what they were pointing to – the fact He was from God and that His teachings were far more important than His miracles. Oh no. It wasn't because they saw the real purpose of the miracles. They came to Him because they "**did eat of the loaves, and were filled.**" In other words, for the free healthcare, the free food, something for nothing. They didn't come for His teaching. They couldn't care less about salvation to eternal life, or having their sins forgiven. And it's the same today too. All people want is things here, now.

Christ went on to tell them that we're not called to labour for things down here, on this earth, "**which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.**" And that only comes from one source, the Son of Man, Christ Himself. So He started teaching them spiritual things. But they didn't want that. No interest. And many of them went away:

John 6:60

*Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?*

John 6:66

*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

And that's what we get today. If we could do wonderful miracles, just like Jesus Christ did, our churches would be full. That's just what people want. Something for nothing. And many churches today set themselves up as having "healing ministries" to attract people. And it does for a while. They're very well attended. Until they find the healing's all fake. These churches seem lively, but they've got a very high turnover. And there's never any teaching about what Christ really came to this world to do – to save His people from their sins. That's what we should be doing, preaching the gospel of God's redeeming grace.

Don't get me wrong. As I said, God can heal. But we ask Him through prayer. To set ourselves up as a "healing ministry" implies it'll always work. And if it doesn't, then we can just blame the victim... er sorry... the patient for not having enough faith. A "prayer ministry" would be far more useful, leaving it to God to heal or not as it pleases Him.

So, the miracles weren't an end in themselves. Their purpose was to point to Jesus Christ as being the Saviour that came from God. He is the one we should listen to and trust in:

Matthew 17:5

*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*

#### **4. Why Different Ways of Performing the Miracles?**

When we look at Christ's miracles, there are many occasions when He just said a word, and the person was healed. There are other occasions when He said nothing and they were healed. There are occasions when the healing was more complicated than that. And there were occasions when He performed the same miracle in different ways.

As an example, Christ gave many blind people their sight, and we have details about three of them in the Scriptures. Let's have a look at them:

With blind Bartimaeus in Luke 18, He just said the word and he was healed:

Luke 18:40-43

*And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*

Christ asked Bartimaeus what he wanted, and after he'd replied, Christ simply said: *"Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee."* That's it. An instant healing. And as Christ is from God, that's what we ought to expect every time. But there are two other examples:

With the man born blind in John 9, it was more complicated. Christ spat on the ground, anointed his eyes then told him to wash in a specific place:

John 9:6,7

*When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.*

And with a man in Bethsaida in Mark 8, Christ performed the miracle in two stages:

Mark 8:22-25

*And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.*

He led the man out of town, spat on his eyes and put His hands on him. But he only partially saw, so He put His hands on him again and asked him to look up, then he was restored fully. This is the only miracle in the Bible done in two stages. It didn't work the first time, so Jesus had to "try again." Is that right? Of course not. Christ never made mistakes or only partially did something. He could have just said a word to heal him, like Bartimaeus. There must be a reason for this miracle being in two stages.

There must be a purpose behind Christ using different methods to do the same thing. Each one of these methods must be teaching us something about our spiritual blindness.

Only Christ can give us spiritual light. That's the first thing:

Ephesians 5:14

*Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*

With Bartimaeus this was instantaneous. Suddenly he's alive. We're all born spiritually blind. And when Christ comes into our lives, He makes us see. Suddenly light. The Bible comes alive. The things of God become a reality. We suddenly see the truth.

With the man born blind, after he was anointed with the clay he was still blind for a while, and he had to obey Christ and go to the pool of Siloam to wash. This teaches us obedience. Yes, Christ is the only one that can give us light, but we need to change. We need to become obedient to Him. After He has changed us, we might still be in the dark for a while, until we learn some obedience. Even if what He tells us to do seems strange, we still need to obey Him to see clearly.

And the third case is in two parts for a purpose. When we become a Christian, we see spiritual light for the first time, and it's wonderful. But we don't see clearly straight away. We only see men as trees walking. All things have become new, but we don't see them clearly yet. Only when we continue to look up to Christ, do things become clearer.



So the three different methods are teaching us different things about spiritual life.

With both the man born blind and the man in Bethsaida, Christ used His spit. Isn't that strange? What gives us spiritual light? The Word of God, the words of Christ, from His mouth:

Psalm 119:130

*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*

That's the picture. If we want spiritual light, we must come to Jesus Christ. Not me, not Mohammed, not Buddha, but Jesus Christ. His words are living and powerful:

Psalm 19:7

*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.*

Hebrews 4:12

*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

That's what the miracles of Christ are all about. Only He and the apostles had the power to do them. They were never meant to be an end in themselves, but pointed to Christ as being from God. And even the different ways Christ performed them teaches us lessons.

But there's one last thing.

## **5. The Miracle of Providence**

This is the miracle we deal with on an everyday basis today.

Miracles had hardly ever happened before. The man born blind in John 9 said:

John 9:32

*Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.*

We only find miracles occasionally in the Bible, particularly the Exodus and in the time of Elijah and Elisha. Other than that, they're very few and far between.

But there is a miracle that God continually performs every day. We see it throughout the Bible, throughout history, and it's taking place here, now. The wonderful miracle of Providence. Unlike the other miracles, this miracle doesn't bypass the natural laws God has set up. It doesn't go above or beyond those means. But using those means, we can say that **nothing happens for no reason**. God is working all things out to His own glory.

From the largest things:

Psalm 148:8

*Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word....*

To the smallest:

Matthew 10:29,30

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

And He particularly works everything out for the good of His people:

Romans 8:28

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

Incredibly, even the wicked acts of men He works out for our good and His glory:

Genesis 50:20

*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*

Acts 2:23,24

*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.*

And above all, He defeats our greatest enemy. Pride. This is the greatest miracle of all:

Daniel 4:37

*Those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*

If there's one thing all of us need, it's for our pride to be destroyed within us:

1 Samuel 2:3

*Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.*

1 Peter 5:5,6

*God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time....*

Only the Lord Jesus Christ can humble the soul. Come to Him. Trust in Him:

Matthew 11:29

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

Jesus Christ, who came from God as the miracles testify, is worthy of all our worship. We can trust in Him completely. This is the confidence we can have, knowing that God is in control of everything. Nothing is outside of His control.

This is the real Christian life, living our lives trusting that all things, both pleasant and unpleasant, work together for good, even when they don't seem to be.

Habakkuk 3:17,18

*Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

## John 9. The Man Born Blind

**[1] And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.**

Jesus saw a man born blind. And the disciples asked Christ a question about him:

**[2] And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?**

The philosophical question here is, Why was this man born blind? Was it for his own sin, or his parent's sin? So the general idea going around was that disability was the result of sin. Now, in one sense that's true. All disabilities are in the world because of sin:

Romans 6:23

*For the wages of sin is death.*

In fact all illnesses, weaknesses and imperfections are because of sin. We all decay and die because of sin. If sin never came into the world, this world would be perfect, nobody would decay and die, nobody would be disabled. In that sense only, it's the result of sin. But individual disabilities are not necessarily directly connected to particular sins.

**[3] Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.**

When Christ said this, He didn't mean they'd never sinned, of course not.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

*For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*

What He meant was, this man's blindness wasn't caused by his sin or his parent's sin directly. Then Christ gives the real reason this man was born blind. I hope Stephen Fry is listening to this. A while ago, he said, "When I see God, the first thing I'll ask Him is, 'Bone cancer in children. What's that all about?'" Well, for a start, when we meet our maker, none of us will be saying any such thing. We won't be saying anything. Like the man in the parable without a wedding garment, we'll be speechless.

Here's Christ's answer: "**That the works of God should be made manifest in him.**" This doesn't just refer Christ healing him. That would be a "work of God," singular. It says, "**works**" plural. That refers to his whole life. Even if he was never healed, the real reason he was born blind was so "**that the works of God should be made manifest in him.**" I remember, many years ago, not long after I was converted, I was in a street, and there was a young man who was blind and dumb, handing out tracts. It was obvious he loved the Lord. He wasn't made like that because of his sin. God made him like that so that "**the works of God**" could be "**made manifest in him.**"

We can extend this to us all. We might think our situation is bad. But remember, God has given us whatever situation we're in, "**That the works of God should be made manifest in**" us. And then Christ goes on to talk about the works He was given to do:

***[4] I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. [5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.***

Christ Himself had been given works to do, amongst which were His miracles. He said:

John 8:12

*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

But He here says, ***“the night cometh, when no man can work.”*** Now Christ has left this world, we’re in the night. We don’t see His miracles any more. But Christ is still the light of the world. He now shows Himself forth in His people. We can’t do miracles like He did, but we can still have His light in us. So it’s important we live life worthy of our calling:

Ephesians 5:8

*For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.*

***[6] When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, [7] And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.***

Christ performs this miracle in a fairly complicated way. This blind man obeyed Christ in every detail, even if it sounded odd. It worked. Suddenly light. We should just do what Christ tells us. Allow Him to change us. Pray to Him. That might sound an odd thing to do, talking to someone we can’t see, but try it. Speak to Him. Tell Him we’re finished with our old life, and want a new one from Him. He’ll hear.

And Christ used His spit. Isn’t that strange? What gives us spiritual light? The Word of God, the words of Christ. That’s the picture. If we want spiritual light, we must come to Jesus Christ. His words are living and powerful. They convert the soul.

***[8] The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?***

This man had undergone a complete life change. From being born blind, spending his life begging, now he can see. He’s altogether changed. His neighbours couldn’t believe the difference, so much so, that some of them didn’t think it was the same person:

***[9] Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he.***

When he found out people were saying this, he immediately corrected them. When we’re truly converted, we want people to know the truth too:

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

People who knew us before don't understand what's happened to us:

1 Peter 4:4

*They think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.*

But we should be ready to give our testimony. Yes, I am the same person, but I've been changed from the inside by Jesus Christ. Of course, many will just think it's just a passing phase. And they'll willingly accept us back into their way of life again at any time. That'll be our first temptation. If we're to be a real witness for Christ, we must be consistent. This man was so thoroughly changed, the neighbours wanted to know more:

***[10] Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?***

They're asking questions. How many times has anybody come up to us and asked for our testimony recently? Not many. Maybe that's to do with the fact we're not much different from the rest of them after all. So the man gives his testimony in detail:

***[11] He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.***

He simply told them exactly what happened. It might have sounded ridiculous, but he just told it like it was. We should be ready to do exactly the same thing. And look at the result:

***[12] Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.***

They asked, "**Where is he?**" They wanted to find Christ too. They all had their particular needs, and after hearing this remarkable testimony from one of their neighbours, they wanted Him for themselves. Just giving our testimony in a simple, straightforward way, without embellishment or exaggeration, is a wonderful witness to everybody around us. In answer to their question, the man had to say, "**I know not.**" That was the truth. Jesus had left, and He honestly didn't know where He was. We can learn two things from this:

Firstly, if someone comes up to us and asks us a question about our faith (it usually happens when we're least expecting it), if we don't know the answer, don't pretend, don't waffle. Be honest. Just say, "*I don't know.*" We're not trying to impress anybody, not even God. Of course, the first thing we'll do when we get home is try to find the answer.

Secondly, this is the way true religion works. The very first thing that happens is that we're changed from darkness to light. We're born again. Justification is by grace alone:

Ephesians 2:8

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*

We become new creatures in Christ first of all, before we get to know anything. Then, only afterwards, we start learning things. We are sanctified by the truth:

John 17:17

*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*

We don't need to know anything to come to Christ. We just need to obey Him. Put our trust in Him. Once He has changed our hearts, we'll then start growing in:

2 Peter 3:18

*...grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

So, if we don't know the answer to anything, don't be afraid to say, "***I know not.***"

***[13] They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.***

They couldn't find Christ, so the neighbours did what they thought was the next best thing, and brought him to the Pharisees. The church leaders. They didn't know any better. They thought the church leaders would know what they were talking about. But that's not necessarily true. The Pharisees were actually Christ's greatest enemies. They were jealous that people were following Christ, not them. Eventually they'd hand Christ over to the Romans to be put to death. But the neighbours didn't know that.

If we want to know what Christianity is all about, we shouldn't go to the church leaders. They just fancy themselves. No! We go to Jesus Christ. We find out for ourselves all about Him in the Bible. Should we trust our lives to the General Synod of the Church of England? God forbid! We trust our lives to Jesus Christ.

***[14] And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.***

The Pharisees were very strict on the Sabbath. There's nothing wrong with that. We ought to treat our Sabbaths properly, as a day of worship and rest. Today that's a Sunday, not Saturday. But they'd added many extra-Biblical rules of their own. So they particularly didn't like Christ healing on the Sabbath. It broke all their rules, so it must be wrong.

***[15] Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.***

So the Pharisees asked the man how he'd received his sight. Another opportunity to give his testimony. It was a briefer testimony than he gave his neighbours. Maybe, unlike his neighbours, he found their attitude intimidating. That's why he didn't bother with details.

***[16] Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.***

After hearing the man's testimony, the Pharisees split into two factions. Some simply repeated, "***This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day.***" But others of them had become interested, "***How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?***"

And that's what happens. Christ said:

Luke 12:51

*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division.*

This will always happen. Some will believe, some won't. But we must continue to witness.

***[17] They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.***

After giving his testimony, he got another question. The Pharisees ask, "***What sayest thou of Him?***" That question is a lot trickier to answer. It didn't ask for a factual answer, it asked for an opinion. The Pharisees wanted him to declare where he stood, with regards Christ. Did he agree with them that He was a sinner, or did he think He was of God? He didn't take sides, he simply replied to the best of his understanding. "***He is a prophet.***"

Muslims would give that answer, because to them that's all Christ is, a prophet. But He's more than that, He's the Son of God. But we can't blame the man here. He doesn't know that Christ is the Son of God yet, He finds that out later in the passage.

***[18] But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight.***

***[19] And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?***

So, they can't get him to either agree with them or condemn himself, so they try another tactic. They now say they don't believe he'd been born blind. So they get his parents involved. They ask them if he was born blind, and asks them how he now sees.

***[20] His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: [21] But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.***

They confirm that this is their son and that he was born blind. But they tell them they don't know how he saw. That was true, in the sense they weren't there when Christ had healed him. But the man must have told them, because we find out:

***[22] These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. [23] Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him.***



They refused to confess Christ, because they knew they would be thrown out of the synagogue if they did. Which is why they gave the answer, **“He is of age, ask him.”**

John 12:43

*For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

And there are plenty of people today who love their church so much, they would rather deny Christ than have to leave it. That’s very sad. But what did their answer achieve? They’d saved their face in the synagogue. But they’d put the pressure back on their son.

***[24] Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.***

The Pharisees call the man to appear before them again. This time they don’t ask a question, but they tell him what they want him to say. **“Give God the praise,”** means, “Agree with us.” But the man’s quickly beginning to see through their hypocrisy, and he’s not going to be scared of them like his parents. But his theology is still not quite right yet:

***[25] He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.***

He says that he doesn’t know whether Christ is a sinner or not. Maybe that’s what he really believed at this point. He confesses Christ isn’t a sinner later. But the Pharisees want him to confess that Christ is a sinner. So, really, the man’s telling them that that’s not the point. The point is, **“one thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”**

This man had been healed by Christ. He was blind from birth, now he sees. That’s a fact, the evidence is right in front of everybody. But the Pharisees just don’t want to believe it.

***[26] Then said they to him again, What did he do to thee? how opened he thine eyes?***

If they can’t get him to agree with them, they ask the same questions again and again until he does. That’s the way the world operates. Most people under such pressure would get fed up and agree, just for the easy life. But if we love God, if we love the truth, if God’s testimony is on the line, we can’t do that. That would be living a lie. All the Pharisees are achieving now is making this man even bolder, even more sure of his position.

***[27] He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?***

He now sees clearly the church leaders for what they are. They’re just trying to get people to look up to them and follow everything they say. They’re hypocrites. Christ said:

Matthew 23:2-5

*The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but*

*they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men*

We're to follow church leaders as much as we possibly can, because they're the leaders of the outward visible Christian church. But don't do as they do. Follow Christ instead. All the church leaders want is to be seen of men and respected in the streets.

This man finally stands up to them. They're not used to that. They rule by fear. His parents were scared of them, because they had power to throw them out of the synagogue. But this man isn't bothered about getting thrown out of the visible church. He has Christ. He knows who to follow. He laughs at the Pharisees. ***"I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?"*** So they get mad:

***[28] Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples.***

Well, Christ said:

John 5:45-47

*Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*

***[29] We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.***

They say they don't know where Christ was from. That's a lie. He was known as "Jesus of Nazareth." Just a little earlier, there'd been a dispute about Him. Then they were sure:

John 7:40-43

*Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him.*

And then the man born blind gives his last speech before the church leaders:

***[30] The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.***

He mocks their statement they don't know where Christ came from. If anyone can heal a blind man so miraculously, surely we'd want to know more about Him, wouldn't we?

***[31] Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.***

As the blind man thinks through his new found faith, his theology is getting clearer and clearer in his own mind. He says, **“God heareth not sinners.”** The argument goes: God heard Christ when He healed the blind man. So Christ, whoever He is, can’t be a sinner, like the Pharisees claimed Him to be. In fact, **“If any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.”** In other words, this man, Jesus Christ, is of God. He’s not a sinner. The miracle proves it. And that’s what the miracles were there to do.

The Pharisees’ claimed that, **“This man is not of God,”** (v.16) and **“We know that this man is a sinner.”** (v.24). And here, the man born blind directly contradicts both statements.

**[32] Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.**

This must be of God. It has never happened before. This is the problem with people who see miracles around every corner. It cheapens the work of Christ. If miracles were commonplace, Jesus Christ would be no big deal. But it’s never been like this before.

**[33] If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.**

That’s the last the Pharisees ever get to hear from this man. They can’t stand it any longer. Nobody before has ever dared to stand up to them. Christ Himself would do so in due time. If we are Christ’s, we must follow Him, because there is no other way.

1 John 3:13

*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*

John 15:18,19

*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

Why did the world hate Christ? Because He testified of it that its works we’re evil. These Pharisees were hypocrites. They taught lies in the guise of truth. Now, we have a choice. Do we simply follow lies, just for an easy life? Or do we stand up for truth? Christ said:

Matthew 10:28

*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

**[34] They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.**

They cast the man out of the visible church. That’s all they could do. Soon enough, they’d do worse to Christ. They’d hand Him over to the Romans to be killed.

And this is what we're called to do, if necessary. We don't deliberately try to get ourselves thrown out of a church, but we should follow Christ. And if that puts us at odds with our church, so be it. We must follow Christ. Even if it means we end up without the camp:

Hebrews 13:13,14

*Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.*

This man had been changed from darkness to light. He could do no other. But what happened now to this poor man? Well, Christ found him:

***[35] Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?***

The first thing Jesus does is teach him some theology. So far, this man's discovered for himself that Christ was a prophet, that He wasn't a sinner and that He was from God. Now the difficult bit. "***Dost thou believe on the Son of God?***"

***[36] He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?***

He doesn't say, "No, I don't." Which would have been the truth. He says more than that. He indicates he doesn't know, but, look, he wants to believe, he desires to know who the Son of God is more than anything else. So he asks the only One who has all the answers.

***[37] And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.[38] And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.***

Christ says He's the Son of God, and of course the man believes. He'll believe whatever Christ tells him from now on. Forget the church leaders. Jesus Christ truly is the Son of God and is worthy of all our trust. And he worships Him. That's the only suitable reply.

John 5:25

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*

***[39] And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.***

Christ came to give spiritual light to those who know they're in darkness. But if we think we're in the light, if we think we know everything, like the Pharisees, "***This man is not of God***" (v.16), "***We know that this man is a sinner***" (v.24), think again. We might keep our reputation before men, but thinking we know it all without Christ, will keep us in the dark.

***[40] And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?***

Christ spoke this in the hearing of the Pharisees. They recognised He was talking about them, which He was. So they ask, "**Are we blind also?**" Notice "**also.**" They couldn't quite admit they realised they were the ones Christ was referring to, but they knew really.

**[41] Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.**

**"If ye were blind, ye should have no sin."** That can't mean if we're blind to spiritual things we haven't got any sin. Of course not. In that case there'd be no incentive to seek spiritual light at all. No, it means we should be honest with ourselves and admit our lack of understanding, that's the attitude Christ wants from us. The problem we all have is that by nature, we're far too full of ourselves. And modern psychologists encourage us to have this sense of self-worth, self-acceptance, self-esteem, self-confidence.

But confidence in ourselves is the last thing we need. Confidence in ourselves, our achievements, our knowledge. That's what Christ is talking about here when He says, "**Now ye say, We see.**" We think we see the truth about lots of different things. And we've learned it all ourselves. If we think this way, we are saying to ourselves, "**We see.**" But in reality, we don't see anything at all. So Christ says, "**Therefore your sin remaineth.**"

Do we see our sin, our blindness, our need? Or are we so sure we know it all. We've got no need for the Bible, or Jesus Christ in our lives? If that's the case, "**Our sin remaineth.**" The urgent need for all of us is to recognise we're sinners in God's sight, to repent, call on Him for help to give us spiritual light. That's the only hope we have. We could just ignore all this, like the Pharisees, who were so sure they were right. But "**Their sin remaineth.**"

Don't be like them. Come to Jesus Christ. Allow Him to turn us from darkness to light, just like this man born blind. Then we'll truly be able to see. And there'll be no stopping us.

## **John 10:10(b). Life More Abundantly**

There's so much we could look at in John chapter 10.

At the beginning, we've got the parable (vv.1-10) of Christ as the door of the sheepfold, as opposed to the thief who comes into the sheepfold some other way. We see the importance of how we can only enter the kingdom of heaven through Christ. Every other way that people try is false. It doesn't work. They might get into the visible church for a while, and so seem to be in Christ's sheepfold, but they're not truly in the kingdom of heaven at all. We can only get there through the door.

Then in vv.11-16, we've got another parable. Christ as the good shepherd, as opposed to the hireling who doesn't care for the sheep. Let's not follow hirelings. There are plenty of them around in the church today that'll teach all sorts of nonsense. Let's rather follow the true shepherd, Jesus Christ. His true people will know His voice (v.16).

But I just want to focus today on one statement here, that occurs between those two parables, and which can so easily be overlooked.

### **John 10:10(b)**

***I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.***

And I want to simply make three points:

1. ***"I am come"*** Christ came for a purpose.
2. ***"that they might have life"*** What does "life" mean?
3. ***"and that they might have it more abundantly."*** What is the abundant life Christ came to give us?

#### ***1. Christ came for a purpose. "I am come...."***

In fact, we've all come for a purpose. Do we realise that? Not many people seem to think that at all. We're not here at random. We're not here for no reason, but for a purpose. I've heard so many sermons in the past, where the speaker has said something like this: "I'm sure you've all thought at some time 'Why am I here' or 'What's the meaning of life?' Well I'm going to tell you." And they then go on to talk about the meaning of life being Jesus Christ. Now, the last bit is true, the meaning of life is Jesus Christ. But it's the first bit I've got a problem with. I don't know anybody who's going around asking themselves, "Why am I here?" Or searching around trying to find the meaning of life. Maybe a few depressed people who study philosophy, but most people aren't asking themselves why they're here at all. They're just living their lives for what they can get out of it.

From the moment we're born, all we do is please ourselves. We cry when we want feeding, or when we want our nappy changing. We grow up just pleasing ourselves, and we get so annoyed when our parents tell us we can't have something. And most people live their entire lives like that. They're not thinking about the meaning of life or why they're here at all. They just go out and do what they want to do, enjoying themselves as much as they can. They don't even think about the concept of life having a purpose. In fact they're no different from the animals, who are just unthinking creatures of instinct.

Psalm 49:20

*Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.*

And that's the fundamental problem with the human race. Left to ourselves, we never think about anything higher than our basic instincts, such as the idea of having a purpose. But God did create us for a purpose. And it certainly wasn't to please ourselves.

Imagine coming before God on judgment day, and He says to us, "And what did you do with the life I gave you?" What are we going to answer? If all we can say is, "Well, I had a good time," I honestly don't think He's going to be very impressed with such a waste of a life. Yet millions are dying every day in exactly that position.

God originally created us for a purpose, whether we acknowledge it or not. And I think underneath everything, we are aware of that to some degree, because God has given us a conscience. Our consciences tell us that there's a need for purpose in our lives, but we don't like that, so we make every effort to ignore it and carry on regardless.

There are many ways by which people try to placate their consciences. One way is by "having a religion." They embrace the man-made traditions of their immediate surroundings. If they're born into a Muslim family, they call themselves muslims. If they're born into a Roman Catholic family, they call themselves Roman Catholic. If they're born Methodist, they call themselves Methodist and so on. They embrace the family religion. Maybe they think they'll disgrace the family if they don't. But they do it in a purely superstitious way. They don't understand it, they just blindly follow their family's traditions, assuming the family is right. I can't understand that.

To automatically assume the religion we are born into must be the true religion, just isn't logical. Even if it was the true religion, surely we still ought to examine it for ourselves, test it, compare it fairly with others, before coming to any conclusion. But nobody ever does that. They just blindly assume their family must be right. And that's the easiest path in the world to follow. It stops us from thinking any more about purpose.

That's not the way it should be. All of us were created for a far, far higher purpose than just living, eating, sleeping and blindly following empty traditions. A real purpose. The Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us exactly what that purpose is:

Q1. "What is the chief end of man?" A. "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever."

1 Corinthians 10:31

*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

Our real purpose, the real reason we're all here, is to glorify the One true living God, Lord of heaven and earth who created us in the first place. It doesn't matter if we say we don't believe in Him. We don't believe in His existence. It doesn't matter whether we believe He exists or not. What we believe is irrelevant. It's what actually *is* that matters. Every one of us has been put onto this earth to glorify God, whether we accept it or not. And if we spend all our time living for ourselves and not even attempting to glorify Him, then what does that mean? We're all sinners. We've all fallen short of His requirements.

Psalm 14:2,3

*The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

Romans 3:23

*....all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*

We've got to understand this principle. We all came into this world for a purpose, to glorify God. But we've all failed and ended up glorifying ourselves instead.

Now, Christ said, "***I have come...***" Christ also came into this world for a purpose. And that too was to glorify God:

Hebrews 10:9

*I come to do thy will, O God.*

Unlike us, He did glorify God in His life. So if we want to know how to glorify God, His is a good example to follow.

But He's more than an example. There's a huge difference between His coming and ours. He was truly and fully a man, but He was also the Son of God. And His purpose wasn't just to glorify God in His own little life, like ours is. He also had a far greater purpose. He was specifically sent by God to come into this world to save poor wretches like us from our sinful nature. That's what His name means:

Matthew 1:21

*....thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

He came to wake us up from this sleep we're in, only looking at the things of this world, living only for what we can get out of life. He came to give His people a new life, a higher life, far greater than just living for themselves. And that brings us to the second point:

## **2. Christ came "*....that they might have life....*"**

(a) Who are the "***they***"?

There's a modern idea going around, which is quite wrong. It goes something like this: Christ died for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, everybody's sins have now been taken away. So that can mean either one of two things:

The first idea says that, if everybody's sins have been dealt with, then everybody on the face of the earth will be saved, and must now be going to heaven. No matter what we do, no matter how badly we behave, we're all going there because our sins have been paid for. So don't think about sin any more. That's negative. Just have a sense of self-worth, self-acceptance, self-esteem. Think positive thoughts about yourself all the time.

This is a very common view in the church today. The problem with that idea is that there's absolutely no justice about it whatsoever. If it were true, then God would simply be an unjust monster. Nobody would be judged and given the just punishment they deserve for their sins. We could be terrible people, and we'd all be let off in the end.



To get around that problem, another idea has been invented which goes something like this: Christ has died for the sins of the whole world, but it's now up to us to respond to Him. We've got to make a simple, positive choice as to whether we follow Him or not. Choose Christ, follow Him, and we'll get to heaven. Don't choose Christ, and we won't.

In this scheme, we choose Christ just as we might choose Mohammed or Buddha or any other religious teacher to follow. Our salvation becomes all-dependent on our choice. But that's not salvation, because we're saving ourselves. It's do-it-yourself religion, based on our choice. And it can't be true, because it's impossible. We can't choose Christ. None of us can see higher than our own natural instincts. And even if we could, who's to say that, after we've had a bad day, we can decide to stop choosing Him. Our supposed salvation is up in the air all the time, depending on how we feel. Nobody can have any sense of assurance in that way of thinking.

And even then, if that was the way to heaven, when we get there, heaven would be full of people boasting about how clever they'd been because they'd chosen Christ and their neighbour hadn't. Heaven would be a terrible place, and again it would be totally unjust. If we're going to be saved at all, boasting **must** be excluded.

So the "**they**" in this passage can't refer to everybody in the world. It must refer only to God's people. And of course, that would fit the context of the passage. Those who hear Christ's voice. Those God draws to Himself. These are the ones the "**they**" refers to.

By nature we can't come to Him by ourselves. We first need God to open our eyes to let us to see above our own pathetic, natural lives. So rather than us just simply making a decision to follow Christ, we need to acknowledge our need of God to change us first. That's what salvation is. We need God to do the saving, because we can't save ourselves.

#### (b) The word "**might**."

The word "**might**" is usually used today in a completely different way to the way that it's used in the Bible. We use the word "**might**" today simply to mean *possibility*. We say, for example, "Tomorrow I might go shopping." By which we mean, maybe I will, maybe I won't. There's still a sense of unsureness about it.

But when the Bible uses the word "**might**," it doesn't mean that at all. It's got a far more definite meaning. It means "*in order for*." And we do use this meaning too. For example, we could say, "I remove the tree branch, that the path 'might' be cleared." By which we mean, "I remove the branch, '*in order for*' the path to be cleared." The path is now definitely cleared because I've removed the branch. We don't mean, after removing the branch, maybe it's clear, maybe it isn't. No, I've cleared it completely by moving the branch. That's the way the Bible uses the word. Let's look at a few Biblical examples:

John 15:25

*But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled*

In other words, "This cometh to pass, '*in order for*' the word to be fulfilled." Now this has come to pass, the word has been fulfilled. There's no uncertainty about it. It doesn't mean

“Now this has come to pass, the word might be fulfilled, but then again it might not.” No, it’s definitely been fulfilled by this coming to pass. What about this one:

John 3:17

*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

This verse is often interpreted to mean that God sent His Son into the world so that maybe people will be saved, maybe they won’t, depending on whether they choose Christ or not. But it doesn’t mean that. That’s the wrong definition of the word “**might**.” It means “God sent His Son into the world ‘in order for’ the world through Him to be definitely saved.” No doubt about it. This “world” he’s talking about will be saved.

I said earlier that not everybody is going to be saved. So the phrase “the world” here can’t mean everybody. It can only refer to the world of all God’s people, whoever they are. In other words, now Christ has been sent into the world, the sins of God’s people have been removed, and the way is now clear for them to be saved. There’s no doubt about it.

Similarly in this verse: “**I am come that they might have life,**” means “I am come ‘in order for’ them to have life.” In other words, Now Christ has come, our sin has been taken away, and this has, undoubtedly, absolutely, given His people “**life**.”

(c) What is “**life**”?

Surely, we’ve all got “**life**.” We all exist. We’re all living, moving, breathing creatures, our heartbeats are functioning. But if that’s all we think life is, then it’s because we’re only looking at the word “**life**” from our own natural viewpoint. What we see here in this world, isn’t the life God has for us. The life God talks about is far higher, far greater.

Actually, the Bible talks about our life, our existence, in this world as a living death:

Ephesians 2:1-3

*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

If we just live for this world, we’re described as “*dead in trespasses and sins,*” walking “*according to the course of this world,*” “*fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind,*” “*by nature the children of wrath.*” That’s the life we’re in now, seeking no higher than our own pleasure. But the passage then goes on to talk about what “**life**” really is:

Ephesians 2:4-7

*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

We were “*dead in sins,*” but God “*quickens*” us, He “*raises us up,*” to “*sit together in heavenly places,*” He “*shews us the exceeding riches of His grace and kindness.*” That’s what we need. We don’t need this pathetic existence we’ve got at the moment. We’re created for so much more than this. Aren’t we wearied by it yet? This life is full of troubles and trials. Why? Because God is wanting us to seek a much higher life than this one.

Don’t we want to get out of bondage to the things of this world? God is offering us all, life. Real life. Life far greater than the one we’ve got here:

Matthew 11:28

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Romans 6:23

*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Eternal life is the opposite of eternal death. Living our lives wanting no more than what this empty world can offer us, is such a waste. And we must be liable to God’s judgment if we continue in it. But there is a way out. We can get away from this empty existence. But we have to forsake our sin. We must repent of our sins and turn to God through the Saviour He has sent. And then we can receive the eternal life He has for His people:

Acts 14:15

*....turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein....*

But sadly, that’s the stumbling block most people fall at. They don’t want to leave their sins. They like them too much. They don’t want to break free, even when they hear about free salvation offered to them in Jesus Christ. A new life, which can be theirs freely if only they would forsake sin and come to Christ. Remarkably, they’d rather hang on to their sins than accept a new start, a new life without sin dragging them back all the time. They’d rather join the crowd laughing at Christianity, so they can hang on to their pathetic, empty, sinful lives. Even when they’re told Christ will help them to break free and they don’t have to do it all themselves. Don’t be like that. Break free from the crowd and cry to God for help. Everyone who sincerely cries to Him, He will hear and give them a new life.

### **3. “....And that they might have it more abundantly.”**

And then we’re told that this “**life**” God gives His people is “**more abundant.**” What does it mean that we might have life “**more abundantly**”? How is it more abundant?

(1) First of all, we escape the judgment to come. We escape the punishment that we all deserve for our sinful natures. We no longer have the thought of a future punishment for our sins hanging over us. What a relief!

Romans 8:1

*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

(2) Secondly, this new life is eternal. If we're just stuck living for no higher things than this world, we're going to have great difficulty seeing beyond our own death. We naturally think death to be the end of our lives. Everything in this life seems so temporary. We can work hard at whatever we do, but it's only ever going to be for a few years, then it's all gone. Walk through a graveyard. Most of the people there have been long forgotten. If this life is all we've got, what's the point in anything?

1 Corinthians 15:19

*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

I can't understand how an atheist can have any sense of fulfilment. To believe that we're only here for a short time and then gone for ever, makes everything pointless. Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived apart from Christ, saw exactly that:

Ecclesiastes 1:14

*I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

But Christ gives us eternal life. Nothing we do for Christ is ever a waste of time. Everything has an eternal purpose. We might not know what that purpose is at times, but we can be assured that everything we do for Christ is of eternal worth:

1 Corinthians 15:58

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

(3) Thirdly, this new life is of a vastly higher quality to the one we have now.

(a.) We're given a new heart:

Ezekiel 36:26,27

*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*

Now we have this new heart, we can begin to live the way God wants us to. No longer living for ourselves, slaves to our sins, our natural instincts. We're now free to live godly lives in Christ Jesus:

John 8:36

*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

(b.) We now have a real relationship with God. We can communicate with Him, talk to Him, as a man does with his friend. We can pour out our hearts to Him, and know He's listening and answers our prayers. We can cry to Him in times of trouble. We can stop worrying about our situation, our little lives, knowing that God hears us, cares about us and will guide and protect us. This is altogether different from the gods of every other religion on earth. In every other religion, we have to go through the motions, the rituals.

There's no real relationship between the worshipper and the god at all. But our God is alive and He cares for every one of us:

1 Peter 5:7

*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*

(c.) And we now have God's Holy Spirit living within us.

(i.) He comforts us:

John 14:16,17

*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

(ii.) He gives us victory over sin:

Romans 8:13,14

*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

(iii.) He helps us to pray:

Romans 8:26

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

(iv.) And He guides us:

Psalms 139:23,24

*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Why should anybody not want this "**more abundant**" life the Lord gives His people? It's crazy to refuse it, simply because we want to hang on to our sin or fit in with the crowd. And what do we have to do to get this new life? Ask:

Luke 11:13

*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*

It's this new life that we should want. Aren't we fed up with living life for ourselves? For simple, worldly pleasures, which are of no consequence, and don't satisfy?

John 4:14

*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

John 7:37-39

*In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive).*

This more abundant life the Christian has given to him by God, is far more than we could ever ask or think. Yet so few people seem to want it. Sin is far more important to them. Let that not be the case for any of us. May each and every one of us cry to God, repent of our sins, and receive the new life He has for all who truly call upon Him.

Ephesians 3:20,21

*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

## John 12:23-26. Dying to Self

Read John 12

**[23] And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.**

Who is Christ answering here? We see in the previous few verses:

John 12:20-22

*And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.*

Certain Greeks, Gentiles, wanted to see Jesus. They seemed to know Philip, so they asked him, who in turn, with his fellow Bethsaidan Andrew, told Christ. The background is Gentiles wanting to meet Christ. And He answers them “**saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.**” Christ’s glorification is not just for Jews, but Gentiles too.

Christ here is talking about His own death. He will be glorified by His death. Nobody could have understood that at the time, but within two days Christ would be handed over to the Roman authorities to be crucified, just as He prophesied to His disciples:

Matthew 20:18,19

*Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.*

How can a death glorify anybody? Well, Christ’s death is the most glorious death in the history of the world. By it, He paid the punishment for the sins of all those who would trust in Him, so they’d go free. We can be free today from the punishment our sins deserve. God can acquit us fully on the basis Christ died in our place. But we have to acknowledge that fact. God doesn’t just save everybody, whether they realise it or not. We must acknowledge Him. Realise what Christ’s death achieved, and trust in it for ourselves.

2 Corinthians 5:21

*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

So, let’s love the death of Christ more than anything this world has to offer. If we don’t love Christ for what He did, if we totally ignore Him and His atoning work on the cross, how can we expect to have that work applied to us? We must acknowledge our need of Him. The world out there knows nothing about the true nature of the death of Christ. Without Him dying for sinners, there’s no hope for any of us, because we can’t save ourselves:

Romans 5:8-11

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath*

*through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.*

1 Peter 3:18

*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit....*

Despite the world telling us otherwise, every one of us needs salvation from our sins. We receive that from Jesus Christ. And it's free, just come to Him and ask Him. He said:

John 6:37

*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

So, Christ is most certainly glorified in His death. But there's also a sense in which the death of each one of God's people is glorious too. The death of the wicked isn't. God says:

Ezekiel 33:11

*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

But the death of God's people is glorious. They have turned and repented of their sins:

Psalms 116:15

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

I mention that, because all these verses can apply not only to Christ, but to ourselves too.

***[24] Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.***

This firstly speaks of Christ. By His "***falling into the ground and dying,***" He "***brought forth much fruit.***" A number that no man can number will be saved to eternal life because they trust in His glorious death on the cross. There was no other way possible for God's wrath to be appeased. Either we get punished for our own sin, or Christ gets punished in our place. An atonement for sin before the Father has to be made one way or another.

Christ is primarily our Saviour. His work on the cross is the most important thing He ever accomplished. That's what we need to trust in. But He is also our example:

1 Peter 2:21-24

*For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*

Christ suffered unjustly in this world. Men reviled Him. Men hated Him, because He told them their works were evil. Men still hate Him today, so we can expect no better:



John 15:18,19

*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

So, how should we react when we're hated for Christ's sake? When men despitely use us? We ought to react the way Christ reacted: "*Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*" That's easier said than done.

When we become a Christian, when we acknowledge Christ and His death on the cross, and come to Him and trust in Him genuinely and completely for the forgiveness of our sins, He comes to dwell within us. We receive a new nature:

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

The Holy Spirit is now within us to guide us and to give us the ability to react in the right way, yet we still have our old nature dragging us back all the time. And this will continue until we die. Only then will we be free from sin completely. Now, we have a battle going on inside us, the old nature against the new nature. The flesh against the Spirit. But the world knows nothing of this battle. They don't have that problem:

Romans 8:12-14

*Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

So, it's easier said than done to behave as Christ behaved. He didn't have a sinful nature dragging Him back all the time. But we do. And, when we're under pressure to react in a right way, we make so many mistakes. We end up getting angry, or annoyed, or reacting according to the old nature far, far too often. No wonder the apostle Paul said:

Romans 7:24

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

But he then went on immediately to say:

Romans 7:25

*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

And that's the Christian life. It's always going to have this struggle in it. But we're still called to be like Christ, who never had this problem.

We need to die to self. If we don't, we "**abide alone.**" There is no hope for any of us if we insist on living for ourselves. Doing what we want to do. There's a whole world out there living for themselves, "**abiding alone.**" They don't think they're living for themselves. They might think they're doing some great thing for humanity, but they're not. Long ago:

Genesis 11:1-8

*And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.*

Men think they achieve something, but everything they do is to the glory of themselves. They forget God altogether. It's God to whom all glory belongs, not puny men. The ultimate aim of all these projects is the glory of man. That man can be proud of his achievements.

It's such a selfish end. And as individuals, we're no better, living for what we want, what we enjoy, what we decide we want to do. When we become a Christian, that way of life ought to be over. And if we truly know Christ and have a relationship with Him, our old way of life is essentially over. But not completely. We still need to continually mortify sin, get rid of all our selfish desires. We can't do this by ourselves, we need the Holy Spirit to do it for us.

That's the only way we can "**bring forth much fruit.**" Fruit is the ultimate end of the plant. If a plant never brings forth any fruit, it is useless, good for nothing. Christ taught a parable:

Luke 13:6-9

*He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

Our job is to bring forth spiritual fruit. If we don't bring forth fruit, we cumber the ground and ought to be cut down and burnt. Without Christ in our lives, that's just what we deserve:

Hebrews 6:7,8

*For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*

So what is the fruit we should be producing?

Galatians 5:22,23

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance.*

Ephesians 5:9

*(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)*

These are the fruit we should produce. And notice they're the fruit of the Spirit. Unless we have the Holy Spirit within us, we can't begin to produce them. Men without Christ can't do these things. They can fake it to some degree, but they can't produce the genuine article.

But even as Christians, we can be unfruitful. In the parable of the sower, we come across the seed that fell in thorns:

Mark 4:18,19

*And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.*

This might be controversial. Some think these aren't believers at all. But I think they are. They "*become*" unfruitful, so I think they once were productive but aren't any longer. Either way, we've got a good list here of what stops good fruit production: "*the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in.*" Even Christians can be taken in by any or all of these things and become unfruitful:

2 Peter 1:5-8

*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

These people had faith, so they were true believers, and they were told to add to their faith: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity. These are all fruit of the Spirit. "*they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor **unfruitful.***" The Christian life is about producing fruit. That's our witness to the world:

Matthew 7:20

*By their fruits ye shall know them.*

John 15:8

*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

So a healthy Christians ought to produce fruit. And the only way to do that, is to die to self.

***[25] He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.***

We've got to hate our own life in this world. That's not a very popular teaching today. We're told even by so-called "Christian" teachers that we must love ourselves. Christ said "*Love thy neighbour as thyself.*" There we are, we've got to love ourselves. What nonsense!

If we really want to live for Christ, we must be finished with self, we must die to self:

Galatians 5:24

*And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*

If we don't do this, if we still love our affections and lusts, even just a tiny amount, we're loving our life too much. We should be finished with them altogether. That's the theory. But it's not like that in practice. We don't, or can't, get rid of them completely. We should want to. In that sense we should be finished with them. But when we fail yet again to mortify the flesh, praise the Lord, we always have an advocate with the Father:

1 John 2:1,2

*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins.*

When it says, "**He that loveth his life shall lose it,**" it's referring to loving this life only, and never thinking of preparing for the next world. Millions out there are losing their lives in the end because, they're not interested in forgiveness of sins. They love their sins. They love their lives here, full of sin. If they carry on like that, they'll lose their lives in the end.

Christians aren't like that. They hate their lives in this world. It's not that they've come to Christ, so everything's now wonderful, they can live the victory life and not have any problems any more. That's loving their life still. No. They're hating their lives because they know they still sin, many times, and they hate it. They want to be free from it. They know, praise God, one day they will be free from it all, because they know for sure Jesus Christ has saved them to eternal life. But while we're here, we must hate ourselves for constantly falling into sin time and time again. It's miserable.

We must hate ourselves in the sense of hating our fleshly affections and lusts. They pander to self, they serve self, to whom we should now reckon ourselves as dead:

Romans 6:11,12

*Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.*

Galatians 2:20

*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

Like a grain of wheat, we, ourselves, living for ourselves and our achievements, hopes and aspirations, must all "**fall into the ground and die.**" We have nothing to live for in this life any more. That's not a depressing thought, it's a liberating thought to the Christian. We now only want to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. The only way to do that is to die to self. Only then can we produce the fruit God wants us to have as a witness for Him.

Matthew 5:16

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

How is it possible for people to see our good works, yet not glorify us, but glorify our Father which is in heaven? If I see someone doing a good work, straight away I'd think they're to be commended. I'd think they ought to be honoured. But that's not how it should be with us. Whatever we do for Christ, we do for Him, not so that others may think how

good we are, because we're not. But so others don't see us at all, but only see our Heavenly Father. We ought to make ourselves invisible. There's a challenge to us.

And we're told, "**he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.**" We're struggling with our old selves down here, but one day we know we'll have "**life eternal.**"

Revelation 12:11

*And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

So let's keep loving not our lives here. We're finished with living for self. Finished with following these affections and lusts. We're weary of them. Let's only live for Jesus Christ knowing that He will keep our lives to life eternal. A life in eternity, finally free from sin.

**[26] If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.**

Let's follow Jesus Christ. He was the one who said:

Matthew 16:24

*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

If we serve Him and follow Him, we're told here that one day we shall be with Him, "**where I am, there shall also my servant be.**"

John 14:2,3

*In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

Not only shall we be with Him, but we shall be like Him, all this sin will be gone for ever:

1 John 3:2

*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

And we're also told God will honour us, "**if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.**"

We must prepare ourselves for the next world. We need to be heavenly minded. But we will be often criticised for that, and told we're not doing enough in this world. James says:

James 1:27

*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

There are two aspects to true religion. One is "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," practical good works, which includes preaching the gospel. I'm sure everybody would agree that good works is an integral part of true religion. And "to keep himself unspotted from the world." This is dying to self. The internal part of true religion is just as

important as external works. We can busy, busy ourselves with outward works, but we should never forget internal religion, because if we neglect that, our witness disappears:

James 1:26

*If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue [keeps himself not in check internally], but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

Our inward life is our real witness to others. Although it's easily misunderstood from the outside. So Christians are often dismissed as simple people who have a difficult life, so they invent some kind of "pie in the sky when you die," just to keep them going. None of their religion is real, but it keeps them through difficult times. Is that really all we have? Just a bit of fantasy to keep us going? Men throughout history have died for this faith. They know it's real. They were prepared to forsake everything to follow Jesus Christ. Are we?

Hebrews 11:32-12:2

*And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

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